

# Cancer

PROGRAMS

QUALITY PROGRAMS  
of the AMERICAN COLLEGE  
OF SURGEONS



# AJCC

**American Joint Committee on Cancer**

Validating science. Improving patient care.

## Lesson 11

**M Category**



AMERICAN COLLEGE OF SURGEONS

*Inspiring Quality:  
Highest Standards, Better Outcomes*

100+ years

- Different rules for M category
  - Defined by method of assessment
  - Not by time frame (diagnostic vs. surgery) like T and N
- Rationale
  - Critical to know assessment to analyze outcomes
  - Clinical judgment vs. proven microscopically
- Clinical Classification – valid M categories
  - cT; cN; cM0, cM1, pM1
- Pathological Classification – valid M categories
  - pT; pN; cM0, cM1, pM1

- cM0 only requires history and physical exam (H&P)
  - Does not mean registrar has to find H&P report in med record
  - Means physician performed physical exam on patient
- No symptoms or signs of metastasis is cM0
- Imaging is not necessary to assign cM0
- Infer status as cM0 unless known clinical M1 (cM1)
- Optimal extent of testing (although none is required)
  - Understand workup ordered based on T, N, and other results
  - NCCN Guidelines
  - American College of Radiology Appropriateness Criteria
- cM1
  - Clinical evidence of metastasis by physical exam
  - Imaging showing evidence of metastasis
  - Invasive procedures including exploratory surgery, without bx

- pM1 requires positive biopsy of metastatic site
  - Biopsy shows presence of cancer in metastatic site
- Negative biopsy of suspected metastatic site is cM0
  - Biopsy shows absence of cancer in metastatic site
  - Assign cM0
  - Do NOT assign pM0
- pM0
  - NOT a valid category
  - May NOT be assigned
  - Undefined concept
    - Would require microscopic exam of all tissues in the body
    - Even autopsy does not sample every single piece of tissue

- Define uncertain information
  - Ambiguity about involvement
  - Details to meet staging criteria are unclear
  - Choosing between two categories
- Correct M subcategory for uncertain information
  - For Physicians only: lower or less advanced subcategory used
  - For Registrars: main M category used

- Uncertain is different from unknown
- Define unknown information
  - Physician must know M status
  - Not used to describe situation where registrar does not have access to the information
- No M category for unknown information
  - Unknown is NOT valid for M, MX not valid
  - Never assign lowest category for unknown
  - For Physicians only: must choose M category
  - For Registrars:
    - If physician states M category, registrars assign physician M category
    - If physician does not state M category, registrar assigns M blank

- MX
  - NOT a valid category
  - May NOT be assigned
  - Pathologist may NOT use MX
    - Leaves M blank if no metastatic tissue examined (not applicable)
    - Leaves M blank if metastatic tissue examined does not show cancer
    - Pathologist may only assign pM1 - tissue examined showed cancer
  
- M status critical
  - M status changes stage group
  - M status drastically changes patient care and treatment plan



Developed through generous support from  
the American Cancer Society.





Thank You