

Healthscope

# Less pain for breast cancer patients

**T**hink of the lymph nodes in your body as a floor trap. Like the waste pipe trap in the kitchen or toilet, lymph nodes filter out bacteria, viruses and other toxic substances and ensure that they are eliminated from the body.

In breast cancer, doctors zero in on these nodes, where the cancer cells may have escaped from a tumour and are now held, looking to go elsewhere in the body.

It used to be that along with breast cancer surgery — to remove the tumour — women had to undergo a procedure to remove all the lymph nodes in their underarm. Called the Axillary Lymph Node Dissection, it was an hour-long operation and, typically, patients required a hospital stay of a week or more.

Plus, there were uncomfortable side effects such as swelling and numbness in the arm, and patients sometimes took months to regain full use of the arm.

Now, a relatively new procedure — Sentinel Lymph Node Biopsy — offers a minimally invasive alternative to the removal of all the underarm lymph nodes.

It was introduced in Singapore about two years ago, though it has been around for a decade. The procedure is

With it, patients save surgery costs, cut recovery time from months to just about a week, and experience a lot less pain.

Says Dr [Name] of the Breast Unit [Name], who has been offering the procedure for the last two years: