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For many women the challenge of surviving breast cancer continues after treatment—every time they look in the mirror. Body image is one of the most important concerns for patients who have had breast cancer surgery. They wonder how they appear to others, or they feel that their body is unbalanced.

To help meet their needs, the UAB Orthotics and Prosthetics Clinic opened the UAB Mastectomy Boutique inside UAB Hospital a year ago. “In many cases, survivors are not comfortable with the way that they look after breast cancer surgery,” says Rita Jackson, ROF, CMF, who started the boutique along with its director, Tracy Brewer, CMF. “This boutique wants to help survivors with that feeling and help them to feel feminine again.”

The boutique features two fitting rooms and is stocked with multiple types and forms of prosthetics and mastectomy bras to suit any type of breast cancer survivor. Some of the various types of prosthetic devices on hand include external silicone breast prosthesis, a non-silicon breast prosthesis, an attachable breast prosthesis and more. Ms. Jackson and Ms. Brewer are certified fitters who spend time with each survivor to understand their needs and fit them properly.

“We want the survivors to feel like customers—not like patients—when they walk in the door,” Ms. Brewer says. “We want them to feel like they are inside a store with their own personal fitter instead of inside a hospital.”

Ms. Brewer and Ms. Jackson note that a breast prosthesis provides more than just an improved aesthetic appearance. Wearing a properly fitted breast form that matches a remaining breast in size and replaces the weight of the removed breast helps to keep the body’s equilibrium and alignment evenly balanced. “With a proper fit, no one will be able to tell if a survivor is wearing a prosthesis,” Ms. Brewer explains. Women who do not wear a breast prosthesis—or who wear one that is not fitted properly—may experience spinal curvature, shoulder drop, balance problems and neck and back pain.

Patients may make an appointment for a fitting at the boutique as soon as their physician grants permission, typically four to six weeks after surgery. Most insurance companies will pay for the boutique’s services; in fact, many will cover two to four mastectomy bras per year, one silicon breast prosthesis every two years and one fiberfill breast prosthesis every six months.

Although it varies depending on the manufacturer, most of these special prosthetics and bras have a two-year warranty.

To make an appointment with the UAB Mastectomy Boutique, call (205) 934-9656 or visit the boutique, located on the fourth floor of Spain Rehabilitation Center.