

I'm grateful my breast cancer was caught early

An early breast cancer diagnosis meant Barbara Erasmus could triumph over the dreaded disease

Barbara Erasmus, 65, and her husband, Michael, live in Newlands, Cape Town, and they have two grown-up children.

'They didn't leave much of your boobs,'" observed the genial carer as she soaped my body in a gentle, circular motion. I could have been at an upmarket spa instead of the surgical ward at Kingsbury Hospital in Cape Town. The doomsayers about falling standards in South Africa would be silenced if they spent a week taking advantage of the first-world conditions evident in the hospital – from space-age equipment to the expertise of world-class surgeons to the meticulous attention to detail observed by the cleaners; a germ doesn't stand a chance in Kingsbury!

I'd first noticed the lump in my breast after experiencing a slight tingling in my nipple. I can't claim it was because I'd paid attention to magazine articles promoting self-examination and regular mammograms. I'd had my only mammogram two decades earlier and I never had another one because it hurt.

It's impossible to justify such an irresponsible attitude. I have access to comprehensive medical aid and a choice of radiologists with world-class detection equipment just down the road from where



I live. Millions of women in South Africa lack these advantages and yet it was too much of an effort for me to take advantage of the opportunities dished up on my plate. I'm ashamed of myself.

I thought I'd overreacted to discovering the lump when the radiologist told me there was at least a page of non-sinister

reasons for having breast lumps. The mammogram was much more user-friendly than it had been two decades ago – no more than minor discomfort. I wasn't perturbed, therefore, when she came back after five minutes to take more pictures or even when I was ushered through to another room for a scan; I'd been told that