Neck Dissection
What is a Neck Dissection?
The aim of a Neck Dissection is to remove Lymph Nodes from one or both sides of the neck. This is undertaken when the cancer cells have travelled from the original Skin Cancer site and settled in the Lymph Nodes.

What are Lymph Nodes?
Lymph Nodes are present throughout your body. You may have felt swollen Lymph Nodes in your neck when you have had an infection such as a simple cold. As well as trapping germs the Lymph Nodes can also trap cancer cells.

Have I got Cancer in my Lymph Nodes?
When a lump is detected the first step is to have a sample taken. This is called an FNA and it is sent to the laboratory to be looked at under a microscope. Your Doctor will also want you to have scans (CT, MRI) prior to surgery.

When will my Neck Dissection be carried out?
A Neck Dissection is carried out once all the test results are available. You will be admitted to hospital early on the morning of your surgery. You will be in hospital for about 3 days.

What does the surgery involve?
Under general anaesthetic a large incision is made which usually starts just underneath the chin and extends downwards towards the collarbone, then upwards to end behind the ear. Once the Lymph Nodes have been removed the flap of skin is replaced with stitches or clips. This operation usually takes between 3-5 hours but you will be away from the Ward for most of the day.
What can I expect after the operation?

At the end of the operation one or two small plastic tubes are placed through the skin to drain any fluid that may collect inside the wound. The other ends are connected to bags that usually stay in place for several days before being removed. Some discomfort is to be expected and is usually worse for the first few days, although it may take a couple of weeks to disappear completely. If required you will be given regular painkillers. The following day you will be encouraged to gently walk around the ward. You may also need to see the physiotherapist for an exercise programme.

You will usually be discharged home with the drain once you have been taught to look after it, and are happy to do so. When at home you will be able to contact your Skin Cancer Nurse; who will see you in clinic to remove the drain when appropriate.

Any stitches or clips will be removed around 7-10 days following surgery.

What are the possible complications immediately after surgery?

There are potential problems with any operation. With this type of surgery, complications are rare but you may experience some of the following:

- Numbness of the neck and lip
- Bleeding
- Collection of fluid around the wound
- Infection
- Wound break down
- Stiffness of the neck and shoulder
What are the possible long-term complications after surgery?

- Some difficulty in moving your shoulder
- Reduced sensation of your lips
- A visible scar and hollowing of the neck on the side of surgery
- Numbness of the skin around the operation site

Will I need to have further treatment after my Neck Dissection?

This depends on what is found when the Lymph Nodes are examined under a microscope. It may take 2-3 weeks for the results to be ready. Your doctor will not know until then whether additional treatment is necessary. Any additional treatment usually involves specialised X-ray treatment in the form of radiotherapy.
References and further Information

NGS Macmillan Wellbeing Centre, Southmead Hospital, Bristol BS10 5NB
Southmead Hospital has a drop-in centre offering a variety of activities/services. For more information telephone 0117 4147051 or ask your Skin Cancer CNS.

Skin Cancer Research Fund (SCaRF)
Based at Southmead Hospital
Telephone: 0117 414 8755

Macmillan Cancer Support
Europe’s leading cancer information charity with over 4,500 pages of up-to-date cancer information, practical advice and support for cancer patients, their families and carers
Telephone: 0808 800 1234

CancerHelp
CancerHelp UK is a free information service about cancer and cancer care for people with cancer and their families. Cancer-help believes that information about cancer should be freely available to all and written in a way that people can easily understand.
www.cancerhelp.org.uk

NHS Constitution. Information on your rights and responsibilities. Available at www.nhs.uk/aboutnhs/constitution
If you or the individual you are caring for need support reading this leaflet please ask a member of staff for advice.