

ABSTRACT SUBMISSION

**CATEGORY 4: DIAGNOSIS/TREATMENT/PREVENTION SECTION/REHABILITATION
SUBCATEGORY: SURGICAL DIAGNOSIS AND TREATMENT**

**Who Says, “No Pain, No Gain” Has to Be the Rule?
Improving the Sentinel Lymph Node Biopsy Experience**

Introduction

As a Breast Health Nurse Navigator-Patient Educator, I work with hundreds of breast cancer patients each year. It is rewarding and humbling to serve these patients by providing education, support and patient advocacy.

Approximately five years ago, our breast cancer surgeons began performing sentinel lymph node (SLN) biopsies routinely. I meet the patient in Nuclear Medicine to offer support during the five sub-dermal, peri-areola injections of a radioactive tracer. The intense emotions expressed during this procedure range from sobbing to screaming. I have felt helpless that patients have to experience what many describe as “a torture chamber” in order to get critical information regarding the lymph node status.

Method

In April 2004, a key breast cancer surgeon agreed to test a topical anesthetic on his breast cancer patients prior to the SLN injections. While some patients preferred to use Emla cream, a more cost-effective method resulted from collaboration with a local compounding pharmacist. The pharmacist agreed to re-tube a Prilocaine/Lidocaine topical cream in 5 gram single-use tubes with a 4”x4” occlusive dressing and directions, for \$18.00.

Results

After using a topical anesthetic on forty breast cancer patients, we proved that one does not have to experience pain to experience gain! Reactions were phenomenal as evidenced by comments like, “That was not bad at all!” and “My girlfriend warned me that this was the worst pain she ever felt, but I hardly felt it,” and “I was worried for nothing!”

Conclusion

My hope is that breast cancer surgeons will routinely order a topical anesthetic for pain management of patients having a SLN biopsy, thus improving quality of care and patient satisfaction.

Dotty Wodogaza, RN, OCN
Palmetto Health South Carolina Comprehensive Breast Center
(803) 434-3377 and fax (803) 434-4791
Dotty.Wodogaza@palmettohealth.org