

NICE updates guidance on early and advanced breast cancer

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a,e,f,g,h = p 2

b,c,d = p 1

<http://www.bmj.com/content/338/bmj.b815>

Susan Mayor

d People with early invasive breast cancer should have minimal surgery without removal of lymph nodes unless there is evidence that cancer has spread to them, recommends new guidance for the NHS in England and Wales.

It also suggests that women who are being advised to have a mastectomy should be offered breast reconstruction, even if it is not available locally, and it updates recommendations on choice of hormonal therapy, on the basis of the latest research.

b The new guidance on early breast cancer from the National Institute for Health and Clinical Excellence (NICE) advises against lymph node clearance in people in whom no evidence is shown on ultrasonography or needle biopsy of lymph node involvement. It suggests that sentinel lymph node biopsy should be used to assess whether cancer has spread to the axilla. This involves removing and checking the first lymph node (or nodes) to which cancer is likely to spread from the primary tumour and assumes, as research evidence indicates, that if it is free of cancer then the other lymph nodes will be also.

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Adrian Harnett, consultant in clinical oncology at Norfolk and Norwich University Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust and lead clinician of the guideline development group, said, "One focus of this new guideline is that it has refined treatment pathways so

that, across the whole country, low risk patients should not receive unnecessary treatment and patients with more aggressive disease get the best current standard of care.

“An example of this is better preoperative assessment of the axilla, which may result in less invasive surgery and, as a consequence, less early and late side effects.”

c
cont

Women with oestrogen receptor positive cancers should be offered an aromatase inhibitor, with tamoxifen being used only where an aromatase inhibitor is not tolerated or is contraindicated.

Patients with lymph node positive breast cancer should be offered docetaxel as part of adjuvant chemotherapy. And women with HER-2 positive early invasive breast cancer should be offered trastuzumab after surgery, chemotherapy, and radiotherapy for one year or until the disease recurs.

A second guideline on advanced breast cancer recommends that endocrine therapy, such as an aromatase inhibitor, should be given as first line treatment to most women with oestrogen receptor positive cancers. It also clarifies when to continue

e

treatment with trastuzumab in women whose cancer is progressing, advising that it should not be discontinued while progression is within the central nervous system but should be stopped when the disease progresses outside this.

f

Care of patients with uncontrolled local disease should be assessed by a multidisciplinary breast cancer team, the new guideline recommends, and bisphosphonates should be considered for patients with a new diagnosis of bone metastases.

g

In addition, women with a single or small number of brain metastases should be offered surgery followed by whole brain radiotherapy, where this is appropriate.

h

“It is important that being diagnosed with advanced breast cancer is not seen as an immediate death sentence; it can be managed effectively, allowing patients to have a reasonable quality of life,” said John Winstanley, consultant surgeon at Royal Bolton Hospital and chairman of the guideline group. “This guideline pulls together the best ways to treat the cancer medically, helping relieve the symptoms and to support patients

a

psychologically, emotionally, and practically.”

The new guidelines have been developed to take account of major advances in the management of breast cancer, including new types of chemotherapy and biological and hormonal agents, over the past few years. They aim to improve the consistency of care of people with breast cancer and to ensure equal access to services throughout England and Wales.

The guidelines will be published in the Practice section of the *BMJ* on 7 March.

Notes

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Footnotes

The guideline on early and locally advanced breast cancer is available at www.nice.org.uk/CG80. The guideline on advanced breast cancer is at www.nice.org.uk/CG081.