Lesson 24
N Category

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American Joint Committee on Cancer
Validating science. Improving patient care.
pT Necessary to Assign pN

• Pathologic assessment of primary tumor (pT)
  – Generally necessary to assign pathologic assessment of nodes (pN)

• pN exception
  – Excision of nodes is pN when
  – No resection of primary site
  – Due to unknown primary, assigned T0 (no evidence of primary tumor)
    • Remember: AJCC physician definition of unknown primary, not registry definition

• When pathologic T (pT) is available
  – Any microscopic exam of nodes is pN
• If **diagnostic** or **sentinel** biopsy proves highest N category

• **Diagnostic biopsy of nodes**
  – Used to assign cN for clinical staging
  – **May** also be used to assign pN for pathologic staging

• **Microscopic exam of node in highest N category**
  – Assigned as pN
  – Even in absence of pathologic information on other nodes

• **Microscopic confirmation of highest N category**
  – **May** be pN
  – Regardless of whether T is pT or cT
  – Caution:
    • cT referring to tumor that cannot be removed
    • Must be in conjunction with other rules such as
    • Microscopic confirmation of highest T, usually **not** bx of primary site
Info Overrides Pathology Report pN

• Information can override pathology report pN

• Clinical stage information
  – Physical exam
  – Imaging
  – Example for breast
    • Physical exam: ipsilateral supraclavicular nodes involved, N3c
    • Imaging: ipsilat internal mammary/supraclavicular nodes involved, N3c
    • Path report: resection, mets in 6 axillary nodes, pN2a
    • Assign pN3c

• Operative findings during resection
  – Surgeon’s observations
  – Example for esophagus
    • Operative findings: 10-12 regional nodes involved, N3
    • Path report: mets in 4 regional nodes, pN2
    • Assign pN3
y for N Category

• y prefix for postneoadjuvant therapy N category
  – N uses same categories as for clinical and pathologic staging

• ycN
  – Used for clinical stage after neoadjuvant therapy
  – Registries do not have data field

• ypN
  – Used for pathologic stage after surgical resection following neoadjuvant therapy
  – Registries document in pathologic data field and
  – MUST use descriptor data field to indicate “y”
X and Blank for N Category

• X and Blank needed
  – Accommodate variability in cancer behavior and type of workup

• X
  – Information is unknown to physicians, cannot be assessed
  – Diagnostic workup did not provide info needed to assess and assign N category
    • Example: colonoscopy for colon cancer, no scans
  – Surgical resection primary but no nodes examined
    • Example: meets pathologic staging criteria but no nodes removed

• Blank
  – Patient did not meet staging criteria
  – No diagnostic workup for clinical stage
  – No surgical resection primary for pathologic stage
    • Example: diagnostic node biopsy not recorded in pN