

Breast reconstruction without the scarring

By DAVID HUDLESTON

A Subiaco plastic surgeon has developed a breast reconstruction procedure with minimal scarring that he hopes will make deciding to have a preventive double mastectomy less confronting for women.

Mark Lee, who operates at St John of God Subiaco Hospital, was recognised by plastic surgeons worldwide when he presented the results from the first 25 surgical cases to the 17th World Congress of the International Confederation for Plastic, Reconstructive and Aesthetic Surgery in Chile last month, just weeks before Angelina Jolie announced her double mastectomy and reconstruction.

Mr Lee also won the Allergan prize for the best reconstructive paper at the plastic surgery conference hosted by the Australian Society of Plastic Surgeons and the New Zealand Association of Plastic Surgeons in Melbourne in April.

“It is a combination of two techniques, the latissimus dorsi reconstructive procedure, which has been around for many years, and the more recent acellular dermal matrix technique, which hit the headlines recently with Angelina Jolie,” Mr Lee said.

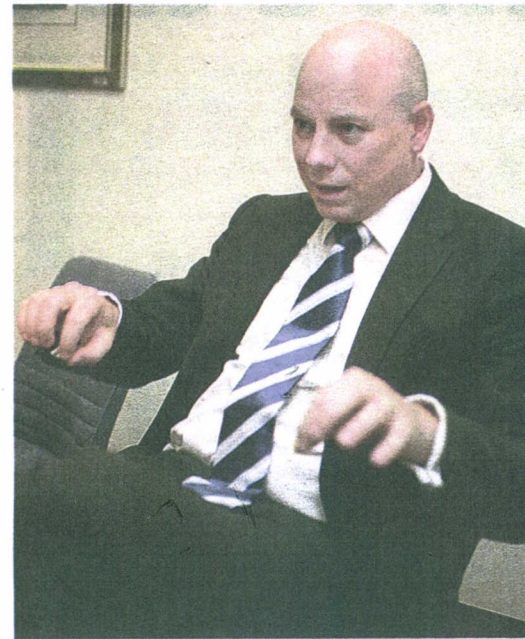
That technique uses pig, cow or donated human tissue, from which the cells have been removed to prevent rejection by the body.

“But there are concerns about using products from other animals and humans,” Mr Lee said.

“My method uses the patient’s own tissue.”

Mr Lee harvests the muscle tissue without dividing the blood supply.

“I bring muscle and fat



Less confronting ... Plastic surgeon Mark Lee’s breast reconstruction procedure leaves almost no scarring. **Photo: Billie Fairclough**

through a tunnel under the armpit to create a breast, with or without an implant, using the mastectomy scar. This leaves no scar on the back.

“Women go to sleep with two nice breasts and wake up with two nice breasts and only a little scar underneath their breast which cannot be seen when they look in the mirror.”

Mr Lee said the procedure was ideal for young women who were genetically predisposed to developing breast cancer and who were considering bilateral preventive surgery.

“I see this playing a really exciting role for women like Angelina Jolie who carry the cancer gene,” he said.

“Women with the breast cancer gene have around a 90% lifetime risk of developing breast cancer and about a 50% risk of getting ovarian cancer.

“There are women in their early 20s trying to make a decision as to whether to have their breasts removed because they face a lifetime risk of cancer.

“With this technique, it is much easier to counsel some-

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body into making such a drastic decision by offering them a reconstruction that can be almost invisible.

“Young women who choose to have preventive mastectomies now have a surgical option that is less invasive and potentially less emotionally confronting for them.”

Patients also benefit from reduced operating time, quicker

recovery, fewer complications and a reduced hospital stay.

Mr Lee said he developed his technique after visiting the US to study the acellular dermal matrix technique.

“After discussions with sur-

reconstruction with minimal scarring.

“But what I was not expecting was to be able to do it with simple equipment.

“We worked out how to get the muscle from around the back without using any major equipment – one surgeon in America uses a \$2.5 million da Vinci robot – I use a \$50 retractor.

“It is the sort of thing any plastic surgeon in the world can do without any major equipment such as endoscopes and robots.

“And that’s one of the things which stood out at the Chile conference. There are places all over the world that don’t have access to the sort of equipment, expensive prostheses and biological matrices we can get in our hospitals.

“This procedure is able to be used anywhere.”