

## Response to the reviewers

To Reviewer 1

Thank you very much for your valuable comments.

To Reviewer 2

Thank you for your comments.

### 1. The abbreviations should be explained at first presence, such as FD and CH.

FD and CH are not abbreviations, but merely identifiers such as Group A and Group B. To reduce the potential for misunderstanding, we have used Group F and Group C.

### 2. Why time required for incubation and fat removal was subtracted in FD group? At least both subtracted and non-subtracted were calculated, I think.

Here, we only measured the actual nodal harvesting time; neither incubation nor fat removal was included in the actual nodal harvesting work; hence, they were not included in the aggregate time. The time required for fat removal is approximately 5 min, but the exact time was not recorded. The time for both groups also did not include time spent preparing and cleaning up afterwards, such as photographing and sketching specimens, sorting formalin vials, or cleaning up the environment.

The physician's work is only on nodal harvesting; specimen incubation time does not contribute to the working hours. We performed postoperative patient briefing, bedside management, and specimen fixation during incubation. These tasks cannot be carried out at the same time while conventional harvesting is being carried out. As with the previous development article, we had no concerns about excluding the incubation time.

We added descriptions of incubation time in the discussion section. Please refer to the newly added ninth paragraph in the discussion: "The disadvantages of the fat dissociation method include the drug cost and the incubation time. The process of removing the dissolved fat also requires time, but this is only about 5 min. Conversely, a 60 min incubation period is also required. However, we do not view this as a drawback. The physician's workload is only nodal harvesting; incubation does not contribute to the working hours. We performed postoperative patient briefing, bedside management, and specimen fixation during the incubation period."

### 3. In the results, when comparing the time duration, the exact value of time and the P

value should be listed.

We added descriptions of harvesting time and exact P value in the results section. Please refer to the last paragraph of the result section: “In group F, the mean duration was 38.2 minutes, which was about 60 minutes shorter than group C of 101.1 minutes, and there was a significant difference ( $P = 4.8158E-08$ ).”

4. I have two concerns about the new method: the one is the reagent used in FD group will affect the diagnosis of lymph node status? Another is whether the exact group (such as no 1, 3 or 7) of the lymph nodes would be hard to distinguish?

The fat dissociation method does not affect the pathological diagnosis. The identification and grouping of lymph nodes is easier and more accurate than the conventional method. I have added this to the discussion section. Please refer to the eighth paragraph of the discussion section: “The fat-dissociation method does not affect the pathological diagnosis<sup>[6-8]</sup>. In addition, the identifications and grouping of lymph nodes is easier and more accurate than conventional method because of the ease of identifying the relationship between lymph nodes and blood vessels.

5. The study included patients with proximal gastric cancer, but in Figure 1 and 3, only an illustration of distal gastric cancer was given.

In the case of total gastrectomy, the #2 and #4sa lymph nodes were easily identifiable, so harvesting these nodes was performed as usual in Group F. We apologize for the misunderstanding. This is described in the methods section. Please refer to the patients, surgery, and materials' section of the methods, “In both groups, the group 2 lymph nodes (i.e., lymph nodes #8a, 9, 10, 11p, 11d, 12a) and easily identifiable group 1 lymph nodes (i.e. nodes #2 and 4sa) were separated with scissors, numbered, and submitted to pathology as per the usual procedure.”

Therefore, this figure has not been modified.

6. The format of the table is not normative, and a three-line table should be used.

We apologize for the broken formatting of the table. The table has been revised.