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IMPORTANT MESSAGE TO ALL PATIENTS 26.3.20

The rapidly evolving changes within the health care system related to the COVID 19 virus means that we are essentially “building the boat as we sail in it”.

I am not sure judging by the fact that we continue to have patients contacting the practice in the expectation that they will be able to schedule routine review appointments, that the whole enormity of the COVID 19 crisis and the looming public health emergency that threatens to overwhelm our health care system has sunk in.

Precautions have clearly escalated over the last 48 hours, and this will obviously impact on the arrangements which had previously been communicated.

Breastscreen Victoria has suspended screening, and whilst routine breast imaging currently continues in many imaging facilities, it is highly likely that this will be suspended in the near future, for the same reasons as the ban on all non-urgent elective surgery announced by the Prime Minister yesterday.

The ban on all non-urgent elective surgery in both public and private hospitals does NOT apply to breast cancer surgery, which is classified as “Category One”, and as such will continue as normal at present.

The ban has been introduced for the following reasons:

- To reduce the risk of COVID 19 exposure to staff
- To decrease the number of non-urgent patients attending health facilities
- To limit the use of PPE in the context of predicted supply deficiencies

It is at present not clear as to how best to handle the issue of the routine follow up +/- breast imaging in women previously treated for early breast cancer. Based on the experience overseas, it is likely to be deferred a period of many months, whilst the immediate priority will be the treatment of COVID 19 cases. BreastSurgANZ, the Australasian society representing oncological breast surgeons earlier this week suggested that routine review of asymptomatic breast cancer patients, including their imaging, be deferred for six months, or as appropriate.

The situation in the United Kingdom and The United States, both of whom are a couple of weeks ahead of us, has progressed to the point that surgery for new breast cancer diagnoses is being deferred at least 3-5 months in situations where patients can be commenced on some form of drug therapy. The [American Society of Breast Surgeons](#) and the [American Society of Surgical Oncology](#) have both this week published guidelines with recommendations for the prioritization, triage and treatment of breast cancer patients during the pandemic.



[American Society of Breast Surgeons Recommendations](#)



[American Society of Surgical Oncology Resource](#)

Regular updates will continue to be posted on our website www.thebreastcentre.com.au and social media channels www.facebook.com/DrJaneOBrien and www.instagram.com/DrJaneOBrien

Keep well

Jane