

## Lymph node status (Core)

Increasing evidence has shown that various characteristics of nodal metastases, e.g., number, size, and extranodal extension (ENE), may provide additional prognostic information. Thus, detailed features of nodal disease ought to be included in the pathology report, and be considered in risk stratification and staging systems.<sup>1-9</sup> A recent meta-analysis by Randolph et al (2012) has shown that small volume subclinical microscopic pathologic N1 disease, i.e., five or fewer subcentimeter metastatic lymph nodes, conveys little prognostic impact on recurrence free survival and disease specific survival in papillary thyroid carcinoma (PTC), compared with clinically evident macroscopic nodal disease involving more than 5 lymph nodes, especially those with ENE.<sup>2</sup> The greatest dimension of the largest metastatic deposit in a lymph node should be measured. It is accepted it can be difficult to distinguish multiple small metastases in one large deposit. Many authors recommend measuring the greatest dimension end to end in a single slide including discontinuous deposits.<sup>10</sup> Taking this data into consideration, the National Comprehensive Cancer Network (NCCN) 2019 guidelines no longer recommend completion thyroidectomy and post-operative RAI in small volume pN1a disease, i.e., <5 involved nodes with metastasis <2 mm in largest dimension.<sup>11</sup> Histologic features of the nodal metastasis that have been incorporated in the American Thyroid Association (ATA) initial risk stratifications included number of involved lymph nodes (>5 is considered as intermediate risk) and size of the metastatic lymph nodes (≥3 cm as high risk). The presence of psammoma bodies alone in a node is subject to controversy. While some practicing pathologists do not consider these as metastasis, we are in agreement with the College of American Pathologists in considering these lymph nodes as positive for metastatic carcinoma.<sup>12</sup>

Extranodal extension is not an uncommon finding, being reported in up to 12% of PTC overall and 33% of nodal metastatic PTC.<sup>1,6</sup> Similar to extrathyroidal extension (ETE), a well-defined, consensus, histologic diagnostic criterion for ENE is currently lacking.<sup>12,13</sup> A recent study by Du et al (2016) has shown that involvement of perinodal adipose tissue appears to be the most consistent diagnostic criteria of ENE, being considered by eleven participating endocrine pathologists as ENE.<sup>13</sup> However, the overall agreement in diagnosing ENE is only fair among expert pathologists.<sup>13</sup> Nevertheless, studies have repeatedly demonstrated the association between ENE and persistent and/or recurrence disease.<sup>1-8</sup> Hence, it is important to document ENE in the pathology report of a differentiated thyroid carcinoma.

A seven compartment nomenclature is used to define anatomic lymph nodes compartments. Central neck refers to level VI (peri-thyroidal, paralaryngeal, paratracheal, and prelaryngeal (Delphian)) and VII (upper mediastinal). Lateral neck refers to level I (submental/submandibular), II (upper jugular), III (mid jugular), IV (lower jugular) and V (posterior triangle).<sup>14</sup>

At the current time, no additional special techniques should be used other than routine histology for the assessment of nodal metastases (i.e., sentinel lymph node-type protocols are not advocated). However, confirmation by immunohistochemical staining, including thyroglobulin for papillary carcinoma and calcitonin and neuroendocrine markers (e.g., chromogranins, synaptophysin) for medullary carcinoma, may be required.

## References

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