

Guidelines for abstraction of information from medical records

The following guidelines aim to provide help in abstracting information on stage from medical records.

- Quickly review the entire record for overall organization. Note the range of service dates and the different facilities involved in the care of the patient.
- Identify definitive reports (operative, pathology, imaging), and note the dates and results on each report.
- Try to rule out distant metastatic disease first.
- Because distant metastasis is more frequent to the bone, lung, or brain, it is practical to look in
 - **imaging reports** for any mention of distant metastasis. If metastasis is mentioned, remember to verify whether this was close to the time of diagnosis.
 - **operative reports or notes** for any indication of liver metastasis or tumour deposits indicating distant metastasis.
- Regional lymph nodes: Common expressions that imply spread to regional lymph nodes are “lymph node metastasis” and “involvement of local lymph nodes”.
- As illustrated in the flow charts (Figures 1–8), the **names of the regional lymph nodes** are specific for each cancer site and must be checked against the clinical record. If the involved node is not in the list of regional nodes, consider it to be a distant node.