September 30, 2009

Dear Colleagues:

We are writing to introduce enhancements in breast oncology surgery now in place at the University of Michigan, East Ann Arbor Ambulatory Surgery Center. We recently added a pathology lab adjacent to the operating rooms. This lab is staffed by an anatomic pathologist who provides intra-operative consultation for evaluation of surgical margins and sentinel lymph nodes.

Currently, at least 30% of breast cancer patients who opt for a breast conserving surgery for breast cancer will require more than one surgery to clear the surgical margin.

With the intra-operative pathology lab, we are now able to perform microscopic examination of tissue samples at the time of surgery, while a patient is still under anesthesia. A pathologist prepares and examines a “frozen section” within minutes. If the margin is positive for tumor cells on the frozen section, the pathologist informs the waiting surgeon, who removes additional tissue during the same operative setting. Frozen sections are also used to assess sentinel lymph nodes for tumor cells. If tumor cells are present, the patient can undergo a standard axillary dissection during the same procedure.

Previously, surgeons had to wait several days for standard laboratory processing to evaluate surgical margins and sentinel lymph nodes, and if not clear, schedule another procedure several days to weeks after the initial surgery. The use of frozen section analysis is state-of-the-art. The University of Michigan is pleased to offer patients a unique service that reduces the likelihood of additional surgery, improves patient care and outcomes, and reduces the overall cost of care.

If you have any questions or would like to refer a patient, please contact M-LINE at 800-962-3555. Patients may directly schedule a consultation with the Breast Care Center at 734-936-6000.

Sincerely,

Alfred Chang, MD
Hugh Cabot Professor of Surgery
Lisa Newman, MD
Professor of Surgery
Director, UM Breast Care Center