Lesson 17
N Category

Donna M. Gress, RHIT, CTR
Minimum Number - Sufficient Sampling

• Minimum number
  – Sufficient sampling to identify positive nodes
  – Eliminate false negatives

• Minimum to be examined can apply to
  – Number and
  – Location of nodes

• Requirements
  – Described in site chapters as appropriate
  – Detail common medical practice

• Sentinel nodes
  – If accepted as accurate for defining involvement, and
  – Sentinel node procedure performed
  – Minimum does NOT apply
pN when Minimum Not Met

• **Lymph node surgery performed**
  – Fewer than ideal minimum number examined
  – N category still generally classified as pN

• **pN category assignment**
  – Based on information available
    • Number of positive nodes and/or
    • Location of most advanced pathologic node resected
  – Assigned even if minimum number or location criteria not met

• **Impact of using pN in this situation**
  – Importance of outcomes data analysis
  – Determine accuracy of nodal staging with less than minimum
Sentinel Node

• Sentinel node designation (sn)
  – Example: pN0(sn), pN1(sn)
  – Used when only a sentinel node biopsy is performed
  – Not used if further dissection of nodes is performed

• Breast chapter instructions for (sn)
  – Indicates nodal status based on less than axillary dissection
  – Used for sentinel node procedure
  – Used where sentinel & non-sentinel nodes are <6 nodes
    (less than standard low axillary dissection)
  – Do NOT use (sn) when ≥6 sentinel nodes removed

• Does not apply to registry coding of procedure
  – Instructions only apply to assigning stage
Pathologic Node Assessment

• Assigning pN
  – Pathologic primary tumor assessment (pT) is
  – Generally necessary to assign pathologic nodal assessment (pN)

• N categories
  – In conjunction with pT
  – Do NOT need pathologic exam of highest N category to assign pN
  – Example:
    • Resection/path exam of N1 nodes only
    • No resection/path exam of N2 and N3 nodes
    • Assign pN1
  – Physician determines appropriate nodal resection for patient
    • N category criteria does not dictate nodal exam
Isolated Tumor Cells

- **ITC**
  - Single tumor cells or small clusters of cells
  - Clusters of cells ≤ 0.2mm in greatest dimension
  - Identified by
    - Routine histology or immunohistochemistry (IHC)
    - Nonmorphologic techniques such as flow cytometry or DNA analysis
  - Designated as pN0 (i+)
  - Defined in chapters where this commonly occurs

- **Nodes with only** ITC are assigned pN0

- **Exception:** nodes with only ITC are assigned pN1 for
  - Melanoma
  - Merkel Cell