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**Ashford Hospital**  
London Road  
Ashford, Middlesex  
TW15 3AA  
Tel: **01784 884488**

**St. Peter's Hospital**  
Guildford Road  
Chertsey, Surrey  
KT16 0PZ.  
Tel: **01932 872000**

Website: [www.ashfordstpeters.nhs.uk](http://www.ashfordstpeters.nhs.uk)

## SENTINEL LYMPH NODE BIOPSY (SLNB)

Breast Clinic

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## Further Information

We endeavour to provide an excellent service at all times, but should you have any concerns please, in the first instance, raise these with the Matron, Senior Nurse or Manager on duty. If they cannot resolve your concern, please contact our Patient Advice and Liaison Service (PALS) on 01932 723553 or email [pals@asph.nhs.uk](mailto:pals@asph.nhs.uk). If you still remain concerned please contact our Complaints Manager on 01932 722612 or email [complaints@asph.nhs.uk](mailto:complaints@asph.nhs.uk)

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**Author:** Regina Santos

**Department:** Breast Clinic

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Should you have any concerns or queries then please contact the Breast Care Nurses during office hours

**Telephone numbers of Breast Care Nurses: -**

At Ashford Hospital direct           **01784 884411**  
Via switchboard                           **01784 884488** pager **8855**

St. Peter's Hospital direct           **01932 722771**  
Via switchboard                         **01932 872000** bleep **5129**

**WHAT IS A SENTINEL LYMPH NODE?**

The sentinel lymph node (gland) is the first lymph node in your armpit to which breast cancer can spread.

**WHAT IS SENTINEL LYMPH NODE BIOPSY (SLNB)?**

By removing the sentinel lymph node, we can find out whether the breast cancer has or has not spread to the armpit nodes, this important information helps us to advise you about the stage of your cancer and the best type of breast cancer treatment for you.

Recent studies have shown that removal of the sentinel lymph node is just as safe and accurate as traditional armpit surgery, which removes more nodes.

**SIDE EFFECTS OF ARMPIT SURGERY**

For some patients armpit node removal can cause temporary shoulder stiffness, severe pain, and/or permanent lymphoedema (swelling of the arm).

The side effects of armpit surgery increase with the number of nodes removed, this means if we remove only the sentinel node, side effects are less than traditional armpit surgery where more nodes are removed. Sometimes there is more than one sentinel node.

**FINDING THE SENTINEL NODE**

Several hours before surgery a small amount of radioactive fluid will be injected into your breast, using a very fine needle to minimise any discomfort. The dose of radiation is very small and the fluid travels to the sentinel node.

You may have a scan to mark the position of the sentinel node some hours later. In most people this will be in the armpit but, in a small minority, it may be close to the breastbone.

All this will be carried out in the Nuclear Medicine Department and your appointment will be for either the day before or morning of your surgery.

During surgery a blue dye will be injected into the breast. This also travels to the sentinel node. Using a special detection probe the surgeon can then find the sentinel node, which is also usually hot and blue.

### **WHAT IF WE CANNOT FIND THE SENTINEL NODE?**

Occasionally it is not possible to find the sentinel node. If this happens, but only with your permission, the surgeon, during the same operation will remove more nodes (approximately four) to make sure that the node which is likely to be the sentinel node is removed.

### **BEFORE YOUR OPERATION**

You will need to sign a consent form

- To have sentinel lymph node biopsy using radioactive fluid and blue dye.
- If the surgeon cannot find the sentinel node we need your permission to remove a sample of approximately four nodes, but this will be discussed with you when you sign your consent form.

### **AFTER SURGERY**

The Pathologist examines the nodes under the microscope; you will get your results at your outpatient appointment, about two weeks after surgery. If the sentinel node is free of cancer cells no further armpit surgery will be required.

However, if cancer cells are found in the sentinel node, you will probably need surgery to remove more nodes from the armpit to determine if there are any further cancer cells present; your surgeon will discuss this with you.

### **WHAT ARE THE BENEFITS OF SENTINEL LYMPH NODE BIOPSY?**

- Less discomfort and earlier mobility in the shoulder/arm.
- Less risk of lymphoedema.
- No drains
- Shorter hospital stay and quicker overall recovery
- Targeted lymph node excision

### **WHAT ARE THE DISADVANTAGES OF SENTINEL LYMPH NODE BIOPSY?**

- Stinging sensation and discomfort when the radioactive fluid is injected into the breast.
- Blue dye will discolour urine, stools, contact lenses (please remove before surgery), tears etc for a few days. The breast skin will be discoloured for up to a few months and very occasionally a year or so.
- Whilst under an anaesthetic allergic reaction to the blue dye seldom occurs. Should this happen it is very rarely severe and can be treated.
- If the pathologist finds the sentinel lymph node/nodes contain cancer, you will need more armpit treatment; this may require a second armpit operation.

### **CONTACT INFORMATION**