



DRAGONS ABREAST AUSTRALIA - after all the treatment – what next?

Once breast surgery is over and the radiation and/or chemotherapy has finished, breast cancer survivors are “on their own”, facing the sometimes daunting task of reconstructing the rest of their lives. It is a jolting change of pace for many, switching from a whirlwind of medically driven activity to suddenly being in charge of rebuilding their health, their fitness and their lives.

Being able to do all those things in the company of others who have travelled the same path helps to restore the confidence, the spark and the sense of adventure needed to permit a full and active life despite the breast cancer. That’s a great time to investigate Dragons Abreast Australia!

You could say we are the “loony fringe” of dragon-boating as a sport. We are more about participation and inclusiveness than competition. We even have a special rule which is unavailable to the sporting teams - we each only do as much or as little as we feel up to and when a paddler needs a rest, she (or he) can just stop paddling for a bit - even in a race. So sometimes we’re a bit like that Olympic swimmer, Eric Musumbani, and like they did for him, the crowd generally cheers us on.



Background

It seems unbelievable now, but as recently as 1996, the prevailing medical wisdom worldwide was that women who’d had breast surgery should not participate in upper body exercise - it was assumed this would cause and/or aggravate complications like lymphoedema.

A Canadian physician, Prof Don McKenzie, challenged this belief and started training a small team of breast cancer survivors to paddle dragon boats. His subsequent paper, published in the Journal of the Canadian Medical Association, established that dragon boating post-breast cancer surgery does not impact on the incidence or severity of lymphoedema. Instead it improves the

general strength, health and well-being of breast cancer survivors .

There are now over 120 breast cancer survivor teams worldwide and here in Australia we have 43 member groups spread across every State and Territory that are part of Dragons Abreast Australia, operating under a philosophy of participation and inclusiveness. Our head office is in Darwin, NT – which is home to the first ever Dragon Abreast Australia team.

Why do we paddle?

We paddle to demonstrate there is quality of life despite a breast cancer diagnosis. By being part of the team we help each other regain that sense of wellness, self-confidence and control of our lives. We promote teamwork and at the same time help each other overcome the isolation that a diagnosis of breast cancer can often bring. Whilst not a formal support group, friendships made in Dragons Abreast Australia provide a unique support network at a grass roots level for people with living with breast cancer.

Who are our paddlers?

We come in all shapes, sizes, and ages (our oldest is 84 and our youngest is 27) and many of us haven’t done any sport since we left school. What we all share is that we are all living with breast cancer. Sporting prowess is not one of our criteria for participation - we welcome all comers.

If you are interested in being part of a Dragons Abreast Australia team or assisting us –contact us on

1300 889 566

www.dragonsabreast.com.au