

# Easier breast cancer treatments

Targeted radiation is faster, less disruptive.

BY **CARINE NADEL**  
SPECIAL TO THE REGISTER

Two newer types of radiation therapy are making it possible for women diagnosed with breast cancer to take back their lives with a minimal amount of disruption.

MammoSite Radiation Therapy System and Contura Multi-Lumen Balloon Brachytherapy, the latest forms of balloon brachytherapy radiation, take five days to complete, rather than the usual five to seven weeks for traditional forms of radiation.

Dr. John West, of the Breast Cancer and Imaging Center of Orange County in Orange, describes MammoSite as a five-day targeted balloon procedure. Brachy-

therapy is from the Greek word for "close" and "internal." After a lumpectomy, a catheter is inserted and "seeds" of radiation are fed through and placed in exact predetermined spots twice a day, six hours apart. Because they are placed in a specific spot or spots, higher daily doses are used.

The side effects aren't as devastating, and the patient can usually go about her daily life, doctors and patients say. After the fifth day, the catheter is removed, and the patient goes back to regular activities.

Orange County patient Susan Corlett, 84, had a lumpectomy and MammoSite treatment after a recurrence of breast cancer two years ago.

She said the treatment allowed her to continue her



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**ALTERNATIVE:** Miriam Norton, with daughter Katie at their Glen Ellyn, Ill., home, underwent brachytherapy.

regular daily activities. While she did have some bouts of tiredness, they weren't enough to really slow her down.

"Two weeks after I was done, I was on a plane to Virginia to spend the holidays with my son and his family," she said.

Another, newer treatment is Contura, which became available last year (MammoSite received Federal Drug Administration approval in 2002). Radiation oncologist Dr. Kenneth Tokita of the Cancer Center of Irvine started using Contura in December.

"It is a more pinpoint and revolutionary method," said Tokita, who still uses the MammoSite method, but not as often.

Sandra McCarthy, who lives in Orange County, had the Contura procedure last year. "From the time I walked in and left each treatment, it was a grand total of 20 minutes," McCarthy said. "I drove myself, all my doc-

tors talked to each other at least once a week, and while I was tired, it was nothing devastating or that actually slowed me down."

"... The worst part, which was very minor, like a Band-Aid being ripped off, was the catheter being removed," she said.

Tokita said that in 1976 the survival rate for patients with breast cancer was 25 percent after five years. Today it is 92 percent to 94 percent.

Dr. John West is one of the co-founders of the Be Aware Foundation, dedicated to and supporting the education of early breast cancer detection programs. The foundation will be holding its first "Stomp Out Breast Cancer"

wine-tasting and grape-stomping contest at Strawberry Farms Golf Club on Sunday from 1-5 p.m. For more information about the fundraiser, call 714-915-3101 or go to [www.beawarefoundation.org](http://www.beawarefoundation.org).