

The Daily Item

HEALTH



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Tuesday, July 23, 2002

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Dr. Martin Keisch shows a MammoSite device at a hospital in Miami, Fla. The device aids in the treatment of breast cancer.

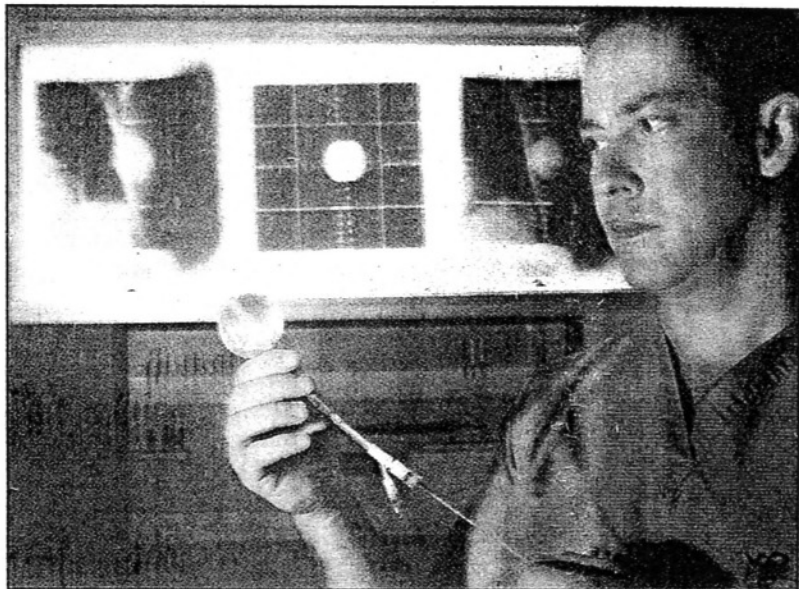


Photo by Knight Ridder Tribune

Cancer-busting balloon targets breast-tumor site

By Daniela Lamas

The Miami Herald.

MIAMI — When Terry Soffes had the second cancerous lump in her breast removed in December 2000, she wanted to avoid the traditional six-week course of external radiation.

Besides the hassle of daily trips to the hospital, she worried about long-term effects of radiation on tissue throughout her breast.

Seeking an alternative, Soffes enrolled in a trial at Mount Sinai Medical Center testing the safety of a new device called MammoSite that allows doctors to irradiate only the tumor site.

MammoSite delivers targeted internal radiation through an inflatable balloon implanted in the breast — a twist on a technique called brachytherapy that has long been used in prostate cancer.

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Since it delivers high-dose radiation from inside the breast to a single area, a full course of treatment takes just five days.

MammoSite won approval from the Food and Drug Administration in May.

Since the original study did not monitor the long-term success of MammoSite therapy, a larger trial has just begun that will track women receiving MammoSite radiation for five years. Mount Sinai is also participating in that study.

Dr. Martin Keisch, a radiation oncologist who headed the Mount Sinai portion of the original trial, says MammoSite promises to make it easier for some patients to keep their breasts intact following a breast cancer diagnosis.

Currently, women whose breast tumors are small enough and caught early are offered lumpectomy — surgery that removes only the cancer — rather than the more disfiguring mastectomy that removes the entire breast.

Six weeks of external beam radiation that irradiates the entire breast follows.

Brachytherapy involves implanting eight to 16 catheters, snaking through one side of the breast and out the other around the tumor site. The catheters must be placed evenly and the radiation “seed” must sit in a different place in each of the catheters to give the high dose of radiation to a precise location inside the breast.

Instead of the brachytherapy catheters, MammoSite uses one inflatable balloon placed precisely in the tumor’s former site.

“This is the same concept (as brachytherapy). The only difference is that the balloon is easier to be placed and easier for the patient,” says Cristiane Takita, a radiation oncologist at the UM School of Medicine.

Keisch and Takita warn that MammoSite is designed only for patients who are older than 45 and whose tumors are no more than 2 centimeters in diameter.