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DONATED TISSUE HELPS WOMEN HEAL AFTER A MASTECTOMY
- BRA Day on October 21st Educates Women about Options after Breast Cancer -

(BLOOMFIELD, CT) – October 16, 2015 – With a mother who is a 15-year breast cancer survivor, and an aunt who is almost five years breast cancer free, Maribel Sepulveda, 47, of Chicopee, MA knew what it meant when her doctor recommended that she “bring a close relative” with her to hear the results of her biopsy.

“Although I had no symptoms, when I had my annual mammogram in January there were some changes from last year’s test,” explained Sepulveda. “They recommended a biopsy of the left breast and discovered that I had intermediate ductal carcinoma in-situ (DCIS) in the left breast. Left untreated, DCIS can go on to become an invasive cancer.”

After the breast cancer diagnosis, Sepulveda was thinking of doing a lumpectomy and radiation. However, an MRI revealed the cancer was more extensive than originally thought and another biopsy of different area on the left breast and an area on the right was recommended.

“Right then and there, I made up my mind that I wanted the bilateral mastectomy,” said Sepulveda. “I had been called back the last two years for the left breast and now there could possibly be something going on with the right breast also? For me, it was a no brainer.”

Sepulveda’s doctor referred her to plastic surgeon Dr. Melissa Johnson in Springfield, MA to perform reconstructive surgery immediately following her mastectomy on May 20th of this year.

“Now when a woman undergoes a mastectomy, there’s no need to actually remove the entire breast,” said Dr. Johnson. “Rather, a skin sparing mastectomy removes only the breast tissue. Skin sparing mastectomies are oncologically sound and performed approximately 75% of the time in my practice. There are many options for women to consider for breast reconstruction.”

Making women aware of their options following a mastectomy is the purpose of Breast Reconstruction Awareness Day USA, or BRA Day, recognized annually in October. This year on Wednesday, October 21st, LifeChoice Donor Services, the non-profit organ transplant coordinator for most of Connecticut and western Massachusetts, seeks to build awareness about the use of donated tissue in breast reconstruction.
Dr. Johnson explained that donor skin is processed to remove all of the living cells. The acellular dermal matrix/grafts (ADM) are used to create permanent scaffolds to reform the breast. The grafts are sutured to allow for a more natural shape and better breast fold on the lower portion of the breast.

“Prior to ADMs, surgeons would elevate a lateral muscle,” added Dr. Johnson. “The grafts will actually get incorporated into the normal chest wall tissues, whereas a foreign body such as prosthetic mesh will not. It is less painful and the cosmetic results are generally better.”

Sepulveda had heard of the use of donor tissue from a friend and after thorough research, decided that was the best treatment for her. Sepulveda’s breast reconstruction was completed on September 8th when the tissue expanders were removed and high profile saline permanent implants were inserted.

“It is amazing what can be done with donated tissues thanks to science, research and technology,” said Sepulveda. “Women can make more informed decisions. I had a wonderful support system from my family, friends, co-workers and my ex-husband. I never thought twice about my decision. I knew it was the right one for me. It’s a very personal choice and we are so fortunate to have many different options available to us.”

LifeChoice Donor Services, Inc. is the federally designated, non-profit organ procurement organization (OPO) for six counties in Connecticut and three counties in western Massachusetts, with a combined population of 2.3 million people. The OPO serves twenty-three acute care hospitals for organ and tissue donation and two organ transplant hospitals: Hartford Hospital in Hartford, CT and Baystate Medical Center in Springfield, MA.

LifeChoice Donor Services is a member in good standing of the United Network of Organ Sharing (UNOS) and the Association of Organ Procurement Organizations (AOPO). For more information about LifeChoice and to join the Donor Registry, please visit www.lifechoiceopo.org or call 1.800.874.5215.

Breast Reconstruction Awareness Day USA (BRA Day) began in 2012 as a joint effort by the American Society of Plastic Surgeons and the Plastic Surgery Foundation to ensure breast cancer patients were aware of their options following mastectomy, and to build awareness about breast reconstruction procedures. Recognized annually on the third Wednesday in October, BRA day was originally conceived by Canadian plastic surgeon Mitchell Brown, MD, in 2011. Learn more at www.breastreconusa.org.

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