General Practitioner in Oncology Self-directed Learning Program 2006

UNKNOWN PRIMARY CANCER MODULE
**Unknown Primary**

**Case 1**

Ethel Jamieson is a 58-year-old woman who presented to her family doctor with a complaint of fatigue. She had suffered from an URTI 6 weeks previously. All the symptoms had resolved, but the fatigue persisted. She is otherwise a healthy woman, with no significant past medical history. Other than her complaint of fatigue, the remainder of her functional inquiry is negative.

Her family physician performs a complete physical examination, including breast and pelvic examinations. She has a palpable, non-fixed 2 cm node in the left axilla. The rest of her physical examination is normal. CXR, mammography and blood work, specifically, CBC, LFTs, lytes, Ur, Cr, and a urinalysis are performed. Pap smear is done. All investigations are normal or negative.

Ethel is referred to a local surgeon who does a fine needle aspirate of the node. Pathology reveals a poorly differentiated carcinoma.

1. Can FNA provide an adequate tissue sample to allow the pathologist to perform special stains, test for markers etc? If not, how will you obtain that information?
1. What other staging investigations would you perform? Why?
2. If this patient were male, would you do any different investigations or examinations?
3. What serum markers would you order? What diseases would they help you differentiate between?
3. How common is Carcinoma of Unknown Primary?
4. How would you advise such a patient regarding treatment recommendations?
5. What is the median survival for a patient with a diagnosis of an unknown primary?

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Carcinoma of Unknown Primary Suggested Reading List

Useful Web Sites

- for practice guideline summaries from Cancer Care Ontario: www.cancercare.on.ca/index_practiceGuidelines.htm
- to review the National Cancer Institute’s Physician Data Query on this disease site: www.cancer.gov
- to view the American Society of Clinical Oncology website, visit www.asco.org
- to view guidelines/special articles from the American Society of Clinical Oncology visit: www.jco.org/misc/specialarticles.shtml
- to view practice guidelines from the National Comprehensive Cancer Network, visit www.nccn.org
- to view a pathology website which discusses the various stains available, and provides references, view http://pathologyoutlines.com/stains.html

1. Ruddon R et al. Use of Biological Markers in the Diagnosis of Cancers of Unknown Primary Tumor. Seminars in Oncology, Vol. 20, No 3 (June), 1993, pp. 251-260.
2. Sporn R et al. Empirical Chemotherapy for Adenocarcinoma of Unknown Primary Tumor Site. Seminars in Oncology, vol. 20, No 3 (June), 1993, pp. 261-267,
3. Hainsworth JD, Greco FA. Poorly Differentiated Carcinoma and Poorly Differentiated Adenocarcinoma of unknown Primary Tumor Site. Seminars in Oncology, Vol. 20, No. 3 (June) 1993, pp. 279-286.
6. de Braud F, Al-Sarraf M. Diagnosis and Management of Squamous Cell Carcinoma of Unknown Primary Tumor Site of the Neck. Seminars in Oncology, Vol 20, No 3 (June), 1993: pp. 273-278,
7. Garro GC et al. Poorly Differentiated Neuroendocrine Carcinoma of Unknown Primary Tumor Site. Seminars in Oncology, Vol 20, No 3 (June), 1993: pp 287-291,

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