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Health newsfeed for Wednesday, January 23, 2013

HEADLINE: NODES AND MELANOMA

ANCHOR LEAD: AN ACCEPTED TECHNIQUE FOR ASSESSING SPREAD OF MELANOMA ISN'T AS EFFECTIVE AS WAS HOPED, ELIZABETH TRACEY REPORTS

When someone has surgery for melanoma, the most deadly type of skin cancer, a technique known as 'sentinel node biopsy' is used to see whether the cancer has spread to surrounding lymph nodes. Julie Frieschlag, director of surgery at Johns Hopkins, describes a new study identifying just how often sentinel nodes don't tell the whole story.

FREISCHLAG: They looked at 515 patients with melanoma and they underwent a sentinel lymph node biopsy. These patients had no evidence of metastatic disease and they did this over a period of 12 years and they wanted to see did they recur and did they survive? So even if you had a negative sentinel node, 16% of these patients actually ended up having a bad outcome, and so it makes us worry that in melanoma, the sentinel node may not be as predictive as in breast surgery, makes you worry that these patients, even with a negative node, need to be watched closely. :31

At Johns Hopkins, I'm Elizabeth Tracey.