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South Africa

Surgery breakthrough gives breasts a long-lasting lift

November 03, 2006 *Edition 1*

Dominique Herman

A Cape Town plastic and reconstructive surgeon has developed a way to lift breasts by using a lightweight mesh attached to the chest wall.

The mesh reinforces the "hammock" created by the horizontal and vertical ligaments in the breast.

These are the strongest ligaments in the breast and, less than 10 years ago, were not known to exist.

They were discovered by an Austrian anatomist and plastic surgeon, Elisabeth WÄ¼ringer.

The idea for the Breform surgical procedure came to Peet van Deventer after he read a "breakthrough" article by WÄ¼ringer in the late 90s.

"The article impressed me so much that I visited her in Vienna," Van Deventer said.

Returning the favour, WÄ¼ringer said yesterday she planned to incorporate the procedure Van Deventer had devised into her surgical repertoire.

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In traditional breast lifts, where the skin is made tauter, there is tension along suture lines that causes scarring and, over time, the breasts begin to sag again.

With the Breform procedure, half of the mesh was absorbed into the breast tissue and the other half acted as an "internal bra", Van Deventer said. In a mastectomy, the mesh hammock would be used for the unaffected breast. In such cases, it would also be far easier to match the remaining breast with the prosthesis.

Before WÄ¼ringer's research was published, only Cooper's ligaments in the breast were known.

These are the fibrous, semi-elastic bands of tissue that radiate outwards towards the edge of the breast among the mammary glands and deposits of fatty tissue.

The ligaments WÄ¼ringer discovered are arranged like a hammock against the chest wall and, unlike Cooper's ligaments, are "distinct and strong".

WÄ¼ringer also demonstrated that blood flow to the breast was directed along these ligaments.

Before this, doctors had thought blood flow to the breast was linked to some unknown factor or anatomical structure.

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