

Staged sentinel node biopsy helps in surgical planning of breast cancer

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By: Reuters Health

NEW YORK (Reuters Health), Oct 21 - Staged sentinel lymph node biopsy (SLNB) before mastectomy can facilitate surgical planning for breast cancer patients who are considering immediate reconstruction, according to a report in the *American Journal of Surgery* for October.



Typically, SLNB is performed at the time of mastectomy and reconstruction. The surgeon waits for the frozen section results in the OR before completing the operation. Unfortunately, frozen section interpretation carries a false-negative rate of 42% compared with the final pathology results available about one week later.

Missed metastatic disease may adversely affect reconstruction. Having to perform a completion lymph node dissection in a newly reconstructed breast can increase the risk of complications. Likewise, discovering that nodal disease actually does exist could mean that postmastectomy radiation is needed, which again could raise the risk of complications.

By allowing time for the final pathology results to come in, performing a SLNB one week before mastectomy could improve surgical planning in breast cancer patients. In the present study, Dr. Nancy Klauber-DeMore and colleagues, from the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, looked at the effect staged SLNB had on subsequent oncologic and reconstructive operations.

The researchers searched their sentinel node database for patients who underwent SLNB with subsequent mastectomy from 2001 to 2004. A total of 25 patients with 27 breast cancers were identified.

Nine patients had node-positive disease and all of them underwent modified radical mastectomy. Six of these patients underwent immediate reconstruction and three did not.

One of the six node-positive patients who underwent immediate reconstruction was reconstructed with a tissue expander rather than autologous tissue. By comparison, 6 of the 16 node-negative patients underwent reconstruction with a tissue expander.

"We conclude that performing a sentinel node biopsy as a staged procedure prior to definitive mastectomy and reconstruction gives the treating physicians more information to guide the patient regarding the best surgical procedure for them," Dr. Klauber-DeMore said in a statement.

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