

MEDIA RELEASE

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Landmark clinical trial results clearly demonstrate the benefit of sentinel node biopsy for melanoma patients.

The final results of the largest surgical trial for melanoma ever undertaken, the Multi-Centre Selective Lymphadenectomy (MSLTI) trial, have been published today in The New England Journal of Medicine. This landmark trial commenced in 1994 and today's publication represents the end to a long search for evidence that sentinel node biopsy followed by the immediate removal of diseased lymph nodes (lymphadenectomy) is a surgical technique that can improve the prognosis for melanoma patients.

Sentinel node biopsy is a technique involving the injection of a dye which will show whether cancerous cells have moved to the lymph node.

The trial enrolled over 2000 patients in 6 countries throughout the world. Patients were monitored for a ten year period after enrolling in the trial and the authors have recently finished the analysis of the results. Melanoma Institute Australia (MIA) was one of the key centres participating in this trial, enrolling over 946 patients.

MSLTI commenced in 1994 and finished recruitment in 2002. Thus all patients in the report had at least ten years follow up. The trial investigated whether sentinel node biopsy and the immediate removal of any cancerous lymph nodes had any benefit compared to patients who underwent wide excision. Wide excision is part of standard treatment after diagnosis of melanoma to ensure that melanoma cells are completely removed. It is a sad irony, that Dr Donald Morton, former head of the John Wayne Cancer Institute and lead investigator of the

study passed away four weeks ago. He was widely regarded as one of the world's leading surgical oncologists.

The analysis of all of the data is now complete and the authors of the study report the critical results that sentinel node biopsy and the early removal of any diseased lymph nodes significantly improves the survival for patients who have an intermediate thickness melanoma (greater than 1.2 – 3.5 mm).

The results of this trial have been eagerly awaited by melanoma clinicians and researchers throughout the world and will change the treatment for melanoma patients after diagnosis with this life threatening disease.

Director of Melanoma Institute Australia, Professor John Thompson, AO, leading melanoma surgeon and a co-author of the study states that

“There has been controversy about the value of sentinel node biopsy. This trial provides definitive confirmation of the accuracy and staging value of sentinel node biopsy in melanoma. It also provides robust evidence that removal of lymph node metastases increases a patient's chance of surviving melanoma. It is not possible to provide patients with melanoma of more than 1mm in thickness with fully informed advice about their treatment options if sentinel node biopsy is not performed. Current Australian guidelines recommend that sentinel node biopsy be ‘discussed’ with all patients with melanomas more than 1 mm thick. The trial results indicate that it should now be part of the recommended treatment.”

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Key Facts about Melanoma:

- **Australia has the highest incidence of melanoma** in the world and it is often referred to as 'Australia's cancer'.
- **Melanoma is the most common cancer in young Australians** affecting more people aged 15–39 years than any other cancer.
- **Melanoma is the third most common form of cancer** in Australian men and women. Each year in Australia melanoma is responsible for more than 1,500 deaths and around 12,500 new cases are diagnosed annually.
- **Melanoma is the most serious form of skin cancer.** Melanoma makes up only 2.3% of all skin cancers in Australia but is responsible for 75% of skin cancer deaths.
- **In Australia one person will die from Melanoma every seven hours**

About Melanoma Institute Australia

- **Melanoma Institute Australia (MIA) is a world leader** in melanoma research, treatment and education, and is dedicated to preventing and curing melanoma. It evolved from the Sydney Melanoma Unit established in the 1960s. Melanoma Institute Australia is located at the Poche Centre in North Sydney, the largest melanoma research, treatment and education centre in the world, and is affiliated with The University of Sydney.
- **The Poche Centre, made possible by the generous donation of \$40 million by philanthropist Mr Greg Poche,** is the largest single tumour cancer centre in Australia. It is

a purpose built, world-class, integrated cancer treatment facility enabling the best possible care for melanoma patients.

- **Melanoma Institute Australia is a not-for-profit organisation** that relies on the generosity of individuals, organisations, NHMRC grants and government funding to continue its ground breaking work into this potentially devastating cancer.

Preventing melanoma

- **Minimise your risk of getting melanoma.** The simplest, most effective way to reduce your chance of developing melanoma is to protect your skin from the sun.
 - Seek shade, especially in the hottest part of the day and remember sun can reflect off surfaces such as water, sand and concrete causing sunburn
 - Wear clothing that covers, at the very least, your back, shoulders, arms and legs
 - Wear a broad-brimmed hat
 - Apply a minimum of SPF 30+, broad-spectrum sunscreen at least every 2 hours
 - Wear wrap-around sunglasses

- **Early detection and treatment could save your life.** Over 90% of melanomas can be cured, if detected and treated early enough. Checking your skin regularly and knowing what to look for, could save your life. Look for:
 - Change in shape or colour of an existing mole
 - Increase in size of an existing mole
 - Bleeding or itching
 - Irregular border
 - New mole or freckle

