Breakthrough gives breasts a long-lasting lift

DOMINIQUE HERMAN

A CAPE TOWN plastic and reconstructive surgeon has developed a way to lift breasts by using a lightweight mesh attached to the chest wall.

The mesh reinforces the "hammock" created by the horizontal and vertical ligaments in the breast.

These are the strongest ligaments in the breast and, less than 10 years ago, were not known to exist.

They were discovered by an Austrian anatomist and plastic surgeon, Elisabeth Würinger.

The idea for the Breform surgical procedure came to Peet van Deventer after he read a "breakthrough" article by Würinger in the late 1990s.

"The article impressed me so much that I visited her in Vienna," Van Deventer said.

Returning the favour, Würinger said yesterday she planned to incorporate the procedure Van Deventer had devised into her surgical repertoire.

In traditional breast lifts, where the skin is made tauter, there is tension along suture lines that causes scarring and, over time, the breasts begin to sag again.

With the Breform procedure, half of the mesh was absorbed into the breast tissue and the other half acted as an "internal bra", Van Deventer said. In a mastectomy, the mesh hammock would be used for the unaffected breast. In such cases, it would also be far easier to match the remaining breast with the prosthesis.

Before Würinger's research was published, only Cooper's ligaments in the breast were known.

These are the fibrous, semi-elastic bands of tissue that radiate outwards towards the edge of the breast among the mammary glands and deposits of fatty tissue.

The ligaments Würinger discovered are arranged like a hammock against the chest wall and, unlike Cooper's ligaments, are "distinct and strong".

Würinger also demonstrated that blood flow to the breast was directed along these ligaments.

Before this, doctors had thought blood flow to the breast was linked to some unknown factor or anatomical structure.

New knee replacement system unveiled

STAFF WRITER

THE first knee replacement system designed to restore natural knee motion was launched in South Africa this week by two Belgian surgeons who are in Cape Town to attend a combined meeting of the Belgian and South African Knee Societies at the SA Sports Science Institute.

President of the Belgian Knee Society, Johan Bellemans, who developed the Journey Knee System with Jan Victor, said the device was "designed to move and feel like a normal knee".

Unlike conventional knee replacement surgery which frequently removed ligaments integral for stability and support, this anatomical knee system provides function for both of the major knee ligaments – the dense structures of connective tissue that fasten bone to bone and stabilise the knee.

So much so, he said, that patients could carry on with their normal active lifestyles and forget that they had a new knee.

The surgical technique used is similar to other knee procedures.

The procedure was particularly effective for professional sportsmen and women who typically were forced to stop playing competitively after suffering knee problems.

Bellemans said South African surgeons were highly rated in knee surgery. He ranked them with the best knee surgeons in the US and Australia.