

'Bearded lady' who slew a cancer dragon

The Advertiser Oct 2003

By Medical Writer
JILL PENGELLEY

THERE was just a moment when Steve Holt worried about being called a sissy.

He was the only man he knew with breast cancer and it was difficult to come to terms with.

Now, 13 years after his mastectomy, the 50-year-old carpenter and self-confessed "bearded lady" gleefully pulls on a pink T-shirt and joins his "sisters" - the Pink Paddlers - as the only man in their dragon boat racing team.

Dragons Abreast is a team of breast cancer survivors with a string of gold medals from national and international racing.

Mr Holt was 38 when he found a lump in his chest.

It was the same age at which his mother had died of breast cancer when he was just eight.

"I was bloody shocked when the doctor told me," he said yesterday.

"I'd never heard of a male who had breast cancer.

"I'm in the building game and I took a bit of ribbing.

"In the first few months they'd shout: 'Here comes the one-tit man'."

Mr Holt had his right breast tissue removed, including the nipple, and lymph nodes under his arm.

Chemotherapy followed, then

‘I was bloody shocked’

five years of Tamoxifen, a drug which blocks the effects of oestrogen on the body.

For the rest of his life Mr Holt will have a yearly mammogram on the remaining tissue on the left side of his chest.

"Luckily I've got some fat they can grab but it still bloody hurts," he said.

"I check myself every now and then but there's a lot of blokes I know wouldn't even think of checking their breasts."

He had gladly taken to wearing the trademark pink adopted by breast cancer supporters.

"I went along to a do the other night and wore a pink bow tie," he said. "And I'll wear blue shorts and a pink T-shirt for the race. I'm a bearded lady."

SA Dragons Abreast practices up to three times a week at West Lakes, preparing for the Masters Games in Canberra next month and championships in South Africa next year.

The crew won gold and silver medals in Rome last year and the Breast Cancer Challenge at the Australian Titles at West Lakes in April.



COMPETITIVE: Breast cancer survivor Steve Holt with dragon boat team-mates training at West Lakes. Picture: TAIT SCHMAAL

HOW THE DISEASE CAN HIT

- About five men and 1000 women are diagnosed with breast cancer in South Australia each year.
- The lifetime risk for male breast cancer is one in 1800, compared with one in 10 for women.
- The most common symptom is a painless lump.
- The cause is unknown but excessive male breast tissue has been associated with the disease, as has a family history of male breast cancer.
- Treatment is the same as for women, including surgery and a possible combination of chemotherapy, radiotherapy and Tamoxifen.