

New alternate therapy

Tebogo Monama

THERE is a new alternative to treating breast cancer that costs half the traditional chemotherapy sessions.

Intraoperative radiotherapy (IORT) only costs R35 000 compared with the R80 000 paid by patients for traditional chemotherapy.

Besides the low cost, patients only go for one procedure in the IORT, instead of at least seven sessions in chemotherapy.

In Africa, the procedure is only available at Tygerberg Hospital in Western Cape.

IORT is a type of partial breast irradiation where the radiation therapy treatment is given during surgery, immediately following the removal of a

tumour. It is based on the premise that 90% of early breast cancer recurrences occur at the site of the original tumour.

The traditional external beam radiation is given for five to seven weeks in daily administrations by an external radiation machine. The advantages of IORT is that it spares the surrounding tissue of the breast, heart and lungs, as there is no radiation effect 2cm from the targeted area.

Head of the Breast Clinic at Tygerberg Hospital Justus Apffelstaedt says the therapy is only applicable to a few patients. The tumour must not be larger than 3cm, not more than three lymph nodes can be involved and the patient must be 45 years or older.