

## Student, surgeon collaborate on Breast reconstruction alternative -



Elizabeth Hopkins, left, a pre-medical student at Florida Atlantic University, participated in and co-authored a study with Dr. Hilton Becker testing out a single-surgery method of mastectomy that improves the effectiveness and patient's satisfaction with the procedure. Photo by Florida Atlantic University

BOCA RATON, Fla., Aug. 3 (UPI) -- A student and surgeon at Florida Atlantic University collaborated on an alternative to traditional radical mastectomy that allows patients to retain their nipples and skin after reconstruction with a single surgery.

Most breast reconstructions after mastectomy are done as two-step procedures. The first surgery includes the mastectomy and spacers placed under the pectoral muscle to stretch the remaining skin on the chest. The spacers are replaced with implants several months later.

The new method, researchers said, allows for easier access during surgery, is less invasive than the standard practice, and is aesthetically preferable because of less scarring as a result of the entire procedure.

"Procedures that spare the nipple and skin have been shown to be oncologically safe and allow for much more flexibility in implant-based breast reconstruction," Dr. Hilton Becker, an affiliate professor FAU's Charles E. Schmidt College of Medicine, said in a press release. "Single-stage breast reconstruction will become more important as there continues to be increasing financial strains on our healthcare system."

The procedure involves making a vertical incision, rather than a horizontal one, when performing the mastectomy, which Becker said allows for easier access during surgery and scarring that resembles a breast lift procedure. Surgeons then insert a smooth saline implant over the pectoral muscle.

Researchers worked with 31 patients, including FAU pre-medical student Elizabeth Hopkins, who had the procedure and is a co-author of the study, published in the *Journal of Plastic and Reconstructive Surgery*. Hopkins underwent the surgery after testing positive for a genetic mutation known to significantly increase the risk of breast cancer.

The patients, whose median age was 51, underwent the single-surgery mastectomy and were followed for 55 months. Of the 31 participants, nine had postoperative complications -- six being fixed with some type of postoperative intervention, and two that resulted in implant loss. Overall, however the newer procedure resulted in fewer post-operative issues, as well as an elimination of animation deformity.

"This blessing in disguise introduced me to a brilliant surgeon whose unique procedure enabled me to have a skin- and nipple-sparing mastectomy free from animation deformity, which happens when implants are placed beneath the pectoral muscle -- mine were placed over the muscle," said Hopkins. "Being his patient and working side by side with Dr. Becker has changed my life and will hopefully change the lives of many others."

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