

Karen Jochems Paul Lagro

THE PATIENT

THIS IS THE PERSONAL STORY OF ONE OF OUR PATIENTS, ACCOMPANIED BY EXTRA INFORMATION FROM THE SPECIALIST.



“I feel like I have my own body back”

BREAST RECONSTRUCTION

In 2012 **Heidi Farrugia (48)** was successfully treated for thyroid cancer. Ten months later, however, she was diagnosed with breast cancer.

“The doctor explained that I would need to have my left breast removed. I immediately asked him about breast reconstruction but he advised me to delay that decision until I had had the operation and chemotherapy. I accepted his advice and had the surgery. Having been confronted with cancer for the third time in my life, I was really shaken. I had always led a healthy life and felt I could no longer trust my own body. The breast removal felt like losing part of my womanhood. I could never accept it. While recovering from chemo I also had my ovaries removed. The doctors said this was not strictly necessary, but I had to do it for my own peace of mind.”

On the waiting list

“After some time I decided to go to an information evening on plastic surgery in Nijmegen. Professor Ulrich was one of the speakers and after it finished, my husband and I stayed on to chat to him. I immediately felt like I could trust him. So I decided to go to him for the removal of my right breast and a breast

reconstruction during the same operation. The breast did not need to be removed but I no longer trusted my body.

I was on the waiting list for almost a year. Dr. Ulrich had warned me that I would probably need silicone implants, as I was too thin to have a free-flap procedure. During that year I gained a little weight and when the time for surgery came, I was delighted to hear that I could have a free-flap procedure after all. I had the surgery last November. Although I was scared and it was a difficult operation, I am glad that I decided to do it. I really feel like I have my own body back.”

Commitment

“I am now a volunteer for the Borstkanker Vereniging (breast cancer foundation) in Gelderland. We organize activities and support for women and men who are going through or have been through breast cancer. I invited professor Ulrich to hold a talk for us. He immediately agreed, in spite of his very busy schedule. To me, that is further proof of his commitment to his work and to his patients. I have great respect and admiration for him and his team. He always took the time to answer my questions and give me reassurance. I will be forever grateful for the normality I have now regained.” ■

“Our center is the largest in the Netherlands for breast reconstruction using free flaps. We do around 180 microsurgical breast reconstructions per year, for patients living in the Netherlands and Germany. This means using tissue from the patient’s thigh, stomach or buttocks to create a new breast. We have developed a special technique to make breasts as symmetrical as possible and to treat lymphedema problems within one procedure. The result is a breast that looks and feels natural. The majority of women much prefer this to a silicone or saline implant.

There are ten PhD candidates in our department and we also have a fellowship scheme for young doctors. They spend a year with us to learn how to perform this procedure in the best possible way.”



PROFESSOR DIETMAR ULRICH, PLASTIC SURGEON AND HEAD OF THE DEPARTMENT PLASTIC SURGERY