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SURGEONS’ TRAINING IN BREAST CANCER HAS AN ARTISTIC FLAIR

Artists’ Materials and Perspectives Used to Help Teach Breast Reconstruction

DALLAS, TX – The American Society of Breast Disease (ASBD) is merging art and medicine this week, by using clay sculpting and other techniques to teach surgeons new skills in breast cancer surgery and reconstruction.

ASBD is hosting the 6th Annual School of Oncoplastic Surgery, Dec. 6 to 8 at the Four Seasons Resort, in Dallas. There, sixty surgeons specializing in breast cancer treatment will join nearly 20 internationally recognized breast specialists and several artists, in a cooperative effort with the Creative Arts Center of Dallas.

The goal is to use artistic materials and perspectives to refine the surgeons’ techniques for breast cancer removal and reconstruction of the removed breast. The program, created and directed by pioneering Dallas oncoplastic surgeon Gail Lebovic, M.D., was originally funded by an educational grant through the Mary Kay Ash Foundation, in Dallas.

For most women who have had a mastectomy (surgical removal of the breast), reconstructive surgery can dramatically improve their self-confidence and quality of life.

“This year, we are combining forces with the wonderful resources of the Creative Arts Center of Dallas, to help breast surgeons appreciate and incorporate aesthetic principles into their surgical techniques. Working as a breast cancer surgeon is very intense, and it is important for the surgeons to blend softer, more artistic qualities into their work” said Dr. Lebovic. “What
they learn here will give them new techniques that I believe will ultimately have great benefits for their patients, especially those that are candidates for reconstruction.”

An estimated 226,870 women will be diagnosed with breast cancer in the U.S. in 2012, and the disease will kill more than 39,500 women this year, according to the National Cancer Institute.

Researchers report that mastectomy rates declined in the U.S. until 2005 and are now increasing across all affected age groups, especially for women younger than 50 years and older than 70. Yet a recent study from Columbia University concluded that relatively few women receive breast reconstruction surgery after mastectomy, despite the recognized psychological and cosmetic benefits of reconstruction.

In creating the conference, Dr Lebovic worked closely with the Creative Arts Center of Dallas, a non-profit art school, to bring medical procedures to life through the assistance of stone carving instructor Art Wells. Wells worked with live models of various ages and body types to create 20 different plaster casts of their torsos, from which he removed one breast – simulating a mastectomy.

On the first day of the conference, Wells and Mike Esson, a well known art professor from Sydney, Australia, will assist the surgeons as they learn how to accurately reproduce the missing breast. Clay for the workshop was donated by Trinity Ceramics Supply.

On the second day, the surgeons will work with volunteer nurses as they practice designing and drawing innovative incision lines. The last day of the conference will be spent working with cadavers, as the doctors practice surgical techniques to minimize scarring and maximize the excision of the cancer to reduce the chances of recurrence.

“As a visual art school, CAC is always finding ways of partnering with the community. This compelling opportunity is especially significant to us as it bridges the gap between art and science,” said the center’s executive director, Diana Pollak.

About the American Society of Breast Disease

Formed in 1976, the ASBD is a professional medical society that advocates the multi-disciplinary team approach to breast healthcare and educates physicians who strive to optimize breast health. The ASBD also supports a national breast disease research agenda, and otherwise collaborates with other scientific societies and advocacy organizations on breast health-related issues. For more information, call 214-368-6836 or access www.asbd.org.

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