

III. THE TNM SYSTEM OF TUMOR STAGING

Introduction

As mentioned previously, the clinical staging of oral cancer is very important as it helps the oncologist to plan the treatment, to evaluate various treatment modalities, and to make international comparisons on various aspects of oral cancer. This system of staging has been suggested and revised by the International Union Against Cancer (UICC, 1987). It has three main parameters. "T", the extent of primary tumor; "N", the condition of regional lymph nodes; and "M", the absence or presence of distant metastasis. The addition of numbers to these parameters indicate the extent of the malignant disease. In addition, two other parameters, "P", pathology and "S", site of the tumor, are also considered in the evaluation and treatment planning of any malignancy.

"T", Primary tumor:

TX Primary tumor cannot be assessed.
TO No evidence of primary tumor.
TIS Carcinoma in situ.
T1 Tumor 2 cm or less in its greatest dimension.
T2 Tumor more than 2 cm but not more than 4 cm in its greatest dimension.

T3 Tumor more than 4 cm in its greatest dimension.

T4

Lip: tumor invades adjacent structures, e.g., through cortical bone, tongue, skin of the neck.

Oral cavity: tumor invades adjacent structures, e.g., through cortical bone, into deep (extrinsic) muscle of the tongue, maxillary sinus, skin.

"N" Regional lymph nodes:

NX Regional lymph nodes cannot be assessed.

NO No regional lymph node metastasis.

N1 Metastasis in a single ipsilateral lymph node, 3 cm or less in the greatest dimension.

N2 Metastasis in a single ipsilateral lymph node, more than 3 cm but not more than 6 cm in greatest dimension, or in multiple ipsilateral lymph nodes, none more than 6 cm in the greatest dimension, or in bilateral or contralateral lymph nodes, none more than 6 cm in the greatest dimension.

N2a Metastasis in a single lymph node. more

than 3 cm but not more than 6 cm in the greatest dimension.

N2b Metastasis in multiple ipsilateral lymph nodes, none more than 6 cm in the greatest dimension.

N2c Metastasis in bilateral or contralateral lymph nodes, none more than 6 cm in the greatest dimension.

N3 Metastasis in a lymph node more than 6 cm in the greatest dimension.

"M" distant metastasis:

MX Presence of distant metastasis cannot be assessed.

MO No distant metastasis. M1 Distant metastasis.

The category M1 may be further classified according to the site of distant metastasis which may be indicated by a specific notation, e.g., PUL (pulmonary).