After your operation
Information for patients
This leaflet describes some of the common problems that people have after breast surgery and explains when you should expect to see your Consultant or Breast Care Nurse next.
How do I care for my wound?

In most circumstances, your wound will heal quickly and easily. Usually the stitches are dissolvable so you will not need to have them taken out. We will let you know if this is not the case. Your wound dressing will normally be removed before you go home. You may bath or shower as normal and if the wound gets wet, simply pat dry. Deodorant can be used as normal.

Care of wound drains

If your wound drains are not removed before you go home the ward nurses will arrange for you to see the practice nurse at your GP surgery or a District Nurse to visit until they can be removed. Separate information is provided for you and your District Nurse about this. If you experience any problems with your drains over the weekend and your District Nurse or GP is unable to help then please contact the Jane Ashley Centre for advice. They will either be able to advise you or will ask you to call the Surgical Emergency Unit.

Please do not go to the Accident and Emergency department.

Surgical Emergency Unit (Ward 6D): 01865 857950

What could go wrong with my wound?

If there are complications with the wound, then they are usually sorted out quickly and easily. The most common problems are:

Infection

Sometimes, through no fault of your own the wound can become infected. You will notice that your wound becomes swollen, red or painful and it may begin to ooze more than before. If you notice any of these symptoms you may need a course of antibiotics. Please contact your Breast Care Nurse during the week, or your GP at the weekend.
Seroma
Sometimes, after your drains come out, the wound continues to produce fluid under the scar, which cannot escape. The fluid will collect and cause swelling. This collection of fluid is called a seroma. It is quite a common problem after breast surgery and is not harmful in any way. You will notice that the wound becomes swollen under the scar or under your arm. The skin can become quite tight and it is sometimes difficult to put your arm down.

This fluid, if left alone, would eventually be reabsorbed by itself. However, if your wound feels uncomfortable because of a seroma, your hospital doctor or Breast Care Nurse can drain it off quickly and easily. This may need to be done several times before it eventually settles down. If the seroma continues to come back, we sometimes use a dressing to apply pressure to the area, which helps prevent the wound filling up again.

If you experience this problem then please contact your Breast Care Nurse. It does not normally need to be dealt with over the weekend.

Hardness under the scar
As your body heals it produces fibrous tissue to promote the healing process. Your body overcompensates after an operation, and produces extra fibrous tissue, which causes the scar to feel hard and lumpy. This is normal and will gradually soften, although it may take several months.

Numbness and tingling under your arm
After surgery to the armpit, the nerve under your arm may be damaged. This does not cause any problem with arm movement. However, some women experience numbness, tingling or pain along the underside of their arm. This is fairly common and usually settles down, although this may take several months.
Who should I contact if I have a problem?

Your main point of contact after you are discharged is your Breast Care Nurse. If you are worried about anything please telephone her. Her number will be on the card you were given when you first met her. If your Breast Care Nurse is not in her office, leave a message on the answer-machine and she will ring you back as soon as she can. If you would like to speak to someone urgently you can phone the hospital switchboard and ask them to bleep the Breast Care Nurse. Due to the busy nature of the hospital, they may take a while to answer your call. The Breast Care Nurse is available Monday to Friday 9am to 5pm. Alternatively you can call the Jane Ashley Centre for advice. The ward is open 7 days a week.

Churchill Hospital Switchboard: 01865 741841
Jane Ashley Centre: 01865 235350

When do I need to come back?

You will usually be given a follow up appointment before you leave the ward.

The appointment is usually two weeks after your surgery and will be in the Blue Area Outpatient department on Level 2 of the John Radcliffe Hospital. This appointment is to check that your wound is healing well and to discuss the findings of surgery. We will be able to give you an indication of what treatment you may need. The Breast Care Nurse and your Consultant should be at this appointment. If you have any questions, please write them down and bring them with you to your appointment. You will be contacted by your Breast Care Nurse by telephone within 48 hours of discharge.

Your Breast Care Nurse is: ........................................................................................................

Telephone: ................................................................................................................................

Your follow-up appointment is: .................................................................................................
Practical and financial support
Many people with cancer experience financial difficulties and money worries. Being unwell and having treatment for cancer can have a big financial impact on the person themselves, and on their carers and families.

Some people have to give up work or may already be on a low income, while others face additional expenses such as prescription charges or travel costs to and from hospital.

Many people aren’t aware that they may be able to claim benefits if they aren’t able to work or they need additional care. They may need advice and help to make claims.

Benefits advice
The Macmillan / Oxford CAB Benefits Advice service is based at Maggie’s Centre at the Churchill Hospital. They are able to offer advice and support to people with cancer, their carers and families, with financial and benefit issues.

This includes:
• checking eligibility for benefits
• help with applications and forms
• grant applications
• initial debt, housing and employment advice
• information about and referrals to other sources of support.

They can give help over the phone, by email, at ‘drop-in’ sessions and by appointment, largely at the Churchill but also one day a fortnight at the Brodey Centre at the Horton General Hospital. They can be contacted direct on 01865 225689 or by e-mail at Macmillan.oxcab@gmail.com.

Prescription charges
After a cancer diagnosis patients are entitled to free prescriptions – this covers treatment and regular medications. To benefit from
this a FP92A form, which can be obtained from the hospital or GP surgery, needs to be completed and sent back. This cover lasts for 5 years and would then need to be reviewed as to whether it continues.

**Wig provision**

Some cancer treatments will result in hair loss. If you are advised that this may happen to you we can help support you with the provision and cost of a wig. In this Trust the providers are either Jacqueline’s at the Churchill, or Banbury Postiche, located just North of Banbury. It is important that the appropriate forms are completed before you select a wig or you may be liable for the full cost. The staff who give your treatment can give you these at your pre-chemotherapy discussion.

**National organisations**

**Breast Cancer Care**
Provides free information and one to one emotional support from volunteers for patients and partners.
Tel: 0808 800 6000
www.breastcancercare.org.uk

**Macmillan Cancer Support**
Provides free booklets on breast cancer and treatments and a one to one counselling service.
Tel: 0808 800 1234
www.macmillan.org.uk

**Local support groups**

**Bosom Friends**
The Oxfordshire support group
Tel: 01844 290362 or 01865 862865
www.bosomfriends.org.uk
If you need an interpreter or need a document in another language, large print, Braille or audio version, please call 01865 221473 or email PALSJR@orh.nhs.uk

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Version 4, July 2011
Review, July 2014
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www.oxfordradcliffe.nhs.uk/patientinformation