

Alternative lymphatic pathway from the arm to the transverse cervical chain

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Abstract

This study describes a new alternative route for lymphatic drainage of the arm to the cervical region. This provides a new possibility of manual lymphatic drainage in patients with lymphedema due to dissection of the axillary lymph node chain.

Keywords: lymphatic anatomy, alternative pathways, axillary dissection

Letter to the Editor

The Anatomy of the lymphatic system has peculiar characteristics with one of them being that most collectors of the upper and lower extremities flow to two large lymph node chains: the axillary and inguinal chains. These two chains constitute two large lymphatic channels that drain the arms, thorax and upper abdomen (axillary) and the legs and the anterior and posterior lower abdomen region (inguinal).

The surgical treatment of some types of cancer involves excision of these chains and as a consequence lymphedema can develop. The identification of alternative routes of lymphatic collectors that do not go to these lymphatic channels has become a necessity over the last few decades. The most affected are the arms and so the description by Ciucci of three alternative pathways, the cephalic, posterior and intra-axillary currents has had a great impact on the treatment of arm lymphedema.

Recently during dissections of the cervical and arm regions, a chain of collectors that drain from the shoulder region to the transverse cervical chain was identified, thus constituting a new alternative route to drain the arm to the cervical region as illustrated in Figure 1. This new description is extremely important to treat

lymphedema related to the treatment breast cancer that involved excision of axillary lymph nodes.

Figure 1 – lymphatic collectors that drain from the shoulder region to the transverse cervical chain

