

Sentinel Lymph Node Biopsy for Malignant Melanoma: A Review of the new Regional Service in Northern Ireland

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Patients with cutaneous malignant melanoma of stage \geq pT1b should be considered for sentinel lymph node biopsy (SLNB) as per UK guidelines.

If micrometastatic disease is found in the sentinel lymph node (SLN), patients are upstaged and considered for adjuvant systemic treatment.

A new, regionally-commissioned SLNB service began in Northern Ireland in December 2018. Patients were seen in NI but due to interim capacity issues, had surgery in the Ulster Hospital, Bristol or Blackrock. A review of the service has been performed.

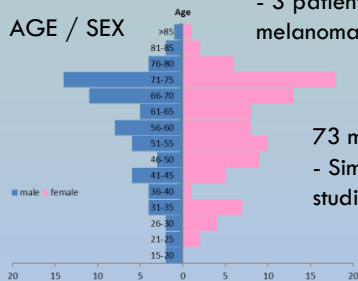
Methods

- Data were obtained from a prospectively-maintained database over the first 16 months of the service (December 2018 – March 2020)
- Outcomes were compared to NI Regional Service Specification / UK Guidelines

Results

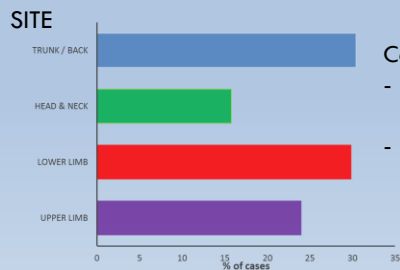
- 168 patients referred for investigation of 171 nodal basins

- 3 patients had synchronous melanomas



73 male / 95 female

- Similar distribution to other studies in comparable populations



Commonest primary site:

- Males: trunk / back (47%)
- Females: lower limb (41%)

TUMOUR STAGE



OUTCOME OF REFERRAL

- 115 nodal basins investigated from 171 referred (27 cancelled due to COVID)
 - 18 micrometastatic disease (15.6%)
 - 91 negative
 - 6 failed
- Mean waiting time from MDT referral to Outpatient appointment = 2.6 weeks
 - Within Regional target of 3 weeks
- Mean waiting time from initial biopsy to SLNB surgery = 15.2 weeks
 - > Regional target of 12 weeks
- 11% of patients referred were not suitable for SLNB due to previous surgery / comorbidities

CURRENT POSITION

- All SLNB surgery was paused due to COVID-19
- Service has now restarted but cases to be managed in Belfast where possible
- Interim arrangements provide SLNB for patients with tumour stage \geq pT3b

Discussion

- Implementation of full service limited by operational considerations
- Waiting times for surgery increased in all three surgical units across study period
 - planned opening of Nuclear Medicine onsite in Ulster Hospital will provide additional capacity for SLNB localisation
- Extracontractual referrals no longer practical
 - Data from this review was used to plan interim limits on service provision
- Waiting times for first Outpatient appointment improved following recruitment of 3rd Consultant Plastic Surgeon
- High proportion of cases were not suitable for surgery, placing considerable pressure on target for first Outpatient appointment
 - Referral proforma being designed to address this study finding