Table 5

TNM staging for colorectal cancer

T categories for colorectal cancer

T categories describe the depth of invasion through the layers of the bowel wall

Tx No description of the tumour's extent is possible because of incomplete information

Tis The cancer is in the earliest stage (in situ). It involves only the mucosa. It has not grown beyond the muscularis mucosa (inner muscle layer)

T1 The cancer has grown through the muscularis mucosa and extends into the submucosa

T2 The cancer has grown through the submucosa and extends into the muscularis propria (thick outer muscle layer)

T3 The cancer has grown through the muscularis propria and into the outermost layers of the colon or rectum but not through them. It has not reached any nearby organs or tissues

T4a The cancer has grown through the serosa (also known as the visceral peritoneum), the outermost lining of the intestines

T4b The cancer has grown through the wall of the colon or rectum and is attached to or invades nearby tissues or organs

N categories for colorectal cancer

N categories indicate whether or not the cancer has spread to nearby lymph nodes and, if so, how many lymph nodes are involved. To get an accurate idea about lymph node involvement, most specialists recommend that at least 12 lymph nodes be removed during surgery and looked at under a microscope

Nx No description of lymph node involvement is possible because of incomplete information

N0 No cancer in nearby lymph nodes

N1a Cancer cells are found in 1 nearby lymph node

N1b Cancer cells are found in 2 to 3 nearby lymph nodes

N1c Small deposits of cancer cells are found in areas of fat near lymph nodes, but not in the lymph nodes themselves

N2a Cancer cells are found in 4 to 6 nearby lymph nodes

N2b Cancer cells are found in 7 or more nearby lymph nodes

M categories for colorectal cancer

M categories indicate whether or not the cancer has metastasised to distant organs, such as the liver, lungs, or distant lymph nodes

M0 No distant spread is seen

M1a The cancer has spread to 1 distant organ or set of distant lymph nodes

M1b The cancer has spread to more than 1 distant organ or set of distant lymph nodes, or it has spread to distant parts of the peritoneum