



Media Alert for Tuesday, 26th November

Surgeons to paddle with breast cancer survivors in Dragon Boat on Sydney Harbour to mark Australia's inaugural BRA Day

Australia's inaugural BRA (Breast Reconstruction Awareness) Day will be held on Tuesday 26th November to highlight low rates of reconstruction among Australian women, and promote awareness of breast reconstruction options following mastectomy.

Earlier this year one of the world's most famous women underwent a breast reconstruction after choosing to have a bi-lateral mastectomy as a preventative measure when doctors told her she carried the BRCA 1 gene making it highly likely she would develop breast cancer.

However, Angelina Jolie is in the surprising minority of women who undergo a reconstruction following mastectomy despite research showing there can be physical and psychological benefits such as improved self-esteem, confidence and lower levels of anxiety.

In Australia, around 5,000 women have a mastectomy each year, but a mere 6 to 12 % of these go on to have a reconstruction. This compares with 42% of women in the United States and 16.5% in England.

"The fact that around only 1 in 10 women is electing to have a breast reconstruction suggests not enough women are aware of the options available to them; some are fearful of further surgery; or it's simply not being offered as an option," says President of the Australian Society of Plastic Surgeons, Dr Geoff Lyons.

Mastectomy is a confronting personal experience often entailing a profound sense of loss and not uncommonly, depression.

"Having a breast reconstruction is an individual choice, and while some women will decide they simply don't want to do so, it's important women - and men - who are about to undergo a mastectomy are aware of the all the available options so they can make an informed choice," says President of the Australian Society of Plastic Surgeons, Dr Geoff Lyons.

“For instance, many women are unaware that there may be benefits to having their reconstruction performed at the same time as the mastectomy to reduce anaesthesia time and to allow the breast surgeon and plastic surgeon to work together to produce an optimal result.

“Equally breast reconstructions are available in the public system and claimable under Medicare,” says Dr Lyons.

“However, we are also concerned about the huge disparity between capital cities and regional or remote Australia in terms of access to information as well as access to multi-disciplinary treatment teams at all stages of cancer diagnosis and management and we would urge governments to address this issue,” says Dr Lyons.

BRA Day was initiated in Canada in 2011, with the United States and New Zealand also holding annual events.

“BRA Day has turned into an important event in these countries and the Australian Society of Plastic Surgeons is delighted to launch the initiative in Australia,” says Dr Lyons.

A special lunch will be held in Sydney to mark the occasion with breast cancer survivors from ‘Dragons Abreast’ joining with plastic surgeons paddling on Sydney Harbour in a dragon boat display. Women will share their personal stories of reconstruction and renewal following their surgeries.

Additionally, a comprehensive fact sheet covering all aspects of breast reconstruction, will be available on the Australian Society of Plastic Surgeons website – www.plasticsurgery.org.au.

What: Inaugural BRA Day, Australia launch

Where: Sugaroom Restaurant, Harris St, Pyrmont

When: From 12 noon

MEDIA: to arrange an interview with Dr Geoff Lyons, or breast reconstruction patients, contact: Edwina Gatenby, Maxicom Public Relations, ph. 02 9965 9302 or 0402 130 254; Shannon Swainston, ph 02 9965 9305 or 0478 053 684.

Tanya Saad, 36 has a family history of breast cancer. After discovering she has the BRCA1 gene six years ago, Tanya made the decision to undergo a bi-lateral preventative mastectomy with reconstruction in 2012. Tanya’s younger sister Paula Grace, also carrying the BRCA1 gene, took the same measures earlier this year. Originally from Taree and previously living in Canberra, Tanya says living outside a major metropolitan centre like Sydney and Melbourne provided limited access to screening and medical specialists in this field.

Janine Johnstone and her identical twin sister were 48 when they were diagnosed with breast cancer in 2007. Both had bi-lateral mastectomies, but initially Janine opted not to have a breast reconstruction instead concentrating on her recovery. However, she found her prosthesis increasingly uncomfortable and subsequently changed her mind when her sister had a

reconstruction. She has been happy with the result and enjoys a healthy, active life – working out at the gym regularly and Dragon Boat racing.

Primary school principal, **Ruth Turnell**, 65, had a breast reconstruction after tiring of her prosthesis. “I got sick of hiding it in the change rooms at the pool as I didn’t want to scare the other women. Having a mastectomy is confronting. I didn’t want to look at it. It became an inconvenience. For some it’s tied up with femininity, identity and sexuality. While it’s major surgery, I couldn’t recommend a reconstruction more highly. I have packed more into my life in those five years than the rest of my life since having the reconstruction.”