

• 临床研究 •

超声监测定位腋窝淋巴结对乳腺癌患者新辅助治疗疗效的预测研究

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[摘要] 目的: 联合超声和腋窝转移定位淋巴结, 建立风险评估模型, 预测临床淋巴结阳性(cN+)乳腺癌患者新辅助治疗(neoadjuvant systemic therapy, NST)后腋窝病理完全缓解(pathologic complete response, pCR)的情况。方法: 选取88例患者按7:3的比例随机分配到测试组或验证组。所有患者于NST前, 选取超声图像上最可疑且由病理活检证实为转移的淋巴结, 在超声引导下置入1枚定位钛夹。对测试组进行单因素和多因素Logistic回归分析, 根据多因素分析结果建立风险评分模型。结果: 腋窝pCR率为48%(42/88)。以NST前激素受体状态、超声提示异常淋巴结的分级和分级的变化、定位淋巴结皮质厚度变化为独立因素, 建立危险评分模型。在-13~-9分和1~10分时, 测试组腋窝pCR率分别为100%和0%。测试组和验证组的受试者工作特征曲线下面积分别为0.931(95%CI=0.868~0.994)和0.762(95%CI=0.576~0.947)。结论: 基于超声和定位淋巴结的风险评分模型准确预测了cN+的乳腺癌患者NST后的腋窝淋巴结状态。危险评分-13~-9时腋窝淋巴结转移假阴性率为0%, 这部分患者能够避免腋窝淋巴结清扫及一系列并发症。

[关键词] 乳腺癌; 新辅助治疗; 超声; 腋窝淋巴结

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Monitoring of clipped axillary lymph node by ultrasound to predict response of breast cancer to neoadjuvant systemic therapy

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[Abstract] **Objective:** Combined ultrasound and axillary metastatic clipped lymph nodes was developed a model to predict the pathological complete response (pCR) of axillary lymph nodes in clinically lymph node-positive (cN+) breast cancer patients after neoadjuvant systemic therapy (NST). **Methods:** Eighty-eight patients were randomly assigned to the testing or validation set at a ratio of 7:3. Before NST, the lymph nodes most suspicious on ultrasound images and confirmed as metastatic by pathological biopsy were selected and marked with a titanium clip under ultrasound guidance. Univariate and multivariate logistic regression analyses of the testing set were performed. A risk score model was developed based on the results of multivariate analysis. **Results:** The axillary pCR rate was 48% (42/88). Hormone receptor status, N grade and changes in the number of abnormal lymph nodes were determined by ultrasonography, and changes in cortical thickness of the clipped lymph nodes were identified as independent factors and established the risk score model. In the score range of -13 to -9 and 1 to 10, the axillary pCR rate of the testing set was 100% and 0%, respectively. The area under the receiver operating characteristic curves of the testing and validation sets were 0.931 (95% CI: 0.868-0.994) and 0.762 (95% CI: 0.576-0.947), respectively. **Conclusion:** The risk score model based on ultrasound and clipped lymph nodes accurately predicte the axillary lymph node status of breast cancer patients with cN+ after NST. When the risk score was between -13 and -9, the false-negative rate of axillary lymph node metastasis was 0%, allowing these patients to avoid axillary lymph

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node dissection and a series of complications.

[Key words] breast cancer; neoadjuvant systemic therapy; ultrasound; axillary lymph node

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新辅助治疗(neoadjuvant systemic therapy, NST)作为乳腺癌临床标准治疗方案之一,可以有效降低疾病分期,提高手术获益。既往研究显示,NST后腋窝病理完全缓解(pathologic complete response, pCR)与患者生存获益显著相关。NST前为临床LN阳性(clinically LN-positive, cN+)的乳腺癌患者在NST后能够变为临床淋巴结阴性(clinically LN-negative, cN0),这部分患者可以接受前哨淋巴结活检(sentinel lymph node biopsy, SLNB),从而避免了腋窝淋巴结清扫(axillary lymph dissection, ALND)所带来的并发症^[1]。

目前,NST的疗效评估常规采用磁共振(magnetic resonance, MR)成像和超声,其中腋窝超声(axillary ultrasonography, AUS)是一种简便有效的腋窝淋巴结评估方式^[2-3]。然而,至今仍没有准确的方法能够筛选出NST后由cN+转为cN0的乳腺癌患者。本研究的目的在于开发和验证一个基于临床病理和影像学特征的模型,以预测NST后腋窝淋巴结的状态,筛选出能够豁免ALND的患者。

1 对象和方法

1.1 对象

所有入选患者均于2019年11月—2021年5月在南京医科大学附属第一医院接受NST。排除标准:①NST前cN0的患者;②NST前后临床或影像学资料缺失;③未在本机构继续治疗;④治疗过程中疾病进展。最终入组患者88例,按7:3的比例随机分配到测试组($n=62$)或验证组($n=26$)。每例患者至少接受8个周期的NST,每2轮治疗后进行1次超声评估,每4轮治疗后进行1次MR评估。该研究方案由南京医科大学附属第一医院伦理委员会批准,并按照赫尔辛基宣言中描述的人体受试者医学研究指南进行。所有患者在参与这项研究之前均签署了知情同意书。

1.2 方法

1.2.1 临床及病理特征

本研究纳入的临床病理特征包括年龄、NST前的临床T分期、NST前超声的N分级以及Ki-67、激素受体(hormone receptor, HR)和人表皮生长因子受

体2(human epidermal growth factor receptor 2, HER2)表达情况。本研究中腋窝pCR的定义为术后病理诊断腋窝淋巴结不存在微转移和宏转移,若只存在孤立性转移淋巴结,则也可认定为腋窝达到了pCR^[4]。

所有患者每2周1个疗程,共进行8个疗程的NST。前4个疗程为密集表阿霉素和环磷酰胺治疗,后4个疗程依据每个患者的情况进行个性化治疗。从NST的第5个疗程开始,HER2阳性患者每21 d接受1次曲妥珠单抗治疗。所有变量在测试组和验证组之间的分布均一致。所有患者在NST后均行ALND。

1.2.2 超声图像特征的获取和记录

超声检查由同一医生完成,采用MyLab™ Twice彩色多普勒超声仪器(EsaoteSpA,意大利),配备4~13 MHz的线阵探头。当淋巴结符合以下至少1个标准时,可判定为异常:①皮质厚度 ≥ 3 mm(弥漫性、局灶性或偏心性增厚);②淋巴门结构完全或部分消失;③彩色多普勒血流信号异常(非淋巴门型血流);④淋巴结相互融合或被不规则癌结节所取代^[5]。进行NST前,对超声提示最可疑的转移淋巴结进行细针穿刺,超声引导下在穿刺病理证实为转移的淋巴结中置入钛夹。每次检查时必须细致记录淋巴结的超声特征,包括异常淋巴结个数、定位淋巴结的形态、皮质厚度、淋巴门的存在状态以及血流分型。定位淋巴结的超声图像见图1。根据美国癌症联合会(AJCC)指南,将超声提示的可疑腋窝淋巴结个数设定为N分级:①0级($n=0$);②1级($1 \leq n \leq 3$);③2级($4 \leq n \leq 9$);④3级($n \geq 10$)^[6-8]。本研究中,如果淋巴结的淋巴门结构完全消失,则皮质厚度等于定位淋巴结的短径值。

此外,常规进行化疗疗效的彩色多普勒超声评估时,还需记录的特征包括原发肿块的大小(3个径线均需记录)、原发病灶的形态、边缘、血流分级等^[9],病灶血流参照Adler分级法分为0~Ⅲ级。

1.3 统计学方法

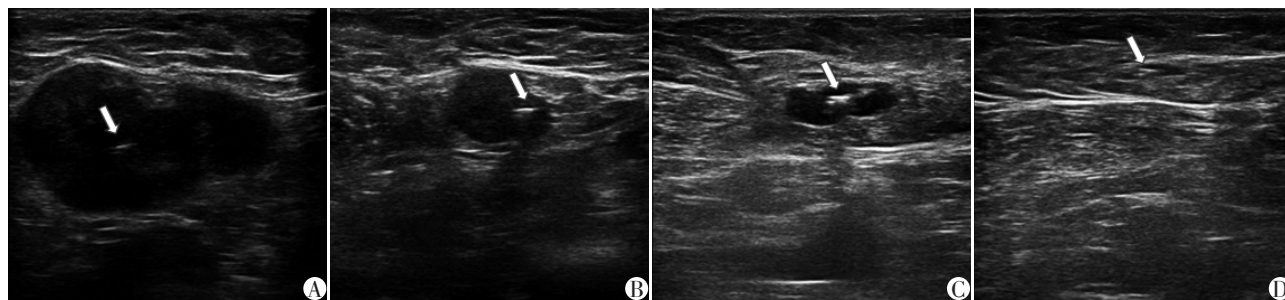
采用SPSS 25.0软件进行统计学分析。对测试组进行Logistic回归分析,单因素分析 $P < 0.2$ 的变量纳入多因素分析,多因素分析得出的独立影响因

素($P < 0.05$)最终用于模型的建立。本研究中的风险评估模型是基于“Framingham Heart Study”的一系列心血管疾病风险评估所开发的^[10]。将所有预测因素的风险得分相加,得到的总和即为该患者的最终风险得分。模型的预测能力用受试者工作特征曲线下的面积(area under curve, AUC)来量化。

2 结果

2.1 纳入病例的特征描述

所有患者的临床和病理特征分析如表1所示。88例患者Ki-67表达均 $>14\%$,为高增殖水平。88例患者全部进行了乳房切除术及ALND。在测试组和



A, B: The same clipped lymph nodes (LNs) pre-(A) and post-NST(B) in a 41-year-old patient. Metastasis was confirmed in one residual LN (1/25). C, D: The same clipped LNs in a 62-year-old patient who achieved an axillary pathologic complete response after NST(0/24).

图1 定位淋巴结的超声图像

Figure 1 Ultrasound images of clipped lymph nodes

验证组中, T2(76%, 67/88)和N1(61%, 54/88)是最常见的T分期和N分级。Miller-Payne分级1~3级者则认为化疗效果欠佳。53%(47/88)的患者Miller-Payne分级为4~5级,腋窝pCR率为49%(43/88)。根据肿瘤亚型分类,HR阴性和HER2阳性患者腋窝pCR率分别为71%(30/42)和68%(26/38)。

2.2 测试组腋窝淋巴结残留转移预测因素的 Logistic 回归分析

分析第1次和最后1次超声的评估参数,单因素分析包括12个特征(表2)。其中,病灶大小的变化采用实体瘤疗效评价标准(response evaluation criteria in solid tumors, RECIST),病灶最长径的第1次与最后1次的变化率达到30%认定为化疗有效果。超声中病灶血流分级的变化、N分级的变化、定位淋巴结皮质厚度的变化均为第1次减去最后1次的差值。测试组的腋窝pCR率为45%(28/62)。本研究中,年龄、临床T分期、超声评估病灶大小的变化、NST前后定位淋巴结淋巴门的状态与腋窝淋巴结残留转移无明显相关性($P > 0.2$),NST前超声的N分级、HR状态、HER2状态、NST后N分级的变化(即可疑淋巴结的个数变化)、定位淋巴结皮质厚度的变化均有差异($P < 0.2$)。腋窝pCR与N1级或2级、HR阴性和HER2阳性相关。定位淋巴结皮质厚度变化 >3 mm和N分级变化 >2 级的患者更容易达到pCR状态。将预测因素($P < 0.2$)纳入多因素分析(表3)。临床特征中的HR状态与腋窝淋巴结残留

转移密切相关($OR=22.1, P < 0.05$)。因为HER2的P值为0.08,与0.05较为接近,所以本研究仍然将其纳入到最终的计算中。

2.3 风险评估预测模型的建立与验证

为每个独立预测因子选择基线参考值(WiREF),并计算基线值与亚分类(Wij)之间的差值 $D=\beta(WiREF-Wij)$ 。皮质厚度的变化单位值定为0.2 mm,计算公式 $B=0.2 \times 3.614$,为亚分类每变化1个分值的单位值。得分(Point= D/B)取四舍五入,风险模型得分由每个预测因素的得分之和获得(表3)。结果总分-13~10分不等。把这些分数分成6个简化的分数组(表4)。预测风险评估模型的AUC值为0.931(95% CI: 0.868~0.994),验证集的AUC值为0.762(95% CI: 0.576~0.947),验证组模型的预测能力同样相对较好(图2)。

3 讨论

在临床实施新辅助治疗的早期阶段,淋巴结阳性的乳腺癌患者在NST后常规进行ALND。然而,与ALND相关的并发症降低了患者术后的生活质量,因此,许多临床研究建议缩小腋窝淋巴结的切除范围,其中较为常见的技术便是SLNB^[3, 11-12]。既往研究报道,NST后SLNB的假阴性率(false-negative rate, FNR)为12.6%,高于临床可接受的阈值(10%)。因此,相关研究人员引入了其他方法来降低SLNB的FNR,例如化疗前在病理证实为转移的

表1 患者特征
Table 1 Patient characteristics [n(%)]

Characteristic	Total	Testing set	Validation set	P
Age				0.757
<40 years	12(14)	8(13)	4(15)	
≥ 40 years	76(86)	54(87)	22(85)	
Clinical T stage before NST				0.725
cT1	6(7)	5(8)	1(4)	
cT2	67(76)	46(74)	21(81)	
cT3	15(17)	11(18)	4(15)	
N grade by US before NST ^a				0.552
1	54(61)	36(58)	18(69)	
2	23(26)	17(27)	6(23)	
3	11(13)	9(15)	2(8)	
Histologic grade				0.703
II	22(25)	17(27)	5(19)	
III	39(44)	27(44)	12(46)	
Unknown ^b	27(31)	18(29)	9(35)	
Miller-Payne grade of breast lesion				0.242
1-3	41(47)	32(52)	9(35)	
4	24(27)	14(22)	10(38)	
5	23(26)	16(26)	7(27)	
HR status				0.796
-	42(48)	30(48)	12(46)	
+	46(52)	32(52)	14(54)	
HER2 status				0.715
-	50(57)	36(58)	14(54)	
+	38(43)	26(42)	12(46)	
Axillary LN status post-NST				0.283
pCR	43(49)	28(45)	15(58)	
non-pCR	45(51)	34(55)	11(42)	

a: The suspicious axillary LNs were initially classified into four categories according to the AJCC guidelines: grade 0 (n=0), grade 1 (1≤n≤3), grade 2 (4≤n≤9), or grade 3 (n≥10). b: Patients with Miller-Payne grade 5 and part of grade 4 were not assigned a histological grade due to insufficient tissue volume.

淋巴结中置入定位夹或向其内注射放射性核素的靶向腋窝清扫技术(TAD)^[13-14]。TAD是近期引入的一种精准手术方式,用于切除置入定位钛夹的淋巴结和1个前哨淋巴结,该方法的FNR为2%^[13]。由于化疗药物对腋窝淋巴组织造成的严重损害,NST后经常出现引流淋巴管的阻塞,因此NST后前哨淋巴结的识别变得较为困难,且TAD的核素定位在临床应用中也有一定的局限性^[15]。先前的研究报道,AUS和SLNB联合使用可以将FNR有效降至9.8%,因此AUS被推荐用于常规评估接受NST的乳腺癌患者的腋窝淋巴结状态^[16]。基于既往的钛夹定位淋巴结和AUS的实验研究,本研究开发了1个预测性风险评估模型,用以评估NST后乳腺癌患者的腋

窝淋巴结状态,指导临床的精准治疗,避免不必要的ALND从而提高患者的生活质量。

结果表明,残留腋窝淋巴结的转移与超声上的N分级、HR状态和HER2状态相关,与既往的研究结果一致^[17]。病理上,HR阴性/HER2阳性的患者更有可能达到腋窝pCR,这可能与化疗药物和靶向治疗的应用有关。在本研究中,所有患者的Ki-67表达水平都较高,这可能是因为纳入的均为淋巴结转移阳性的患者。尽管Ki-67排除在本研究的最终计算之外,既往研究显示其表达情况与NST后的腋窝淋巴结状态是存在相关性的^[18]。

每次进行超声评估时均需严格记录肿瘤病灶和定位淋巴结的各项特征参数。超声中的淋巴结

表2 测试组基线特征的单因素分析

Table 2 Univariable analysis of baseline characteristics of the testing set

[n(%)]

Characteristic	Total	Residual axillary-nodes metastasis		OR	P
		No(n=28)	Yes(n=34)		
Age				1.022	0.67
<40 years	8(13)	4(14)	4(12)		
≥40 years	54(87)	24(86)	30(88)		
Clinical T stage before NST				1.101	0.92
cT1	5(8)	2(7)	3(9)		
cT2	46(74)	19(68)	27(79)		
cT3	11(18)	7(25)	4(2)		
N grade by US before NST				5.321	0.02
1-3	36(58)	17(61)	19(56)		
4-9	17(27)	8(28)	9(26)		
≥10	9(15)	3(11)	6(18)		
HR status				33.26	<0.001
-	30(48)	21(75)	9(26)		
+	32(52)	7(25)	25(74)		
HER2 status				0.212	0.13
-	36(58)	12(43)	24(71)		
+	26(42)	16(57)	10(29)		
Change to tumor size by US ^a				2.586	0.42
≤30%	16(26)	4(16)	12(36)		
>30%	46(74)	24(84)	22(64)		
Change to tumor color by US				1.607	0.44
≤0	10(16)	4(14)	6(18)		
1	27(44)	10(36)	17(50)		
2	18(29)	10(36)	8(24)		
3	7(11)	4(14)	3(9)		
Change to N grade by US ^b				0.004	0.20
≤0	27(44)	8(29)	19(56)		
1	25(40)	11(39)	14(41)		
≥2	10(16)	9(32)	1(3)		
Change to cortical thickness of the clipped nodes				0.009	<0.001
≤3 mm	15(24)	3(11)	12(35)		
>3 mm	47(76)	25(89)	22(65)		
Fatty hilum status of clipped nodes pre-NST				0.864	0.83
Appearance	12(20)	7(25)	5(15)		
Partial disappearance	20(32)	9(32)	11(32)		
Complete disappearance	30(48)	12(43)	18(53)		
Fatty hilum of clipped nodes post-NST				0.577	0.64
Appearance	34(55)	19(68)	15(44)		
Partial disappearance	11(18)	6(21)	5(15)		
Complete disappearance	17(27)	3(11)	14(41)		
Clipped node color post-NST				5.598	0.42
Hilar blood flow	44(71)	24(86)	20(59)		
Non-hilar blood flow ^c	18(29)	4(14)	14(41)		

a: Change to tumor size by US based on the Response Evaluation Criteria in Solid Tumors. b: Change to N grade by US based on the last ultrasound evaluation value minus the first evaluation value. c: Marginal blood flow; central blood flow; mixed blood flow(marginal + central blood flow). OR: odds ratio

表3 测试组中预测因素的多因素分析
Table 3 Multivariate analysis of predictive factors in the testing set

Characteristic	β	OR	95%CI	<i>P</i>	Reference value(W_{iREF})	β ($W_{iREF}-W_{ij}$)	Point=D/B ^a	Score
N grade by US before NST	1.592	4.911	1.374-17.560	0.01				
1					0= W_{1REF}	0	0	0
2					1	1.592	2.2	2
3					2	3.184	4.4	4
HR status	3.097	22.124	3.499-140.005	0.00				
-					0= W_{2REF}	0	0	0
+					1	3.097	4.2	4
HER2 status	-1.467	0.230	0.045-1.190	0.08				
-					0= W_{3REF}	0	0	0
+					1	-1.467	-2.0	-2
Change to N grade by US	-1.581	0.206	0.054-1.780	0.02				
≤0					0= W_{4REF}	0	0	0
1					1	-1.581	-2.2	-2
≥2					2	-3.162	-4.4	-4
Change to cortical thickness of clipped nodes by US ^b	-3.614	0.027	0.002-0.356	0.00				
≤3 mm					0= W_{5REF}	0	0	0
>3 mm					1	-3.614	-5.0	-5

a: $D=\beta(W_{iREF}-W_{ij})$, representing the distance between the baseline value and every sub classification. b= 0.2×3.614 , representing the unit distance for every one point. B: Cortex thickness was calculated as the short diameter of the LN without a fatty hilum. CI: Confidence interval.

表4 测试组和验证组中风险评估模型的性能
Table 4 Performance of the risk score model with the testing and validation sets

Score	Simplified score	Testing set			Validation set			Axillary pCR	
		No. of cases	No. of axillary pCR	Axillary pCR rate(%)	No. of cases	No. of axillary pCR	Axillary pCR rate(%)	No. of cases	FNR (%)
-13 to -9	1	4	4	100	3	3	100	7	0
-8 to -6	2	13	12	92	2	1	50	13	13
-5 to -4	3	9	6	67	4	3	75	9	31
-3 to -2	4	14	5	36	5	3	60	8	58
-1 to 0	5	8	1	13	6	3	50	4	71
1 to 10	6	14	0	0	6	1	17	1	95

FNR: false-negative rate.

分级和皮质厚度的变化与腋窝 pCR 密切相关。根据 RECIST 对乳腺癌原发病灶的评估^[19],原发病灶最大径缩小>30%则可认定新辅助治疗有一定效果。本研究单因素分析结果显示,肿瘤大小的改变与 NST 后腋窝淋巴结残余转移情况无关。然而,既往有研究表明两者之间是存在联系的,且肿瘤大小的变化界值需>50%^[18,20]。由于本研究的病例数量有限,所以没有进一步分析肿瘤大小的相关性。后续研究可以进一步做深入分析,探讨肿块变化界值点的具体数值。

超声中显示可疑淋巴结个数 N 分级的最后一次评估结果减去第一次的评估结果,当该变化值≤0 时,将其作为该特征中的基线值(W_{iREF})赋值为 0。用相同的方法,将超声评估的定位淋巴结的皮质厚度变化≤3 mm 作为基线值赋值为 0。各亚分类的赋值随着这两个因素的变化值的增大而降低,表明这两个预测因素均为 NST 后腋窝淋巴结残留转移的保护因素,随着分值增大,则腋窝淋巴结残余转移的概率逐渐降低。与超声或 MR 的静态评估结果相比,这两项由化疗前后评估相减所得出的指标

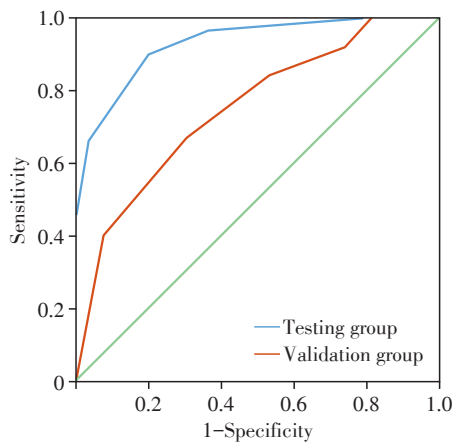


图2 测试组及验证组的ROC曲线

Figure 2 Receiver operating curves for the testing and validation sets

更准确地反映了化疗过程中疗效的动态变化。若根据既往研究判断, NST后超声形态异常的淋巴结(如皮质厚度为3.1 mm)通常被归入残余转移阳性的患者中, 而本研究则发现, 其中部分患者若定位淋巴结在NST后皮质厚度仍较厚, 但其NST前后的皮质厚度变化 >3 mm, 则腋窝淋巴结有可能已经转阴, 这样便大大降低了对腋窝淋巴结状态的高估。

本研究测试组和验证组的AUC分别为0.931(95% CI: 0.868~0.994)和0.762(95% CI: 0.576~0.947)。在以往的研究中, 重点主要集中在模型的开发建立上, 而忽略了模型的验证。本研究对所提出的模型进行了内部验证, 结果表明该模型具有良好的预测能力。预测得分被简化为6个危险等级, 简化分级为1级(得分为-13~-9分)的患者FNR为0, 且FNR随等级的增加而增加。而分级为2~6级的患者, FNR均 $>10\%$, 这部分患者与既往的腋窝手术方式没有区别, 仍需要进行SLNB或ALND。本研究中所有患者在NST后均行ALND, 同时也得到了定位淋巴结的病理结果, 避免遗漏残留淋巴结转移的情况。

本研究仍存在一些局限性。首先, 样本量较小, 研究结果可能会存在一定的偏倚。其次, 模型的验证存在不足, 需要进一步进行全面的内部和外部验证, 以判断该模型的预测能力。再次, 最终的评分中有部分得分存在病例缺失的情况, 因此得分的划分可能不够细致。最后, 本研究中的部分预测因素的统计偏于简化, 仍需要做更深入的分析 and 探讨, 例如原发病灶大小前后变化率的界值分析以及定位淋巴结皮质厚度变化能否更精准地探讨等。

综上所述, 本研究结合了AUS及钛夹定位淋巴结的特征, 建立了风险评分模型, 以准确预测cN+的

乳腺癌患者NST后腋窝淋巴结的状态。根据该模型显示, 得分为-13~-9分的乳腺癌患者NST后腋窝淋巴结可达到pCR状态。该模型能够有效帮助临床医生合理筛选出能够获免ALND的患者, 从而避免了术后并发症, 提高患者生活质量。

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