Premise: very anxious, big fear of recurrence despite early breast cancer (mastec vs lumpec

### patient scenario:

Dr. Tan: Good morning, Mdm Chua. Thank you for coming in today. How are you feeling?

Mdm Chua: Good morning, Dr. Tan. I’m feeling quite anxious, to be honest. I know my cancer was caught early, but I keep worrying about it coming back.

Dr. Tan: I understand. Fear of recurrence is very common, and I want to help you feel as confident as possible in your treatment decision. Can you share what’s worrying you the most?

Mdm Chua: I keep thinking—what if the cancer isn’t fully removed? What if it comes back later? I don’t want to go through this again. I don’t know if I should just remove everything to be safe.

Dr. Tan: That’s completely understandable. There are two main surgical options: a lumpectomy, which removes only the tumor while keeping the breast, and a mastectomy, which removes the entire breast. Both options have comparable survival rates, meaning neither is a "better" choice in terms of overall life expectancy.

Mdm Chua: But if I remove everything, doesn’t that mean the risk is lower?

Dr. Tan: A mastectomy lowers the risk of cancer coming back in the same breast, but when combined with radiotherapy, a lumpectomy offers a very similar recurrence rate. That means keeping your breast is still a safe option.

Mdm Chua: But what if there are still cancer cells left behind after the lumpectomy?

Dr. Tan: That’s a good question. After a lumpectomy, we carefully examine the surgical margins—the area around the tumor that was removed. If the margins are clear, the risk of recurrence is low. However, if the margins are not clear, there is a higher risk of cancer returning, and your surgeon will usually recommend a second surgery to remove more tissue.

Mdm Chua: So, there’s a chance I might need a second operation?

Dr. Tan: Yes, about 5-15% of patients need a second surgery after a lumpectomy to ensure all the cancer is removed. But if you are okay with that possibility, a lumpectomy is still an excellent option. If you strongly prefer to avoid a second surgery, a mastectomy would be the more definitive choice.

Mdm Chua: I just want to feel safe. Maybe removing everything is better for my anxiety.

Dr. Tan: That’s completely understandable. If having the entire breast removed would give you peace of mind and help you feel more confident about your treatment, a mastectomy might be the right choice for you. You can also consider reconstruction if you wish.

Mdm Chua: I think I need to talk to my family first, but I’m leaning toward mastectomy for peace of mind.

### Decisional tool (pros and cons of each modality):

Lumpectomy + Radiotherapy

* Pros:
* Preserves the natural breast, which may be important for some women.
* Less invasive with a shorter recovery time.
* When combined with radiotherapy, the recurrence rate is similar to a mastectomy, addressing Mdm Chua’s concerns
* Cons:
* Requires radiotherapy, which means multiple hospital visits.
* 5-15% chance of needing a second operation if the margins are not clear.
* If margins are unclear and not treated with further surgery, the risk of recurrence increases.

Mastectomy

* Pros:
  + Lower risk of local recurrence compared to lumpectomy alone.
  + No need for radiotherapy in most cases, reducing follow-ups.
  + May provide greater peace of mind for patients with high anxiety.
* Cons:
  + More extensive surgery with a longer recovery period.
  + Permanent loss of the breast, which may affect body image.
  + If reconstruction is chosen, it involves additional procedures.

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