

**AXILLARY LYMPH DRAINAGE AS A PROGNOSTIC FACTOR
OF SURVIVAL IN BREAST CANCER****K. Kett, K. Szilágyi, B. Anga, A.G. Kett, K. Királyfalvi**

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ABSTRACT

Axillary lymph node staging is an important prognostic factor in patients with breast cancer. The long-term survival is poor if the number of metastatic axillary lymph nodes exceeds three. With 1-3 metastatic lymph nodes, survival in 30% of the patients is 20 years. The markedly different outcome of these patients with metastatic axillary lymph nodes suggests that other factors likely play a critical role in breast cancer dissemination. In this study, we examined the association of impaired axillary lymph drainage with breast cancer survival. Fifty patients with breast cancer underwent direct breast lymphography before treatment to evaluate the status of ipsilateral axillary lymph nodes and lymph drainage at time of presentation. Twenty-five patients with signs of metastatic disease and/or impaired lymph drainage were followed for 10 years. Seven of 25 patients survived 10 years; 6 are tumor free; and 1 has distant metastases. The other 18 patients died during the 10 year period. Seventeen of the 18 died from disseminated breast cancer; 1 died of unrelated disease. In the survivors, direct breast lymphography showed normal breast lymph drainage. All patients with distant metastases had obstructed lymph vessels at the time of original diagnosis. These findings suggest that the chance for survival is determined both by the status of axillary lymph drainage as well as the number of metastatic axillary lymph nodes.