Premise: Concern about drain management and no caregiver - prefers fast recovery, lumpectomy vs mastectomy

### **Patient Scenario**

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

**Ms. Wong:** Good morning, Dr. Lee. I’m doing okay, but I’m really worried about the surgery. I live alone, and I don’t have anyone to help me at home. I want to recover as quickly as possible.

**Dr. Lee:** That’s completely understandable. Having support during recovery can make a big difference, and it’s important to choose an option that suits your situation. You’re deciding between a lumpectomy and a mastectomy, correct?

**Ms. Wong:** Yes. I know that a lumpectomy means I’ll need radiotherapy, but I heard that a mastectomy involves having drains, and I don’t know how I would manage that on my own.

**Dr. Lee:** That’s right. After a mastectomy, surgical drains are placed to remove excess fluid and reduce swelling. These drains typically stay in place for about one to two weeks and require regular care, such as emptying them and monitoring for signs of infection. If you don’t have a caregiver to assist you, managing them alone could be quite challenging.

**Ms. Wong:** That’s what I’m worried about. I also want to get back to work as soon as possible. I can’t afford to take a long time off.

**Dr. Lee:** I see. A lumpectomy is a less extensive surgery compared to a mastectomy and generally allows for a quicker recovery. Most patients can return to normal activities sooner, though you will still need to undergo radiotherapy to lower the risk of recurrence. However, radiation therapy usually does not require hospitalization, and sessions are relatively short.

**Ms. Wong:** That sounds better for me. If I go with a lumpectomy, how long would my recovery be?

**Dr. Lee:** Most patients recover from a lumpectomy within a few weeks and can return to work sooner compared to those who undergo a mastectomy. You will likely experience some soreness, but it is usually manageable with simple pain relief. Radiotherapy treatments can span several weeks, but each session only takes a short time, allowing you to continue with your daily activities.

**Ms. Wong:** That sounds more manageable than having to deal with drains and a long recovery. I think I’ll go with the lumpectomy.

**Dr. Lee:** That’s a reasonable choice given your circumstances. I’ll provide you with more details about the procedure and what to expect, and we can schedule a date for your surgery.

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

#### **Lumpectomy + Radiotherapy**

✅ **Pros:**

* **Faster Recovery:** Less invasive than mastectomy, allowing a quicker return to normal activities.
* **No Drain Management:** Drains are usually not needed after a lumpectomy, which is ideal for patients without a caregiver.
* **Breast Preservation:** Maintains the natural shape of the breast, reducing psychological impact.

❌ **Cons:**

* **Need for Radiotherapy:** Requires multiple sessions over several weeks, which may be inconvenient.
* **Risk of Re-excision:** If margins are not clear, a second surgery may be needed.
* **Longer Overall Treatment Course:** Combining surgery and radiotherapy means the treatment process is extended.

#### **Mastectomy**

✅ **Pros:**

* **No Need for Radiotherapy (in most cases):** Avoids the time and inconvenience of radiation therapy.
* **Lower Recurrence Risk:** More definitive removal of cancerous tissue, reducing the chance of local recurrence.

❌ **Cons:**

* **Longer Recovery:** More extensive surgery requiring a longer healing period.
* **Need for Drain Management:** Post-surgical drains require daily care, which can be difficult without a caregiver.
* **Permanent Breast Removal:** This may have emotional and psychological impacts.