

Hormone Therapy

Mixed Martial Arts

Breast Cancer Survivor

Louisiana's

Health & Fitness

Fitness • Recreation

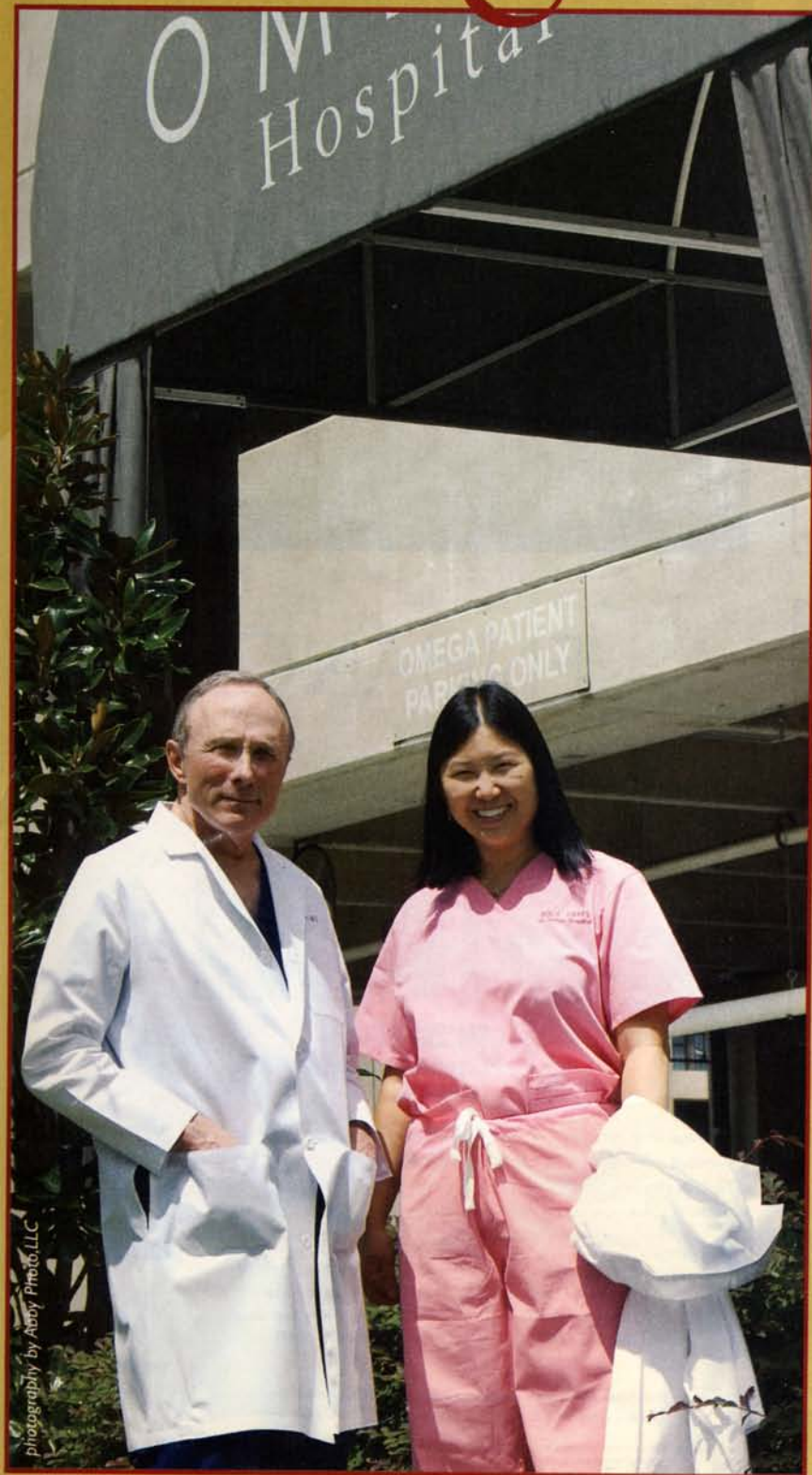


OMEGA Hospital's

Drs. Maria M. LoTempio, Robert J. Allen,
Constance M. Chen, Alan J. Stolier

October 2009 • Complimentary

Dr. Constance M. Chen of Omega Hospital



A breast cancer diagnosis is one of the most frightening things a woman can face. It can kill a woman at an age when she should still be productive and enjoying a life filled with family and friends. And even for those who survive the disease there is often the need for a surgical mastectomy. While this of course is a good choice if it saves the woman's life, a breast cancer survivor who receives a mastectomy can often feel not whole or like an incomplete woman after the cancer has been defeated. So, breast cancer survivors in that position often seek breast reconstruction surgery. And that is where Dr. Constance M. Chen and the surgeons at the Omega Hospital step in, providing the best, most cutting-edge and patient-friendly reconstructive surgeries in a warm, loving environment.

The Omega Hospital is located at 2525 Severn Avenue in Metairie. "It's a very focused, small boutique hospital that specializes in high quality breast reconstruction," said Dr. Chen. Every patient gets her own room. Each room has a separate Murphy bed where a family member or spouse can stay overnight. In addition to this, there are special robes, high speed Internet access, a mini-bar, a microwave, and a coffee maker in the room, making it feel more like a hotel than a hospital. Instead of typically drab hospital cuisine, food from various New Orleans restaurants can be delivered to patients as well.

Now, these amenities are fantastic, but they would not amount to much if the doctors were not also top notch. After all, the reason people go to a hospital is to receive the best care possible from the best physicians possible. Dr. Chen (and all of the other surgeons at the Omega Hospital, for that matter) are trained to the highest standards in each of their specialties. And since Dr. Chen specializes in breast reconstruction and that alone, she does more breast reconstructions than a surgeon who does more than one type of surgery. Like anything else in life, the more you do something, the better you get at it, and Dr. Chen has performed countless breast reconstructions.

Dr. Chen's specialty is perforator flap breast reconstruction, something she refers to as the "holy grail" of breast reconstruction. Only 30% of mastectomy patients decide to get breast reconstruction. And of that 30%, only about 30% get autologous tissue reconstruction, which means doctors take the patient's own tissue to create a new breast.

Perforator flap breast reconstruction is an advanced form of autologous tissue breast reconstruction. The traditional way of taking tissue from a patient involved taking skin, fat, and muscle from the belly. The perforator flap takes only the skin and fat, without removing or damaging any muscle. The result is natural looking breasts from a procedure that is essentially a tummy tuck.



photography by Abby Photo, LLC

What are the benefits of this procedure for the patients? By not removing muscle, the recovery time is drastically reduced. The hospital stay is cut down and patients are out of bed the next morning. In addition to this, the post-operative pain is severely diminished. Dr. Chen says that depending on the patient, some use only Tylenol or Advil for post-op pain control - no prescription medication needed. "You turn a major procedure into something that is much less stressful to the patient's body," Dr. Chen said.

Dr. Chen and the other surgeons at the Omega Hospital are so skilled at this procedure that they routinely finish the operation in 4-6 hours. In other parts of the world, similar surgeries can take 12-14 hours. Since the patient is under anesthesia for a shorter amount of time, she is less susceptible to complications that can arise from being unconscious and immobile for 12+ hours (e.g. blood clotting, deep vein thrombosis).

Dr. Chen credits her success to the team she works with at the Omega Hospital. "They're the most technically gifted doctors and nurses I've ever worked with," Dr. Chen said. The surgeons not only work together well, but they interact with each other outside of the hospital too, giving the team at Omega the feel of a major symphony orchestra with

good chemistry, where everyone tunes into each other to achieve a beautiful result. At Omega, this allows patients to heal as quickly and painlessly as possible.

Caring for women in need and helping to make them feel whole again is a passion for Dr. Chen. However, an interest in women's health is not new to her. "I always had an interest in women's health and women's issues even before I went to medical school," said Dr. Chen, who wrote a book in 1996 titled *The Sex Side of Life: Mary Ware Dennett's Pioneering Battle for Birth Control and Sex Education*.

Dr. Chen is so committed to giving women the best experience possible that she was on a team from Memorial Sloan-Kettering Cancer Center that created a questionnaire now being used by the American Society of Plastic Surgery to measure how satisfied breast reconstruction patients are with their reconstruction and their quality of life after surgery. Interestingly, what studies have shown is that, a number of years after the surgery, patients who use their own tissue for breast reconstruction are happier and are much less likely to require subsequent surgeries than people who undergo implant reconstruction. "It pays off in the long run," Dr. Chen said.

Dr. Chen received her undergraduate degree from Harvard University. She received a Master's of Public Health at Tulane School of Public Health. She earned her M.D. from Stanford University. She did her plastic surgery residency at Cornell University, her microsurgery fellowship at New York University, and her research fellowship at Memorial Sloan-Kettering Cancer Center in New York City. She is a clinical assistant professor at Tulane, where she trains and teaches residents, and she is part of the NOLA GABRs (New Orleans Louisiana Group for the Advancement of Breast Reconstruction), a group of plastic surgeons who operate at Omega Hospital and who are dedicated to the latest advances in breast reconstruction surgery.

Her academic work underlines her clinical philosophy. "The key is not only to be able to do the operation, but to be able to do the operation consistently with outstanding results."

The Omega Hospital is located at 2525 Severn Ave. in Metairie. For more information, email info@omegahospital.com or call 1-800-535-4177.