Premise: Cost concerns. Patient deciding between breast conserving but with radiotherapy versus mastectomy without recon as recon is too expensive

### **Simulated Patient Scenario**

**Dr. Lim:** Good morning, Ms. Tan. Thank you for coming in today. How have you been feeling?

**Ms. Tan:** Good morning, Dr. Lim. I’ve been okay, but I’m feeling very anxious about my surgery options. I’m also worried about the costs involved.

**Dr. Lim:** I understand. Making a decision about breast cancer treatment is never easy, and financial concerns are an important factor to consider. You’re deciding between breast-conserving surgery (lumpectomy) with radiotherapy and a mastectomy without reconstruction, is that right?

**Ms. Tan:** Yes, I like the idea of keeping my breast, but I know that means I will need radiotherapy. I’m worried about the cost of that treatment.

**Dr. Lim:** That’s a valid concern. A lumpectomy is less extensive than a mastectomy and preserves your natural breast, but it does require radiotherapy afterward to reduce the risk of recurrence. The cost of radiotherapy can add up, especially if you need multiple sessions over several weeks.

**Ms. Tan:** That’s what worries me. I don’t have insurance that covers all these treatments, and I don’t want to burden my family financially.

**Dr. Lim:** I see. On the other hand, a mastectomy without reconstruction eliminates the need for radiotherapy in most cases, meaning lower long-term costs. While this option removes the entire breast, it reduces the likelihood of needing further treatments or follow-ups compared to a lumpectomy with radiotherapy.

**Ms. Tan:** I understand. But I also feel scared about losing my breast. I thought about reconstruction, but I know that’s very expensive.

**Dr. Lim:** That’s right. Breast reconstruction can be costly and may require additional surgeries, which would increase both expenses and recovery time. Some women choose to go flat, which avoids extra procedures and follow-ups. Would you like to talk about how you might feel about that?

**Ms. Tan:** I think I could adjust to going flat if it means I won’t have to pay for extra treatments. I just want to make sure I’m making the right choice.

**Dr. Lim:** That’s completely understandable. It’s important that you take the time to think about what works best for you. If cost is a major concern and you want to minimize the need for further treatment, a mastectomy without reconstruction may be the most practical option. However, if preserving your breast is important and you can manage the cost of radiotherapy, then a lumpectomy remains a reasonable choice. Take your time to discuss with your family, and we can revisit your decision when you’re ready.

### **Decisional Tool: Pros and Cons of Each Modality**

#### **Lumpectomy + Radiotherapy**

✅ **Pros:**

* Preserves the natural breast, which may be psychologically beneficial.
* Less extensive surgery, meaning shorter recovery time.
* Less immediate impact on body image compared to mastectomy.

❌ **Cons:**

* Requires post-surgical radiotherapy, which involves multiple hospital visits and additional costs.
* Risk of needing a second surgery if clear margins are not achieved.
* The combined treatment process (surgery + radiation) can be longer and more expensive in the long run.

#### **Mastectomy Without Reconstruction**

✅ **Pros:**

* Eliminates the need for radiotherapy in most cases, reducing long-term treatment costs.
* Lower likelihood of needing further surgery.
* Avoids additional costs associated with breast reconstruction.

❌ **Cons:**

* Complete removal of the breast, which may have a significant psychological impact.
* Longer initial recovery time compared to lumpectomy.

Permanent change in body image, which some patients may struggle with.