

## **6/4/04 Welsh Development Agency - New Operation Could Spare Women Painful Cancer Treatment**

Women with breast cancer may be spared additional unnecessary surgery under a new technique developed by physicians at the University of Wales College of Medicine.

Doctors now remove all lymph nodes under the arm as well as the primary cancer in the breast to halt the spread of the disease, because there has been no way to tell if the cancer has spread. Removing all the nodes is a painful operation that can have permanent side effect including swelling of the arm and numbness.

Now after a three year research program led by Robert Mansel, professor of surgery at the University of Wales College of Medicine, Cardiff, a new technique has been developed that could make the drastic surgery unnecessary in three quarters of the cases

The new technique uses a tiny radioisotope dose to locate the main gland—the sentinel node—under the arm that drains from the cancerous tumour, and removing only it.

Around 75 percent of women with screen detected cancer have no spread of the cancer to the armpit nodes and are thus over treated by removing all the nodes.

This sentinel node biopsy uses less radioisotope than a mammogram. Trial research has been shown that if the sentinel node is clear of cancer, then all the other 20-30 nodes will be clear as well. Not all women will be suitable for this new technique and some will still need the standard operation of removal of all the nodes.

These results are being presented to the American Society of Clinical Oncology (ASCO) in New Orleans on Saturday 5th June. and if they show advantage for the new procedure it would suggest that the new operation should become the standard operation in due course.

Surgeons will have to be trained in this new procedure since it is not currently performed routinely in the UK. It will take around 12-18 months before the new technique becomes widely available in the UK National Health Service.(NHS).

The procedure also must be approved by the Government Committee for administration of radioactive materials to humans (ARSAC), so the administration and training will need to take place in a planned co-ordinated way.