

Cancer Advances: New Way of Examining Lymph Tissue Detects Hidden Melanoma

From the October 1, 2003 issue of the *Journal of Clinical Oncology* [1] **Read the Study** [2] When patients are diagnosed with early stage melanoma, the best indicator of how severe their disease will be is whether or not the cancer is present in the lymph nodes. However, standard tests do not always detect the early signs of the disease in the lymph nodes. Now, a new study has shown that a molecular analysis¹ "which detects certain proteins related to melanoma" may be better able to identify which patients will experience the most severe cases of disease and would benefit from a more aggressive treatment. Led by Dr. Dave S.B. Hoon, director of the Department of Molecular Oncology at the John Wayne Cancer Institute in Santa Monica, California, researchers designed a test to detect four "genetic markers" associated with melanoma. They tested very small sections of stored tissue² known as archival paraffin-embedded lymph node tissue² from 77 patients with early stages of the disease. Standard techniques showed that 37 of the samples contained melanoma. However, when researchers performed their molecular test, they found many of the remaining 40 lymph node samples originally thought to be free of melanoma actually had signs of the disease. **What Does This Mean For Patients** This study shows that the presence of certain proteins in a patient's lymph nodes can be used to predict which patients will have worse cases of melanoma² a finding that could affect when and how aggressively they are treated for the disease. Researchers, including those involved in this trial, are currently enrolling patients in a new multi-center study to examine this technique with a larger group of patients using these and other markers linked to melanoma. Patients who are interested in clinical trials should discuss their options with their doctor and participating centers.

Links:

[1] <http://www.jco.org/>

[2] <http://www.jco.org/cgi/content/abstract/21/19/3566>