

The fitting file

Undergoing breast surgery and post-operative treatments is a traumatic experience for any woman suffering from breast cancer. But finding a good-fitting bra to accommodate your new shape can be just as stressful. Triumph is one of the lingerie brands operating in the UK offering programmes to provide retailers with the additional skills and confidence to fit women who have undergone a mastectomy. Zabian Southwood attended one of the brand's Mastectomy Care Training Days at its London showroom to learn all about it.



Triumph Amourette Décor

TRIUMPH'S MASTECTOMY CARE TRAINING PROGRAMME

Triumph has been running breast surgery fitting days for 14 years – and they've really taken off over the past five years, following the increase in public awareness of breast cancer. Now coordinated by training adviser Monica Harrington in association with Breast Cancer Care, Triumph's Mastectomy Care Training Programme is open to all lingerie retailers interested in taking their fitting skills to the next level. "It's not a day to show how to fit as the retailers attending this event will already be proficient in fitting," says Harrington, who has been at Triumph for 15 years and been working in the lingerie industry for 19 years. "Instead, the day is all about enhancing the retailers' service and giving them the confidence to fit a customer who wears either a prosthesis or has had a reconstruction due to breast cancer. It is also an opportunity for people attending the course to find out about the whole journey, from finding the initial lump to the bra fitting and demonstrate how, in the general scheme of things, bras are low down on the list of priorities for many women who have been through so much emotionally and physically."

THE COURSE – A BRIEF OVERVIEW

The one-day course is attended by 16 retailers from department stores and independent boutiques who have travelled from all over the country. After an introduction by Harrington as to what we can expect from the day, she tells us about her experience within the industry, and how the course originated as a means of training Triumph's in-store consultants.

We are then introduced to Liza Cooper, a former cancer information nurse, and now services development nurse for Breast Cancer Care; and Sue Boulton, who became a volunteer after having a mastectomy and is now a prosthesis fitter for the charity. They take over the morning session with talks about Breast Cancer Care's services, show a video about breast awareness, explain in simple terms what breast cancer actually is and discuss the various treatments available. We're then invited to look and handle all the various prostheses available on the market, which range from very heavy and cumbersome to extremely lightweight and soft. We're told how one woman, unaware she was entitled to a new prosthesis every two years, had been making do with a bag of birdseed for years. Fortunately, days like this are helping to inform more women of what they're entitled to.

After lunch comes the most moving part of the day as we're introduced to Jan and Jill, two breast cancer survivors, each with a very different personal experience of how they coped with being diagnosed with the disease, the effects of having a mastectomy and the way they were treated when being fitted with a bra. Both now volunteer their time to talk about what fitters should be aware of when dealing with women who are left with both physical and psychological scars. Jan, who had her left breast removed 15 years ago, wears a prosthesis, while Jill, who had breast cancer 16 years ago, underwent a reconstruction of her left breast two years later. After telling their stories, they undress so the group can see exactly what a mastectomy looks like, and act as models while each member of the group take turns to measure and fit them from the large amount of bras in the showroom.

For anyone serious about appealing to a growing number of women who often feel neglected when seeking good-fitting mastectomy bras, this course is a must. As well as enhancing your fitting and customer service skills, the course offers excellent practical information on breast cancer, what products are available on the market, and invaluable tips on how to treat someone for whom, in all likelihood, it has taken a great deal of courage just to walk through your shop door.