The first two New Zealand women have been treated in Auckland with a revolutionary one dose, one time treatment for early-stage breast cancer.

The Intrabeam intraoperative radiotherapy (IORT) system avoids the traditional 3–6 week course of radiation therapy for 80% of patients and eliminates the need for up to a further 25 visits to hospital for post-operative radiotherapy. This is much more convenient for patients, saves the health service money and could reduce waiting lists.

A team of Auckland breast cancer specialists has formed their own service, Focus Radiotherapy, to bring the new treatment option, using the Zeiss Intrabeam intraoperative radiotherapy (IORT) system, to the Southern Cross Hospital, North Harbour Auckland and intend to make it available to women across the country.

One of the founders of Focus Radiotherapy, Auckland Breast Surgeon Dr Erica Whineray Kelly says: ‘This may be an excellent therapy option for women having breast-conserving surgery. We are the first and only centre in New Zealand offering this revolutionary treatment. The goal of this approach is to destroy remaining cancer cells, helping to prevent the possibility of recurrence – and in most cases – eliminating the need for weeks of radiation treatments.’

Professor Mohammed Keshtgar, consultant surgical oncologist at the Royal Free and Professor of Cancer Surgery and Surgical Oncology, University College London who has been involved in trials using Intrabeam therapy from the outset for over 12 years, said: ‘We welcome the news that intra-operative radiotherapy using the Intrabeam will now become a viable option for women aged over fifty with grade 1-2 breast cancer seeking treatment in New Zealand and I was delighted to welcome the team of wonderful clinicians from New Zealand in London when they attended our training program and became members of the TARGIT Academy.

‘We are in no doubt that this is the future of breast cancer treatment. Our results show that the technique is safe, has reduced side effects from radiation treatment such as scarring, and is effective with a cancer recurrence rate that is equivalent to giving standard radiotherapy treatment. We believe this will revolutionise the treatment of breast cancer.’

Chairperson of the Breast Cancer Aotearoa Coalition (BCAC), Libby Burgess, says Intrabeam is a wonderful innovation for women with low-risk early breast cancer: ‘The delivery of surgery and radiotherapy during a single operation will eliminate weeks of daily trips to the clinic, allowing women to avoid ongoing stress and inconvenience and return to their normal lives much faster.

‘The precise targeting of radiation to the area that the tumour was removed from will avoid unnecessary radiation to healthy tissue. I’m delighted to see this option being offered to New Zealand women’, Ms Burgess says.

Currently only women who have early-stage breast cancer, have negative lymph nodes and are 50 and older may be candidates for Intrabeam. The clinically documented treatment delivers a single fraction of radiotherapy in 20-30 minutes during the time of lumpectomy. Other forms of radiation therapy can require three to six weeks of treatment.

Localizing the radiation inside the breast is effective because this is where cancer is most likely to recur. The international TARGIT research group has been investigating this new method of delivering radiotherapy for breast cancer in which the treatment can be delivered at the time of surgical lumpectomy since 1988. The results of the trial show the overall number of recurrences of the cancer was very low[1].
Benefits of INTRABEAM

- A reduction in radiation treatment time for the patient
- Minimized exposure to healthy tissue and organs, such as the ribs, lungs, heart and opposite breast
- No treatment delay for patients who must also undergo chemotherapy as part of their breast cancer treatment
- Same-day treatment with no hospitalisation required
- No travel required to a radiotherapy centre for up to six weeks of daily treatment

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