

Patient Information Leaflet

## Sentinel Lymph Node Biopsy in Breast Surgery

**Produced By:**  
Breast Care Team



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**If you require this leaflet in another language, large print or another format, please contact the Quality Team, telephone 01983 534850, who will advise you.**

## **Sentinel node biopsy for patients with breast cancer**

This technique involves identification of the first lymph node in the axillary chain. Biopsy of this accurately stages the axilla and removes the need for complete axillary clearance in women with node negative disease. This is now the standard of care.

### **Lymph nodes/glands**

The lymphatic system consists of a collection of lymph vessels and lymph nodes/glands throughout the body that play an important role in the body's ability to fight infection.

Important decisions about treatment are made when it is known if any of the lymph glands are affected by cancer.

### **Identifying The Sentinel Nodes**

Whilst awake a small amount of radioactive liquid is injected into the breast. This liquid is then carried into the armpit by the lymph vessels and trapped by the sentinel node/nodes this can then be located using a probe, this probe can pick up the radioactive material. The nodes/node is then removed and sent to the laboratory to see if it contains cancer.

Blue dye is also used in the operating theatre while you are asleep. This dye stains the sentinel node/nodes blue this makes it easier for the surgeon to see the node.

The dye also stains the breast (it looks like a bruise) and this can last for a few months. Your tears and urine will also be blue/green for about 24 hours. You may look grey/blue yourself for a couple of days.

The blue dye may be visible around the scar following surgery but gradually disappears.

### **Advantages of this procedure**

Sentinel node biopsy is an accurate way of determining the stage of disease. It is a smaller operation than removing all the nodes/glands.

- A smaller scar under the arm.
- Less pain and numbness under and at the back of the arm.
- Fewer long term side effects
- Enables the arm to be used normally much more quickly.
- Reduces the risk of Lymphoedema (swelling of the arm).

### **Disadvantages of Sentinel node Biopsy**

In less than 5% of people this procedure does not accurately predict the disease extent within the armpit, a few people may not have disease in their sentinel nodes but may do in other glands under the arm.

Very rarely (1%) of people may have an allergy to the blue dye and could go into shock when it has been used.

### **Positive Sentinel Node**

If the sentinel nodes have cancer in them a second operation may be needed to remove all the nodes/glands in the armpit.  
It may be possible to continue and remove these glands at the same operation.

### **Contact Details**

The Breast Care Team can be contacted on - 01983 534562, Monday – Friday 8am – 4pm - there is an answer phone if we are not available and we will get back to you as soon as possible

Valuables should not be brought into the hospital. If patients have to bring in valuable items they should ask a nurse to store them safely and request a receipt for the items. You may not be able to have the valuable items returned if the time of discharge from hospital is out of hours.

We are sorry but the Trust cannot accept responsibility for loss or damage to items not given for safe keeping.

You can get further information on all sorts of health issues online at: <http://www.nhs.uk/>

For Health advice and out of hours GP service please call the NHS 111 service on: 111

### **We Value Your Views On Our Service**

If you wish to comment on the care which you, your relative or friend has received, we will be pleased to hear from you. Please speak to the person in charge of the ward, clinic or service in the first instance or ask them to contact the Quality Team. If you wish to contact them directly, telephone on 534850.

Alternatively you may prefer to write to:

Chief Executive  
Isle Of Wight NHS Trust  
St Mary's Hospital  
Newport  
Isle of Wight  
PO30 5TG

You can also share any concerns you have about our services with the Care Quality Commission (CQC) on 03000 61 61 61 or at [enquiries@cqc.org.uk](mailto:enquiries@cqc.org.uk)

All NHS sites are no smoking areas.

If you would like help and advice to stop smoking please call: Freephone 0800 169 0 169 to talk to the NHS Smoking Helpline.

Ref: BC/SNB/03