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St George Hospital performs new innovation in breast cancer treatment

St George Hospital is now performing the latest in cutting-edge breast cancer treatment – in what is a first for public hospitals in NSW.

Loftus resident, Sheila Davy, 69, has undergone a procedure called Accelerated Partial Breast Irradiation (APBI), where the breast is implanted with brachytherapy applicators. The procedure is performed under a general anaesthetic.

The new breast cancer treatment is performed in the Cancer Care Centre at St George Hospital and is offered to women with early breast cancer; under the auspices of a human research ethics committee approved clinical trial.

According to Dr Yaw Chin, Staff Specialist, Radiation Oncology, APBI provides an alternative radiotherapeutic option for women who wish to conserve their breasts, but do not want their lives to be severely affected by the rigorous treatment regime associated with it.

“Unlike conventional radiotherapy, where the entire remaining breast tissue is treated, APBI treats only the high risk breast tissue surrounding where the cancer has been removed.

“In doing so, higher doses of radiation can be given during each treatment, thereby reducing the number of treatments,” Dr Chin said.

“The entire radiation treatment is delivered within five consecutive days, with two treatments given each day.

“Most importantly, with this treatment, the normal organs near to the tumour, such as the chest wall muscles, ribs, lungs and heart can be spared from receiving unnecessary radiation doses,” he said.

Dr Chin said conventionally, whole breast radiation is delivered on a five-day per week basis, over a four to seven week period.

“This lengthy course of treatment can be prohibitive for working women, the elderly, or for those who live a distance from a radiotherapy centre – which may prompt the choice of mastectomy over breast conservation,” Dr Chin said.

“Accelerated Partial Breast Irradiation is a much less invasive way to treat breast cancer and it is good to see the technology still being developed.

“There are a number of ways to treat breast cancer and we always suggest that women look at what is available and, in consultation with their doctors, select the treatment best suited to them,” he said.

South Eastern Sydney Local Health District
Media contact: Maxine Brennan 02 9113 2601 or 0413 028 776