



Correspondence address:
Ironwood Physicians, PC
PO Box 6423
Chandler, AZ 85246

www.ironwoodcrc.com

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Contact: Liz Dowling
Dowling & Dennis PR
415-388-2794

Liz@dowlingdennis.net

Local Surgeon Helps Pioneer Innovative Approach to Treating Breast Cancer

Among First to Adopt New Device That Improves Targeting for Radiation Treatment and Cosmetic Outcome after Surgery

SCOTTSDALE – A local cancer surgeon is among the first in the Southwest to adopt an innovative new device that improves the treatment of breast cancer. The device, called BioZorb, helps provide better cosmetic outcomes after surgery. It also allows more precise targeting of radiation treatment.

Breast surgeon Dr. Patricia Clark of Ironwood Cancer and Research Centers has helped pioneer use of the BioZorb marker. The device is placed during lumpectomy surgery, which removes the cancer and preserves the breast.

This unique marker is the first device that identifies in a fixed, three-dimensional manner where the tumor was removed. After surgery, the marker helps the radiation oncologist more reliably determine where to aim radiation treatment.

“BioZorb helps maintain the shape of the breast with the natural tissues that remain after the tumor is removed,” Dr. Clark said. “It assists the healing process and can help improve cosmetic outcomes, while also more accurately marking the tumor site for follow-up radiation.”

The implantable marker consists of a framework made of a bioabsorbable material that holds six titanium clips. The framework slowly dissolves in the body over the course of a year or more. The tiny marker clips stay in place so the surgical site can be viewed for long-term monitoring such as future mammograms.

Among women who have benefited from Dr. Clark’s work with the device is Marleen Marek, 71, a retired nurse educator who lives in Fountain Hills.

“When Dr. Clark explained to me why she recommended using a BioZorb during my surgery, it made so much sense to me. I think it's just phenomenal,” Marek said.

The marker “helps us avoid the dimples or dents in the breast that can result from a traditional lumpectomy,” Dr. Clark said. “We often use it in conjunction with oncoplastic surgery, which reconstructs the breast with the patient’s own tissues.”

Breast cancer can be treated by mastectomy (breast removal) or by lumpectomy. In a lumpectomy, a small amount of tissue containing the tumor is removed. In addition to the surgery, radiation treatment is typically added to “clean up” any microscopic cancer cells that might remain in the breast.

Dr. Diane Recine, a radiation oncologist and Ironwood physician who is providing Marek’s radiation treatment, said the marker is especially helpful in protecting healthy tissue.

At the end of standard radiation treatments, lumpectomy patients often receive a higher-dose “boost” of radiation. “The benefit of the boost is that it reduces the risk of local disease recurrence,” Dr. Recine said. “BioZorb helps us target the boost volume very precisely – meaning we can treat a smaller area. That improves the cosmetic result by minimizing any skin long-term effects such as scar tissue or fibrosis.”

Marek has seven grandchildren and is enjoying her retirement after years as a nurse educator at Purdue University and locally in the Banner Health system.

As she looks to completion of her radiation treatment, she’s grateful for Dr. Clark’s guidance and the new technology that’s improving breast cancer treatment.

“When Dr. Clark explained the medical and cosmetic benefits of the marker, she definitely got my attention,” Marek said. “She was very understanding of what it’s like to go through this process. She said to me that she didn’t want me to have to look in the mirror and remember that I had cancer.”

About Ironwood Cancer and Research Centers/ Ironwood Breast Centers

Ironwood is the largest cancer provider in the Metro Phoenix area. Ironwood provides cancer care in comprehensive cancer centers strategically located around the Phoenix Valley. We are proud to announce the inauguration of Ironwood Breast Centers valley-wide, to offer treatment of benign and malignant diseases of the breast. These locations are dedicated to providing a wide variety of ancillary services to patients at a single service site. For more information call 480-324-5252 or access www.Ironwoodcrc.com.