Breast cancer Essential TNM

Key points for breast cancer staging

- 1. Metastasis is common to the bone, lung, and brain. Look for evidence on imaging.
- 2. Remember that lymph nodes on the opposite (i.e. contralateral) side or in the neck are distant metastases (M+).
- 3. If M+, Stage IV can be assigned and there is no need to look for further information.
- 4. Look for tumour extension to breast skin (epidermis).
- 5. Regional lymph nodes are the axillary (including intramammary), infraclavicular, internal mammary, and supraclavicular nodes **on the same side as the tumour** (see the diagrams in Fig. 4).
- 6. If lymph node involvement (R+) has been established but no further information is available about the number and location of nodes, R+ is assumed. In such a situation, the case will be allotted to the lower stage category (following Rule 4 of the TNM system), for example to Stage II Regional Limited.
- 7. Size of the tumour is a critical aspect, and a tumour that measures 2 cm or less is very limited (Stage I).
- 8. If two malignant tumours are present in the same breast, use the biggest one to stage.

Fig. 4. Breast cancer Essential TNM flow chart. A, advanced extension; L, localized extension; M, distant metastasis; R, regional lymph nodes; TNM, Tumour, Node, Metastasis.

