

“PET Scans Crucial for Finding Breast Cancer, Study Says”

National Post



Breast cancer

accounts for nearly 20,000 of all new female cancer cases in Canada annually, and causes 15% of cancer deaths among women.

As with all cancers, management decisions in breast cancer are complex and affected by available information, the judgment of the physician and the desires of the patient. Accurate staging (knowing the extent of cancer) is critical in determining the best therapeutic approach for any cancer patients and is particularly important with breast cancer.

Worldwide studies have established that PET has a unique ability to detect and stage breast cancer with high diagnostic accuracy. Furthermore, PET is used to monitor the effectiveness of

treatment. A U.S. study, referenced in a National Post article in September 2001, examined how the introduction of a PET scan altered patient treatment. The study showed that in nearly 40% of cases, staging of breast cancer was altered because of the unique information provided by a PET scan, and that patient management was altered in 60% of cases. The main reason for these changes was the discovery of previously undetected spread of the disease.

“Our study... reinforces the role and the importance of PET in the disease management and treatment planning of women with breast cancer,” said one of the Study’s authors. “If you can limit treatment to the most useful things and not do things like unnecessary surgeries that

will adversely affect the quality of life of these patients, it is really a great step forward.”

The PETSCAN Centre in Vancouver has provided more than 200 breast cancer PET scans in the last 18 months, and is involved in a breast cancer research program conducted by the BC Cancer Agency and the University of Washington in Seattle. The PETSCAN Centre is the only PET facility in Canada dedicated to clinical diagnosis of cancer patients.

In a recent case, a female patient came for a PET scan in order to confirm that a surgical procedure had successfully eradicated her diagnosed breast cancer. The PET scan showed that such was indeed the case, but detected a problem in the other breast. Other previous procedures, including ultrasound and mammography, had been negative, but the patient insisted that the PET scan diagnosis must be evidence of an undetected cancer. After two further ultrasound procedures, it was acknowledged that the PET scan was right and indeed there was a small tumour present. This led to a simple surgery and removal of the cancer at a very early stage – cancer that only a PET scan had found.

The next article will discuss the use of PET in colorectal cancer.

BREAST CANCER CASE STUDY



History: a 48-year-old female patient with breast cancer had a chemo/radiation therapy. Ten months later, she began to experience pain in the right shoulder.

Original diagnosis: a bone scan was negative, and a CT scan was read as negative.

PET findings: a whole-body PET scan found numerous lesions in the upper chest.

Change in treatment: based on conventional diagnostic techniques, the treatment would have been watchful waiting. Instead, the patient was put back on chemo therapy. A reread of the CT after PET still could not accurately gauge the extent of disease.

Full-body clinical PET scans are available at the Vancouver PETSCAN Centre.



For more information call:
(604) 689-7776
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www.petscan.ca

