

# Drainage of seromas resulting from breast surgery

## Introduction

This leaflet will explain what will happen when you come into hospital for your procedure. It is important that you understand what to expect and that you feel able to take an active role in your treatment.

This procedure is usually performed in the Seroma Clinic. This leaflet will answer some of the questions that you may have but if there is anything that you and your family are not sure about then please ask.

## What is a seroma?

A seroma is a collection of fluid which can collect under the wound or in the axilla (armpit) after a breast operation, or when lymph nodes have been removed from the axilla. The fluid seeps from small blood and lymph vessels that are cut during the operation to remove the breast tissue or lymph nodes. Once these small vessels start to heal no further fluid collects and the seroma will gradually be absorbed by the body.

Approximately one in three patients who have had a breast operation will develop a seroma, even if surgical drains have been used. It may take several weeks after an operation for the seroma to disappear completely.

## What do I do if I think I have a seroma?

Small seromas will usually disappear within one month without any treatment. If the seroma is large and causing problems with discomfort or restricting your arm movement then the fluid can be drained using a fine needle. This may need to be repeated until it has settled down, and can vary from person to person. Having a seroma drained is usually painless as the area around the wound is still likely to be numb.

Seromas do not always need to be drained. If they do need to be drained then this can be done in clinic. Repeated seroma drainage can encourage the seroma to refill and as the procedure carries a small risk of infection it should not be done unless the seroma is causing problems. If the seroma does need to be drained then we encourage you to attend our nurse-led clinic.

## What are the risks?

The risks associated with seroma drainage are infection, bleeding and pneumothorax (this is where air enters the pleural cavity and may cause shortness of breath). These risks will be explained and your consent obtained before the procedure is carried out.

If you experience difficulties breathing, excessive bleeding or leaking from the wound site, an increased amount of pain or inflammation around the area you should seek medical advice via one of these routes:

- Calling the ward where you had your surgery
- Seeing your GP
- Attending the nearest accident and emergency department

## Seroma clinic

Seroma drainage is carried out by the Breast Care Nurses in the Berkshire Cancer Centre. Where possible we will book you an appointment following your breast cancer surgery or you may attend as a drop-in patient when necessary. Please be aware that a large number of patients attend this clinic so please allow plenty of time for this visit. There is a WRVS tea bar nearby if you require refreshments. The clinics are held in the **Berkshire Cancer Centre** on **Tuesdays between 2.30 – 3.30pm** and **Fridays 9.30 – 10.30am**. If you experience problems with fluid collecting outside of these hours you should contact your Breast Care Nurse, the ward where you had your surgery or your GP.

Additionally there is a seroma clinic held in Newbury at the Outpatient Department in **West Berkshire Community Hospital**. The clinics are held on **Mondays between 1pm – 2pm** and **Thursdays between 1pm – 2pm**.

Please ring in advance to let the nurses know you are attending and which day you would like to come. West Berkshire Community Hospital: 01635 273475

## Breast Care Nurses

Can be contacted on: 0118 322 7420

## Useful telephone numbers:

Sonning Ward: 0118 322 8204

Adult Day Surgery Unit: 0118 322 7622

Berkshire Cancer Centre 0118 322 7890

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