

Introduction and principles of Essential TNM

Introduction

This user's guide provides general instructions for abstracting information on extent of disease using Essential TNM. Site-specific coding flow charts are provided for selected cancer sites. Flow charts for additional cancer sites will be added as they become available.

Principles of Essential TNM

Essential TNM is a complement to the full Tumour, Node, Metastasis (TNM) classification, to assign cancer stage at diagnosis. It is for use by cancer registrars when either the traditional (or full) TNM stage group (I, II, III, or IV) or the TNM staging components (T, N, and M) have not been explicitly recorded in the patient's record.

Essential TNM follows a logical pathway documenting the furthest extent of disease in each patient with cancer using combined clinical and/or surgical/pathological information that is available via the completion of surgery (if it is performed).

If T, N, and/or M have been explicitly recorded by the treating clinician, these should be abstracted by the registrar. However, if one or more of these components are based on clinical evaluation (cTNM) and if surgical/pathological information has become available at a later date, the registrar may record the appropriate Essential TNM code if it differs from that in the patient's record.

In the event that neoadjuvant therapy (i.e. systemic therapy before surgery) is given, information used for staging purposes should include only procedures and records before the initiation of this therapy.

Essential TNM is composed of three key components that together summarize the extent of cancer in the patient at the time of diagnosis. The components are:

- M** Presence or absence of distant metastasis
- N** Presence or absence of regional lymph node metastasis or involvement
- T** Extent of invasion and/or size of the tumour.

The extraction of data from medical records is facilitated through the use of flow charts that include relevant questions and diagrams to help identify the extent of disease in different cancer sites. These flow charts correspond to the eighth edition of the Union for International Cancer Control (UICC) TNM classification (Brierley et al., 2017).