**RAFT LAUNCHES ‘*LIFE AFTER BREAST CANCER FUND’***

**New research to improve options for women post-mastectomy**

*24 September 2015:* Medical research charity RAFT (Restoration of Appearance and Function Trust) has today launched the *Life After Breast Cancer Fund* to finance pioneering research into breast reconstruction, with the aim of vastly improving outcomes for women post-mastectomy.

Currently £352m a year is spent on researching better ways of treating and preventing breast cancer, but with 82% of women now recovering from the disease, more can and needs to be done to help women regain their quality of life after treatment.

A significantly small proportion of women who have undergone mastectomies go on to have breast reconstruction surgery because it is traumatic, often requiring multiple operations and with unpredictable results. Yet breast reconstruction is an important step in regaining dignity and quality of life. With 40% of women\* currently suffering from depression post mastectomy, RAFT believes it is vital for major improvements to be made in reconstructive surgery techniques, to help women rebuild their lives post-cancer.

RAFT aims to raise £2 million over three years with which to fund this research and carry out clinical trials. It will focus exclusively on two areas of breast reconstruction without the use of synthetic implants: free flap and fat grafting reconstruction. Improvements in techniques as a result of the research will mean less time spent in hospital by patients, fewer operations, reduced scarring and a far lower risk of tissue rejection.

**The Research**

**1. Free Flap Reconstruction -** this involves the movement of a tissue flap (fat and skin) from one site of the body to the mastectomy site. Common complications involved with this surgery include tissue loss, delayed healing and often repeat surgery, all of which takes a physical and emotional toll on the patient.

RAFT will work on a ground breaking real-time imaging technique that will greatly increase the chances of the tissue flap surviving, aiming to improve free flap tissue transfer techniques for patients by 2017.

**2.** **Fat Grafting** – involving fat tissue being removed from another part of the body and using it to help recreate the breast. The major concern with this process currently is that up to 90% of transferred fat can be absorbed by the body, resulting in multiple operations over many months or even years. RAFT aims to test new fat grafting methods in clinical trials within three years.

The *Life After Breast Cancer Fund* will research the use of stem cells to increase the chance of fat survival within the reconstructed breast. The team will also investigate using 3D biological scaffolds to further improve the function and survival of the transplanted tissue.

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Leonor Stjepic, CEO RAFT, said: “The aim of the Life After Breast Cancer Fund is to ensure that women who have had breast cancer have access to the very best reconstruction possible. We want to see the same dedication and resolve going into improving reconstructive surgery as there is in fighting breast cancer itself. Rebuilding lives post-cancer is at the core of this campaign and we urgently need to improve the options for women who currently face multiple operations with no guarantee of a successful outcome.

“We’re embarking on this new fundraising journey to bring about major advances in breast reconstructive surgery. The results will benefit women worldwide and particularly in developing countries where mastectomies are more common.”

Like all of RAFT’s work, the breast reconstruction programme is funded entirely by donations. To find out more please visit <http://www.lifeafterbreastcancerfund.org>

**For campaign updates on Twitter, please follow** [**@AfterMastectomy**](https://twitter.com/AfterMastectomy)**, @RaftCharity. #LifeAfterBreastCancerFund.**

**Ends**

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**About RAFT**

RAFT (Restoration of Appearance and Function Trust) carries out medical research that helps people rebuild their lives and regain independence and dignity after major trauma. For more than 25 years the RAFT research team has focused on areas of research that can provide practical and tangible solutions for children and adults affected by accidents, disease and birth defects.

RAFT is one of the few charities around the world that actually raises money to finance its own research. It has its own facilities, its own team of specialised researchers and its own projects.

Over the years, RAFT has provided help and hope to people suffering from breast cancer, trauma related wounds, skull injuries, and lost limbs. Recent accomplishments include: new treatments to encourage the healing of wounds; the creation of anti-scarring agents for burn patients; the invention of laser hair removal; advanced treatment for Dupuytren’s Contracture, facial palsy and damaged tendons; neo-natal methods of treating cleft lip and palate disorders.

To find out more please visit: [www.raft.ac.uk](http://www.raft.ac.uk)