

Cancer

SURGERY



Surgery remains by some way the most effective curative treatment for cancer. As more people survive cancer new techniques have improved the quality of life for patients.

It is well known that breast cancer can often spread to the lymph nodes under the armpit. In the past, screening involved making a large incision and removing up to 20 lymph nodes to check the cancer had not spread – this was invasive and risked causing further future health problems by damaging the immune system.

The sentinel lymph node (SLN) technique works by injecting a radioactive tracer dye into the breast. Surgeons use a probe which picks up a signal as the tracer moves through the armpit to the lymph nodes. The sentinel lymph node (SLN) is the first node that a tumour is likely to spread to and the signal will be strongest there. This way the surgeon can identify which lymph nodes should be removed for testing. This is a much smaller and speedier operation removing just two or three nodes and is much more comfortable for the patient with less long-term health consequences.



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