

## **Cancer Staging and the National Cancer Data Base**

### **Frank S. Rotolo, MD**

Greater Baltimore Medical Center is a comprehensive community cancer center accredited by the Commission on Cancer (CoC) of the American College of Surgeons. As part of our commitment to the CoC, all new cancer patients treated at GBMC are “staged” by the treating physicians. This year alone 2,117 patients were staged at GBMC. Staging of cancers allows us to select primary and adjuvant therapy, to compare treatment outcomes for similar types of cancers, and to estimate prognosis. Since the mid 70's staging of cancers has been based on the TNM classification (T-tumor extent, N-spread to regional lymph nodes, M-metastasis). The criteria for T, N, and M differs for tumors at different sites in the body and for different histologic (cell) types.

The 6th Edition of the AJCC (American Joint Committee on Cancer) Staging Manual was just issued in January to better reflect our understanding of cancer and its spread. Changes for breast cancer reflect our increasing use of sentinel lymph node biopsies and immunohistochemical techniques. The importance of skin ulceration with melanoma has been incorporated with the new system. Some cancers such as ovarian cancer have had no changes in staging.

The staging data is collected in the National Cancer Data Base (NCDB) along with similar data from other participating hospitals. Commission on Cancer (CoC) approved hospitals, which treat over 80% of cancer patients, are required to submit their data to the NCDB. The information collected by the NCDB will allow us to better plan treatment strategies. For example, a data review this year will compare survival rates for local resection of rectal cancers as opposed to more aggressive treatments such as low anterior colon resection or abdominoperineal resections. Physicians as well as patients and their family have access to the information at [www.facs.org/cancer/ncdb](http://www.facs.org/cancer/ncdb)

Frank S Rotolo, M.D.  
Maryland State Chair of Cancer Liaison Physicians