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The Clinical Importance of Isolated Axillary Lymphadenopathy Incidentally Detected on Sonography

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Purpose: To evaluate the clinical importance of incidentally detected, isolated abnormal axillary lymph nodes on sonography (US) in asymptomatic patients.

Materials and Methods: From October 2003 to August 2010, 76 consecutive women with isolated axillary lymphadenopathy incidentally detected on US were enrolled in the study. None of the 76 patients had any known primary malignancy or complained of symptom. Lesions were pathologically confirmed by surgical biopsy (n = 10), US-guided core biopsy (n = 14), or US-guided fine needle aspiration biopsy (n = 28). And 24 patients who did not undergo biopsy and 27 of the patients who underwent biopsy had imaging follow-up for 6-60 months (mean, 17 months).

Results: The final diagnoses were benign reactive hyperplasia in 67, tuberculosis in 3, Kikuchi disease in 4, and sarcoidosis in 1. Only one patient (1.3%) was diagnosed as metastatic lymphadenopathy by US-guided fine needle aspiration and then lung cancer was found. There was no malignancy in the patients undergoing follow-up.

Conclusion: Incidence of isolated abnormal axillary lymph nodes incidentally detected on breast US was 1.4%. Of them, only one of 76 patients (1.3%) was diagnosed as metastatic lymphadenopathy and the majority of patients were diagnosed as benign.

Therefore, in that case, short-term imaging follow-up rather than immediate biopsy may be recommended.