

Restoring Peace of Mind— Couple Committed to Cause, Dr. Michele Cooper and Dr. Scott Sullivan

FOR THE PATIENT, a breast cancer diagnosis is devastating enough, but concern over how their body may be permanently scarred and disfigured can further deepen their anxiety. Often times, in the rush to rid themselves of the cancer the patient fails to investigate her reconstructive options prior to having her mastectomy or lumpectomy performed. “Having this information ahead of time would not only give patients the peace of mind of being whole after surgery, but it greatly impacts the aesthetic outcome of the case,” says Dr. Michele Cooper, a Mandeville plastic surgeon and St. Charles Surgical Hospital staff member.

Seeing this deficiency and the further stress and trauma it adds to these women’s lives at an already vulnerable time, Drs. Scott Sullivan and Frank Dellacroce, co-founders of the Center for Restorative Breast Surgery at the St. Charles Surgical Hospital, have devoted their careers to changing this. St. Charles Surgical Hospital is the only hospital in the world dedicated to breast cancer reconstruction. “Our ideal standard for breast reconstruction is a coordinated effort between the general surgeon and the plastic surgeon. We work in concert to first remove only the breast tissue from the affected breast. We leave an empty component of breast skin in tact, and in many cases the nipple too. Micro surgically transplanted tissue from another area of the body is then used to fill the breast. The patient awakens from surgery with a breast very much like their previous one—and often better,” notes Dr. Sullivan.

According to Dr. Cooper, the New Orleans metropolitan area has a higher percentage of patients who undergo mastectomy and reconstruction together, and utilize their own breast tissue, than other areas of the state as well as the nation. This is due in part



Dr. Sullivan and Dr. Cooper with their daughters Elle and Alexis.

to the dedication of local plastic surgeons and general surgeons who promote awareness of this option.

The American Society of Plastic surgeons (ASPS) and the Plastic Surgery Foundation (PSF) were also alarmed by this lack of dissemination of information nationally. Despite a federal mandate which requires that all breast cancer patients have knowledge of both their reconstruction options, and knowledge that insurance companies must cover the procedure they choose, there are still patients slipping through the cracks in the system.

“Of the 250,000 women who will be diagnosed with breast cancer this year alone, only a small percentage will undergo reconstruction. In fact, only three out of ten women will even be informed of their reconstructive options. These statistics are concerning at a time when information is so easily available and dispersed through the internet,” Dr. Cooper indicates. “As plastic surgeons, we are presented almost daily with a patient that has survived breast cancer but is permanently scarred from the procedure. We can’t go back in time and change that, we can only work with what we have been presented. The patients are

distraught and we know this part of their recovery could have been prevented with greater collective and preventative energy by physicians and surgeons.”

The first ever National Breast Reconstruction Awareness Day or BRA day will be held in the United States on October 17, in New Orleans. This is the inaugural event of a two year campaign to empower women with information about their breast reconstruction choices. The American Society of Plastic Surgeons, The Plastic Surgery Foundation and The Center for Restorative Breast Surgery (Dr. Sullivan and Dr. Dellacroce) are National Sponsors of this event. Dr. Michele Cooper is a local sponsor. ✂

To learn more about the first ever BRA Day visit www.breastcenter.com, 504-899-2800. Find Dr. Michele M. Cooper at www.michelecoopermd.com, 985-626-6163. To aid in the BRA Day campaign, pop artist and BRA Day national spokesman Jewel, will perform at an intimate concert on October 29 in New Orleans. For tickets to the event visit www.plasticsurgerythemeeting.org

