



Kate Kohlhaas, therapist, assists Dr. Robert Kuske, who pioneered brachytherapy.

photo by Mark Susan

The ABCs of B-R-A-C-H-Y

Necessity is often the mother of invention. In this case, the invention was brachytherapy, a breast cancer treatment breakthrough pioneered by Scottsdale's own Dr. Robert Kuske.

"Back in 1991, while I was chairman of radiation oncology at the famed Ochsner Clinic in New Orleans, the CEO of the oil industry in Venezuela came to see us," explains Dr. Kuske.

Though diagnosed with stage-two breast cancer, she had some very definite plans on her treatment.

First, she flat-out refused to lose her breast.

Second, she simply did not have six to eight weeks to undergo treatment.

"After all, she had all the oil in Venezuela as well as her family to look after," says Dr. Kuske.

And third, when she went back to Venezuela, the closest clinic for follow-up was about 250 miles away—which, for a cancer patient, may as well be on the other side of the world.

"With this in mind, she challenged us

to create a treatment program based on her life—not her tumor, not her stage of cancer, not the grade of the cancer," says Dr. Kuske. "She challenged us to think outside of the box."

The result—at first scribbled up on a napkin as a pie-in-the-sky idea—was the invention of what is now known as breast brachytherapy, a hugely popular five-day alternative to the conventional six weeks of external beam, whole-breast radiation in select early-stage breast cancers. It is also the best radiation option for women with augmented breasts, as it doesn't harden silicon like other types of radiation do.

"Brachytherapy, even after all these years, is one of the fastest-growing treatment options in Arizona and hottest topics in breast cancer. So much so, it is the subject of five international randomized clinical trials worldwide, including my 4,300-patient trial funded by the National Cancer Institute that is upon its completion right here in Scottsdale," says Dr. Kuske.