



Donor-Transmitted Cancers in Transplanted Livers: Analysis of Clinical Outcomes

Albino Eccher,^{1*} Ilaria Girolami,^{1*} Stefano Marletta,¹ Matteo Brunelli,¹ Amedeo Carraro,² Umberto Montin,³ Ugo Boggi,⁴ Claudia Mescoli,⁵ Luca Novelli,⁶ Deborah Malvi,⁷ Letizia Lombardini,^{8,9} Massimo Cardillo,⁹ Desley Neil,¹⁰ and Antonietta D'Errico⁷

¹Department of Pathology and Diagnostics and ²General Surgery and Liver Transplant Unit, University and Hospital Trust of Verona, Verona, Italy; ³General Surgery Unit, ULSS1 Dolomiti Hospital of Feltre, Feltre, Italy; ⁴Division of General and Transplant Surgery, University of Pisa, Pisa, Italy; ⁵Surgical Pathology and Cytopathology Unit, Department of Medicine, University and Hospital Trust of Padua, Padua, Italy; ⁶Institute of Histopathology and Molecular Diagnosis, Careggi University Hospital, Florence, Italy; ⁷Pathology Unit, Sant'Orsola-Malpighi University Hospital of Bologna, Bologna, Italy; ⁸National Health Institute, Rome, Italy; ⁹National Transplant Center, Rome, Italy; and ¹⁰University Hospital Birmingham, Birmingham, United Kingdom

The risk of transmission of malignancy from donor to recipient is low. However, this occurrence has dramatic consequences. Many reports of donor-derived cancers in liver transplant recipients have been published, but they have not been systematically summarized into a lucid and unified analysis. The present study is an attempt to provide clarity to this unusual but clinically important problem. We systematically reviewed all patient reports, patient series, and registries published on cancer transmission events through the end of December 2019. We identified a total of 67 publications with 92 transmission events. The most frequently transmitted cancers were lymphomas (30; 32.6%), melanomas (8; 8.7%), and neuroendocrine tumors (8; 8.7%). Most of the melanomas were metastasizing, whereas most of the lymphomas were localized to the graft. The median time to cancer diagnosis after transplantation was 7 months, with 78.1% of diagnoses established in the first year. Melanoma carried the worst prognosis, with no recipients alive at 1 year after cancer diagnosis. Lymphoma recipients had a better outcome, with more than 75% surviving at 2 years. A metastatic cancer carries a worse prognosis for recipients, and recipients with localized cancer can benefit from the chance to undergo transplantation again. The findings confirm the need to pay attention to donors with a history of melanoma but also suggest the need for a more careful evaluation of groups of donors, such as those dying from cerebral hemorrhage. Finally, recipients of organs from donors with cancer should be carefully followed to detect potential transmission.

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Transplantation is the best therapeutic option for patients with end-stage liver disease, with the benefits for survival and quality of life greatly exceeding the risks. An important risk is the development of de novo cancer due to immunosuppression. In addition, transplantation of an organ from a donor to a recipient

carries a risk transmission of diseases, such as cancer. Cancer transmission from a donor was originally recognized in kidney transplant recipients, and many patient reports have been published.⁽¹⁾ Donor-related cancer (DRC) can be divided into donor-transmitted cancer (DTC), in which the malignancy is present or presumed present in the graft at the time of transplantation, or donor-derived cancer (DDC), in which cancer is not present but develops within donor cells after transplantation.^(2,3) Although this definition is theoretically useful, a clear distinction is not always possible in practice.⁽²⁾ Ison and Nalesnik⁽³⁾ and Ison et al.⁽⁴⁾ set out a framework for a definition of proven, probable, or possible transmission event, but they also stated that it was not possible to assign these categories on the basis of a single time point.⁽³⁾ The incidence

Abbreviations: CENTRAL, Cochrane Central Register of Controlled Trials; CI, confidence interval; CNS, central nervous system; DDC, donor-derived cancer; DRC, donor-related cancer; DTC, donor-transmitted cancer; GBM, glioblastoma; HR, hazard ratio; IQR, interquartile range; NA, not available; OS, overall survival; PRISMA, Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses; QCRI, Qatar Computing Research Institute; SD, standard deviation; VIF, variance inflation factor.

of DTC appears to be low according to large series of donors with a history of malignancy or ongoing malignancy.⁽⁵⁻⁸⁾ However, there is still concern regarding the safe use of such donors and how to prevent transmission events. Moreover, international guidelines and recommendations⁽⁹⁻¹²⁾ on the level of risk are mainly based on patient reports or small patient series published across a long time span and in different transplant settings.⁽¹³⁾ Most available literature concerns renal transplant recipients. Compared with livers, kidneys are far less often involved with metastases,⁽¹⁴⁾ and therefore, the incidence in liver recipients may be higher.

The aim of this study is to systematically review all of the published evidence on cases of DTC in liver transplant recipients to provide insight on cancer-specific survival and assess recipient and transplant factors that influence recipient outcome.

Patients and Methods

We conducted a systematic review according to standard methods and reporting in the Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses (PRISMA) statement.⁽¹⁵⁾ No institutional review board approval was needed because no ethical issue is raised by literature reviews.

SEARCH STRATEGY AND DATABASES

A systematic search was carried out without any language restrictions in the electronic databases PubMed, Scopus, and Cochrane Central Register of

Controlled Trials (CENTRAL) through December 31, 2019, to identify any study documenting transmission of cancer from a donor to a liver transplant recipient. An additional search was performed in clinicaltrials.gov and gray literature resources (opengrey.eu and oaiSTER.worldcat.org). The full texts assessed for eligibility also underwent reference searching by hand to identify relevant articles that could potentially be missed.

The key terms “transplantation,” “transmission,” “donor,” “cancer,” “tumor,” and “malignancy” were adequately combined in their variations for all the databases (Supporting Appendix 1).

INCLUSION AND EXCLUSION CRITERIA

Two investigators (I.G. and S.M.) independently screened titles and abstracts with the aid of the Rayyan Qatar Computing Research Institute (QCRI) reference manager web application.⁽¹⁶⁾ Disagreements were resolved by consultation with the senior researcher (A.E.). Any article documenting a DTC or DDC in a liver recipient according to the Disease Transmission Advisory Committee⁽⁴⁾ was included. Exclusion criteria were nonliver recipients and the only transmission of oncogenic viruses considered to be a predisposing factor to tumor development but with no documented cancer originating from the donor. The lack of a description of a recipient’s outcome was not considered sufficient to exclude an article if other relevant information was present. Any type of study that contained data pertinent to a transmission event was included, even if it was not mainly dealing with a liver transplant but reported a brief note on the liver recipient (eg, report of a transmission event in a kidney recipient from a multiorgan donor which reports also a note on the liver recipient). Editorials, letters, and review articles were excluded, but their reference lists were searched by hand. When more than 1 publication was present for the same case of a transmission event, the more detailed article was included. Full texts of articles fulfilling the initial screening criteria were reviewed for subsequent inclusion.

DATA EXTRACTION

Two authors independently extracted data from the included studies following a standardized extraction form. Data extracted were donor age and sex, recipient age and sex, cancer type and site if localized to

Address reprint requests to Albino Eccher, M.D., Ph.D., Department of Pathology and Diagnostics, University and Hospital Trust of Verona, Piazzale Aristide Stefani 1, Verona, 37126 Italy. Telephone: +390458122161; FAX: +390458122011; E-mail: albino.eccher@aovr.veneto.it

**These authors contributed equally to this work.*

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the graft or metastasizing, treatment of the recipient, prior cancer history in the donor, whether the donor was a multiorgan donor, whether and how the donor was evaluated, donor cause of death, methods of establishing donor origin of cancer, time to cancer diagnosis in recipient after transplantation, outcome of recipient, time to death from cancer diagnosis, and whether death was due to cancer.

The primary outcomes were the time to cancer diagnosis and the overall survival (OS) of recipients after cancer diagnosis. The secondary outcomes were the distribution of cancer types, frequency of metastasizing malignancies, and impact of retransplantation as a treatment for localized malignancies.

QUALITY ASSESSMENT

Quality of studies was assessed according to a standardized checklist for quality assessment of patient reports and patient series.⁽¹⁷⁾ The items of the checklist were modified and tailored to the specificity of a cancer transmission event. The checklist comprised descriptions of the following: donor and recipient demographics, donor cause of death, donor evaluation at procurement, method to establish donor origin of tumor, time from transplantation to cancer diagnosis, type and site of cancer, whether the cancer was localized or metastasizing, recipient treatment, follow-up time, recipient outcome, and whether death was due to a transmitted cancer. Adequate follow-up time was defined a priori as at least 6 months after transplantation or until the recipient's death, following previous reporting.⁽¹⁾

DATA SYNTHESIS AND STATISTICS

A descriptive synthesis of demographic data of donors and recipients, types and sites of malignancies, donor evaluations, and recipient treatments was provided. Continuous measures were expressed as mean with standard deviation (SD) and median, and range, and dichotomous variables were expressed as numerical values and percentages.

Time-to-event curves were calculated using the Kaplan-Meier method for overall recipients and for the 3 most frequently transmitted malignancies. Cox proportional hazards analysis was used to assess the impact of clinical variables (age, sex, site of cancer, and treatment other than retransplant) on recipient survival. Univariate regression models were fitted for the overall population of recipients and in the subpopulation of

most frequent cancers, and for the multivariate regression analysis, a backward selection of variables was performed at $P = 0.20$ for inclusion. In the subgroup of most frequent cancers, the histotype was considered an additional variable. The absence of multicollinearity was verified with a variance inflation factor (VIF) test. Statistical significance was set at $P < 0.05$. All analyses were carried out with the open-source statistical software R, version 3.6.2 (R Foundation for Statistical Computing, Vienna, Austria).

Results

LITERATURE SEARCH

Of the 9271 publications, following removal of duplicates, 8956 were excluded after title and abstract screening. The remaining 315 were assessed in full-text form. Of these, 67 articles were included. The included studies comprised 45 case reports ($n = 45$ patients), 16 case series ($n = 33$ patients), and 6 registries ($n = 14$ patients), with a total of 92 recipients. Each case of a recipient with DRC corresponded to a single liver donor. The flow of article screening is depicted in Fig. 1.

QUALITY APPRAISAL

The quality appraisal is shown in Supporting Fig. 1. The overall quality was adequate, with more than 70% of cases with clear information in 6 out of 11 items. Information on the recipients' outcomes, adequate follow-up, and whether death was due to cancer was present in all patients and was clear in more than 90% of patients. Time to cancer diagnosis was lacking in 6 (6.5%) patients, and site of cancer was clearly reported in 73 (79.3%) patients. Clear demographic data of recipients were more frequent than clear donor data (71 [77.2%] versus 54 [58.7%]). Clear information regarding the method to establish the donor origin was reported in 57 (62%) patients. The less commonly reported items were the evaluation of donor at procurement (49 [53.3%] with missing information), the donor's cause of death (42 [45.7%] with missing information), and the donor's demographic data (32 [34.8%]).

CHARACTERISTICS OF DONORS

The main characteristics of donors are reported in Table 1. All donors were deceased, of which 49

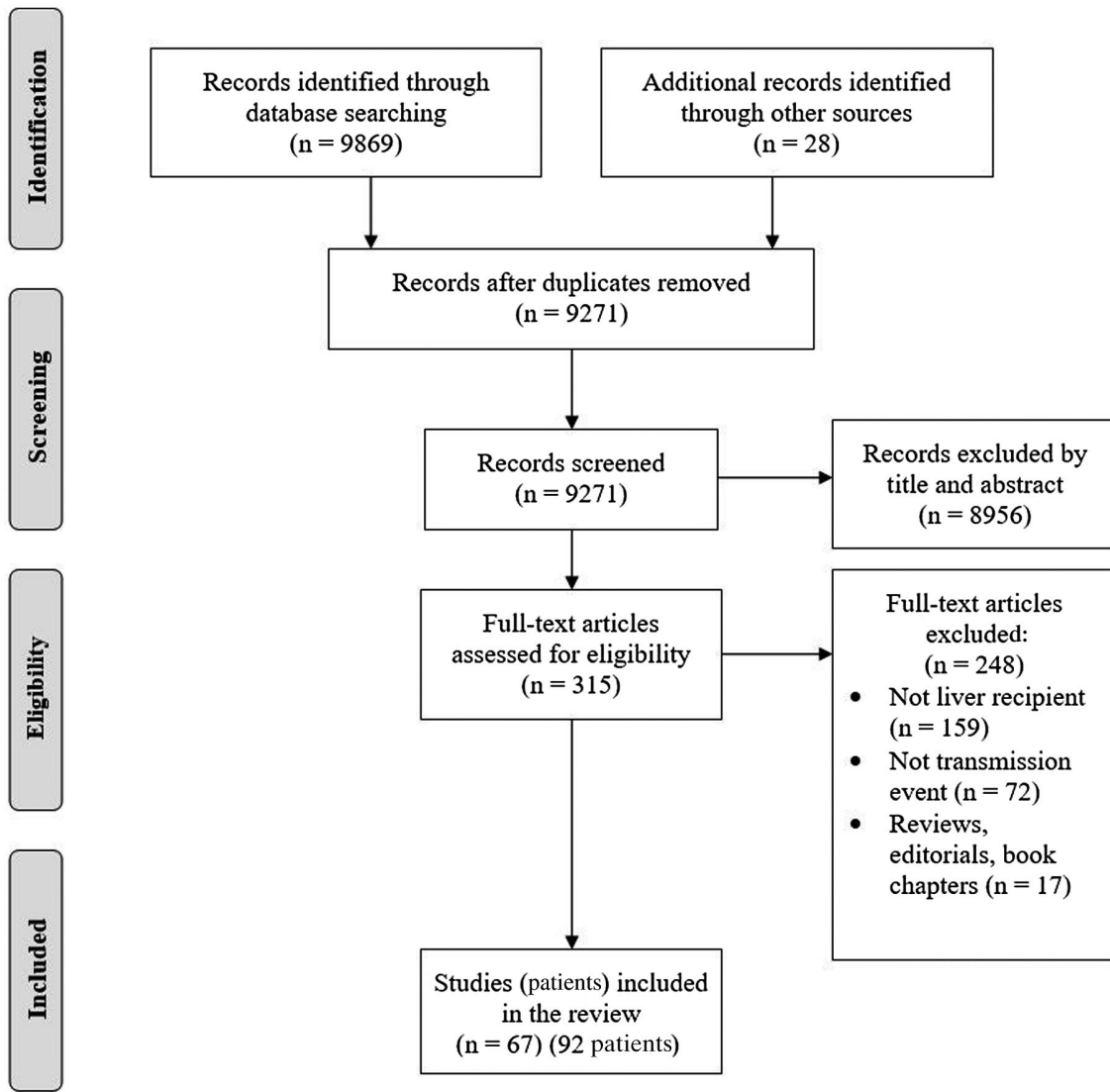


FIG. 1. Search flow diagram. The diagram was designed according to the template of the PRISMA flow diagram from Liberati et al.⁽¹⁵⁾ (2009), available at the PRISMA Web site (www.prisma-statement.org).

(53.3%) were multiorgan donors, 3 (3.3%) donated the liver only, and the information was not stated in 40 (43.5%). The mean age of all donors was 45.6 ± 20.4 years (median, 47.5; range, 1–81 years) but varied by cancer types, with a mean age of 29.5 ± 16.8 years and 31 ± 4.8 years for donors transmitting lymphoma and choriocarcinoma, respectively, and a mean age of 69 ± 7.5 years and 50 ± 5.7 years for donors transmitting colorectal carcinoma and melanoma, respectively. Sex was not stated for 34 (37%) patients, whereas there were 30 (32.6%) male and 28 (30.4%) female donors. There was a known history of cancer

or a malignancy present at procurement only in 8 (8.7%) patients, of which 5 (62.5%) were glioblastoma (GBM) patients.

Causes of death were available in 50 (54.3%) patients, of which 31 (62%) were cerebrovascular events (cerebral hemorrhage/hemorrhagic stroke); 9 (18%) patients reported head trauma/accident; and the remaining 8 donors died from other causes. Three patients with GBM died after receiving surgery for the disease. A total of 43 cases provided information on patient evaluation at procurement, with 21 detailing information: 10 patients underwent some imaging

TABLE 1. Characteristics of Donors by Cancer Type

	Lymphoma (n = 30)	Melanoma (n = 8)	Neuroendocrine (n = 8)	GBM Multiform (n = 5)	Choriocarcinoma (n = 5)	Colorectal (n = 5)	Other (n = 31)	Total (n = 92)
Percent of total	32.6	8.7	8.7	5.4	5.4	5.4	33.7	100
Age, years								
Median (range) (IQR)	23 (15-71)	51.5 (42-55)	62 (22-77)	38 (14-48)	30 (26-36)	69 (58-79)	52 (1-81)	47.5 (1-81)
Mean \pm SD	29.5 \pm 16.8	50 \pm 5.7	55.8 \pm 25.2	34.5 \pm 16.2	31 \pm 4.8	69 \pm 7.5	50.3 \pm 19.9	45.6 \pm 20.4
Sex								
Male	10 (33.3)	1 (12.5)	3 (37.5)	1 (20)	0 (0)	3 (60)	12 (38.7)	30 (32.6)
Female	2 (6.7)	3 (37.5)	3 (37.5)	2 (40)	5 (100)	2 (40)	11 (35.5)	28 (30.4)
NA	18 (60)	4 (50)	2 (25)	2 (40)	0 (0)	0 (0)	8 (25.8)	34 (37)
Known history of cancer	0 (0)	1 (12.5)	0 (0)	5 (62.5)	0 (0)	0 (0)	2 (25)	8 (8.7)

NOTE: Data are given as n (%) unless otherwise noted.

study, 7 patients had only clinical examination and blood tests, 1 patient had a biopsy, and 3 patients had a complete autopsy.

CHARACTERISTICS OF RECIPIENTS

The main characteristics of recipients are shown in Table 2. The mean age of all recipients was 49 ± 14.2 years (median, 52; range, 1-73 years) but varied by cancer types, with a mean age of 23.7 ± 8.4 years for recipients with GBM and 59.6 ± 4.8 years for recipients with colorectal cancer. Of the recipients, 53 (57.6%) were male, though the sex was not reported in 19 (20.7%) patients. Cancer was localized to the graft in 46 (50%) patients and metastasizing in 29 (31.5%) patients, whereas in 17 (18.5%) patients, this information was not reported or was unclear. Cancer was limited to the graft in more than 80% of lymphomas and in all 5 colorectal cancers, whereas 100% of choriocarcinomas, 80% of GBMs, and 62.5% of melanomas were metastatic. Recipients were treated with tumor excision or retransplant in 25 (27.2%) patients, with chemotherapy alone in 24 (26.1%) patients and reduced immunosuppression alone in 9 (9.8%) patients; in 5 (5.4%) patients, there was only supportive or no treatment, and in 29 (31.5%) patients, the information was missing or unclear.

FREQUENCIES OF MALIGNANCY

Of all 92 patients, 30 (32.6%) were lymphomas, followed by melanomas (8 [8.7%]) and neuroendocrine malignancies (8 [8.7%]). Choriocarcinomas, GBMs, and colorectal cancers each represented 5 (5.4%) patients. There were 31 (33.7) other malignancies, which included 5 (5.4%) sarcomas, 3 (3.3%) high-grade undifferentiated malignancies, and 2 (2.2%) other central nervous system (CNS) tumors. A full list is given in Supporting Appendix 2.

OUTCOME OF OVERALL RECIPIENTS

The time to diagnosis for the overall population of recipients is shown in Fig. 2. The median time to cancer diagnosis was 7 months (IQR, 5-12 months) and at 1 and 2 years, 78.1% and 90.3% of recipients, respectively, were diagnosed. There was no significant difference between males and females (log-rank $P = 0.52$) or

TABLE 2. Characteristics of Recipients by Cancer Type

	Lymphoma (n = 30)	Melanoma (n = 8)	Neuroendocrine (n = 8)	GBM Multiform (n = 5)	Choriocarcinoma (n = 5)	Colorectal (n = 5)	Other (n = 31)	Total (n = 92)
Percent of total	32.6	8.7	8.7	5.4	5.4	5.4	33.7	100
Age, years								
Median (range) (IQR)	51.5 (18-62)	49.5 (35-62)	45 (33-60)	28 (14-29)	57 (18-64)	59 (53-66)	55 (1-73)	52 (1-73)
Mean ± SD	48.4 ± 9.6	47.5 ± 10.1	47.2 ± 10.8	23.7 ± 8.4	46.3 ± 24.8	59.6 ± 4.8	51.6 ± 17.4	49 ± 14.2
Sex								
Male	23 (76.7)	4 (50)	5 (62.5)	0 (0)	1 (20)	4 (80)	16 (51.6)	53 (57.6)
Female	5 (16.6)	2 (25)	1 (12.5)	2 (40)	3 (60)	1 (20)	6 (19.4)	20 (21.7)
NA	2 (6.7)	2 (25)	2 (25)	3 (60)	1 (20)	0 (0)	9 (29)	19 (20.7)
Localization								
Graft	25 (83.3)	1 (12.5)	2 (25)	1 (20)	0 (0)	5 (100)	12 (38.7)	46 (50)
Metastasizing	1 (3.3)	5 (62.5)	4 (50)	4 (80)	5 (100)	0 (0)	10 (32.3)	29 (31.5)
NA	4 (13.3)	2 (25)	2 (25)	0 (0)	0 (0)	0 (0)	9 (29)	17 (18.5)

NOTE: Data are given as n (%) unless otherwise noted.

between localized or metastasizing malignancies (log-rank $P = 0.86$).

The OS for the overall population of recipients after cancer diagnosis is shown in Fig. 3. The median OS was 37 months (IQR, 2-78 months), with 55.7% and 51.8% of recipients alive at 1 and 2 years after cancer diagnosis, respectively. There was no significant difference according to sex (log-rank $P = 0.19$). The median OS for recipients with a metastasizing malignancy was 2 months (IQR, 1-9 months), whereas recipients with localized malignancies did better (log-rank $P < 0.0001$). Therefore, it was not possible to determine the median survival, with 87.7% recipients alive at 24 months and at end of available follow-up. In the univariate regression analysis, the recipient age did not appear to be associated with OS (hazard ratio [HR], 1.86; 95% confidence interval [CI], 0.89-3.88; $P = 0.10$), and the metastatic localization of cancer was the strongest prognostic factor associated with a bad outcome (HR, 13.58; CI, 4.61-40.04; $P < 0.0001$). Sex was not associated with OS (HR, 1.70; 95% CI, 0.77-3.75; $P = 0.19$), nor was treatment other than retransplant (HR, 2.14; 95% CI, 0.86-5.59; $P = 0.10$). In the multivariate regression analysis, only metastasizing cancer retained a strong adverse prognostic value (HR, 12.56; 95% CI, 3.85-40.97; $P < 0.0001$). Sex (HR, 1.11; 95% CI, 0.45-2.74; $P = 0.82$), age (HR, 2.10; 95% CI, 0.84-5.32; $P = 0.11$), and treatment (HR, 2.72; 95% CI, 0.95-7.73; $P = 0.06$) did not. No multicollinearity was detected (highest VIF, 1.12). The results of survival analysis are summarized in Table 3.

SUBGROUP OF THE MOST FREQUENT TUMORS

The time to diagnosis for the most frequent cancer types is shown in Fig. 4. The median time to diagnosis was 7 months (IQR, 4-8 months) for lymphoma, 9 months (IQR, 6-15 months) for melanoma, and 9.5 months (IQR, 8-12 months) for neuroendocrine malignancies (log-rank $P = 0.003$). All melanomas and lymphomas were diagnosed in the first 2 years after transplantation, whereas a case of a neuroendocrine tumor was discovered after 5 years.

The OS for the 3 most frequent tumors is shown in Fig. 5. Recipients with lymphoma had better survival than recipients with melanoma or neuroendocrine tumors (log-rank test pairwise comparisons with post hoc correction, $P < 0.0001$ and $P = 0.02$, respectively), with approximately 79% of lymphoma recipients

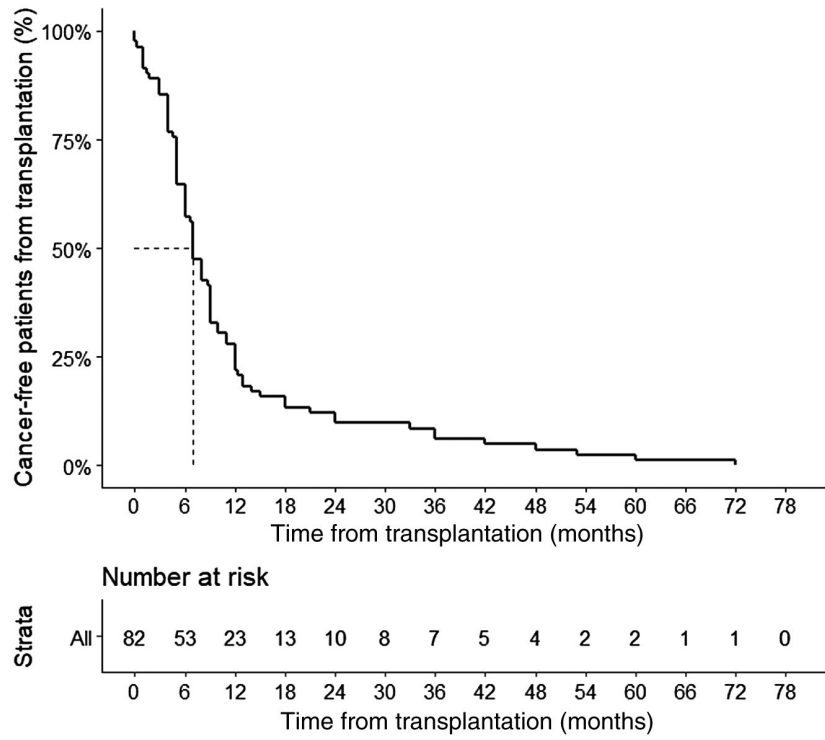


FIG. 2. Time to cancer diagnosis from transplantation for all recipients.

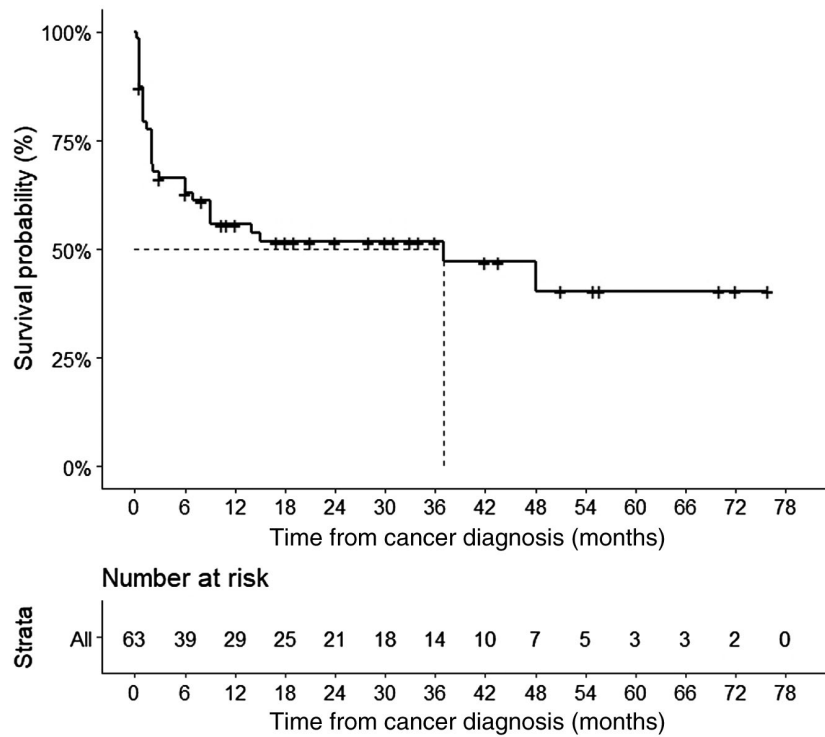


FIG. 3. OS after cancer diagnosis for all recipients.

TABLE 3. Results of the Survival Analysis

Variable	Univariate Analysis		Multivariate Analysis	
	HR (95% CI)	P Value	HR (95% CI)	P Value
Sex	1.70 (0.77-3.75)	0.19	1.11 (0.45-2.74)	0.82
Age	1.86 (0.89-3.88)	0.10	2.10 (0.84-5.32)	0.11
Localization	13.58 (4.61-40.04)	<0.0001	12.56 (3.85-40.97)	<0.0001
Treatment other than retransplant	2.14 (0.86-5.59)	0.10	2.72 (0.95-7.73)	0.06
Subgroup of most frequent cancers*				
Sex	1.35 (0.36-5.01)	0.65	—	
Age	0.97 (0.93-1.02)	0.19	0.97 (0.91-1.04)	0.37
Localization	14.89 (3.15-70.40)	0.0007	4.15 (0.19-92.34)	0.37
Treatment other than retransplant	1.23 (0.25-6.10)	0.80	—	
Diagnosis of melanoma (reference: lymphoma)	18.12 (4.38-75.07)	<0.0001	6.20 (0.16-248.01)	0.33
Diagnosis of neuroendocrine cancer (reference: lymphoma)	4.79 (1.19-19.32)	0.03	11.06 (0.17-711.42)	0.25

*Most frequent cancers: lymphoma, melanoma, and neuroendocrine cancer.

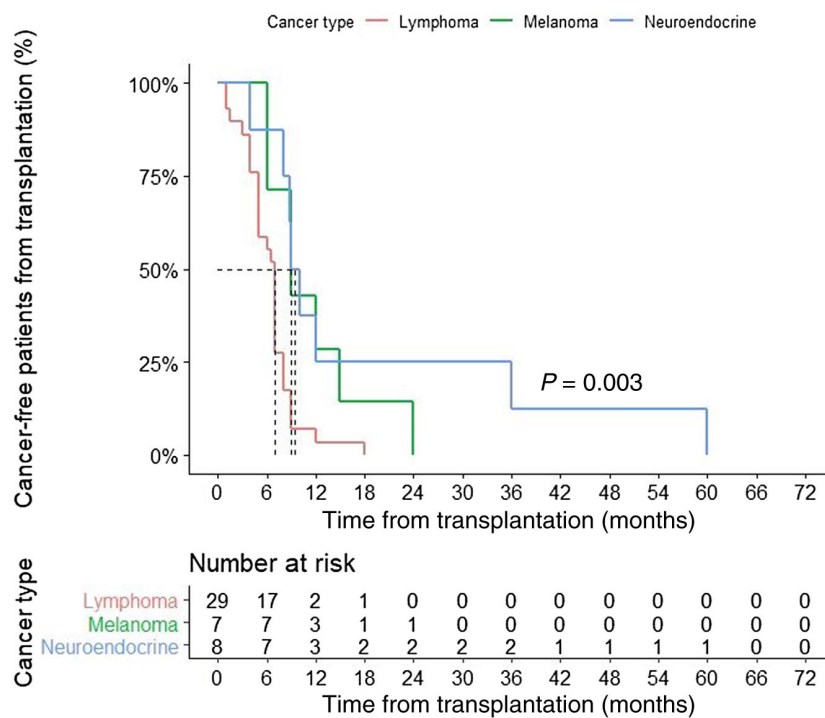


FIG. 4. Time to cancer diagnosis from transplantation for the most frequent cancers.

alive at 2 years after diagnosis. The median OS for melanoma and neuroendocrine cancer recipients was 1 month (IQR, 0.5-2 months) and 9 months (IQR, 6-48 months), respectively. Of the 8 neuroendocrine cancer recipients, 5 (62.5%) died of the disease, but complete data on follow-up time were missing for 1 of

them. Of the 8 melanomas, complete follow-up data were missing for 3 of them; however, the other 5 all had metastasizing malignancy and died from the disease at 1 year after diagnosis. In the univariate regression analysis, a diagnosis of melanoma or neuroendocrine cancer was associated with a worse prognosis with

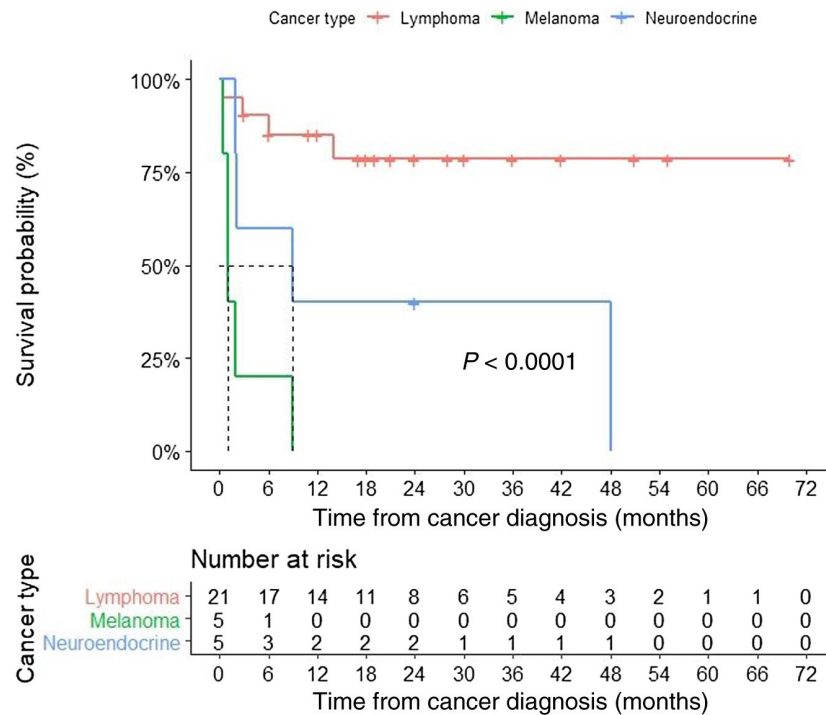


FIG. 5. OS for recipients with the most frequent cancers.

variable statistical significance. As shown in Table 3, for melanoma the HR was 18.12 (95% CI, 4.38-75.07; $P < 0.0001$). For neuroendocrine cancer, the HR was 4.79 (95% CI, 1.19-19.32; $P = 0.03$). However, in the multivariate model, the HRs were not statistically significant for these cancers: melanoma (HR, 6.20; 95% CI, 0.16-248.01; $P = 0.33$) and neuroendocrine (HR, 11.06; 95% CI, 0.17-711.42; $P = 0.25$). None of the other variables that entered the multivariate analysis reached significance to be kept in the model. No multicollinearity was detected (highest VIF, 4.77). The results of the survival analysis are summarized in Table 3.

OTHER OUTCOMES

In the subgroup of recipients with localized cancer, tumor excision followed by retransplant or retransplant alone was the treatment of choice in 18 (39.1%) patients. In this subgroup, for recipients undergoing retransplant, there was a tendency to better survival than recipients treated with chemotherapy or only reduction of immunosuppression; however, this did not reach statistical significance ($P = 0.11$, data not shown).

Chemotherapy alone was the most common treatment of lymphoma patients (11 out of 30 patients; 36.7%), and excision and retransplant/retransplant alone was the treatment in 80% of colorectal cancer recipients, all of which were limited to the graft. None of the melanoma recipients underwent retransplant, and 3 (37.5%) patients were treated with chemotherapy alone.

Discussion

Because of this imbalance between the supply and demand for organs, to increase the donor pool, donors with a history or a current diagnosis of malignancy are being considered by some centers. Although the risk of cancer transmission appears to be low, with reported incidences of approximately 0.03%-0.06%, a transmission event has severe consequences.^(5,18-21) This has been studied the most in renal recipients, and our aim was to provide some insights on the outcome and characteristics of the liver transplant recipients with transmitted cancer, given also that no clearly systematic study on the topic is present to date in the literature⁽²⁾ and that livers in theory

are more likely to carry tumor cells because they are more often the site of metastases.⁽¹⁴⁾ Publications on cancer transmission in the liver are less numerous than in kidney recipients where this issue has been already systematically explored.

The present study suggests that in most patients, the diagnosis of cancer is made soon after transplant, with 78% of recipients developing transmitted cancer before 12 months. Although transmission is a rare occurrence, a higher index of suspicion while managing patients in the first posttransplant year is warranted.

According to our findings, melanoma and neuroendocrine cancers have the worst prognosis, with no melanoma recipients alive at 2 years and 40% OS for neuroendocrine cancer. In comparison, the prognosis of recipients developing lymphoma is more favorable, with a 2-year survival rate of more than 75%. A similar review on kidney recipients by Xiao et al., in which lymphoma and melanoma were among the most common transmitted cancer, showed survival results comparable to ours.⁽¹⁾ The findings for melanoma are not surprising because the immunological background plays an important role in melanoma. Melanoma cells that have been dormant in the donor for years can reactivate in an immunocompromised host and give rise to a metastatic spread.⁽²²⁾ At the same time, new available treatments with immune checkpoint inhibitors can offer an important therapeutic chance, as already seen in kidney recipients with transmitted melanoma.⁽²³⁾ Although the findings on the neuroendocrine tumors are partly unexpected, because there are some similarities with melanoma, with early onset, widespread metastases, and a bad prognosis, further investigations of possible immunological interactions could be warranted.⁽²⁴⁾ Furthermore, poor prognosis of transmitted neuroendocrine tumors makes tumor discovery even more important and could suggest the opportunity for blood tests for hormone-producing tumors in the donor. Survival curves were not obtained in other cancer groups because of the extremely low numbers, but we can point out some observations. All 5 choriocarcinomas had metastasized at the time of diagnosis, and all recipients died of the disease. Similar findings apply to GBM recipients, with 80% metastatic malignancies and 3 out of 5 dying of the disease. On the contrary, all colorectal cancers were limited to the graft, and only the recipient not undergoing retransplant died of the disease.⁽²⁵⁾ These findings

suggest that caution is advised in using organs from donors with high metastatic potential malignancies, weighting also the risk factors in single patients, whereas for other malignancies, if localization is limited to the graft, retransplantation, together with the new immunotherapy treatments, could be a feasible option.⁽²³⁾

Localization of the tumor to the liver appears to be the most important factor influencing outcomes. Metastatic disease at diagnosis is the strongest adverse prognostic factor, which is reasonable because cancer metastatic spread requires the recipient to undergo chemotherapy and precludes the chances of early retransplantation. This is compounded by the inability to stop or significantly reduce immunosuppression in liver recipients to achieve an immunological response against the donor cancer because, unlike in renal transplantation, there is no possibility of easy replacement therapy and returning to the waiting list.

Consideration also needs to be given to the management of the donors to identify potential risks. The donor had a clear history of cancer in only 8.9% of patients, and 5 of these were the GBMs. These, however, were from decades ago when donors with CNS malignancies were used even in the presence of risk factors such as surgery and ventricular shunts. Such cases are less likely to occur today because of their recognized risks.^(11,12) Evaluation of the donor is the item that is reported less frequently in an adequate manner, so we can only speculate on the consequences of a more careful evaluation. Autopsy led to the early discovery of cancer and prompted urgent retransplantation in 1 patient.⁽²⁶⁾ Routinely performing autopsies is now not considered cost-effective due to the low pickup rate and because it is not always accepted by families; therefore, a balanced use of radiological examinations should be part of the donor evaluation. An extensive instrumental/invasive evaluation of the donor is not viable or cost-effective because donors in intensive care units are clinically unstable, with a risk of organ damage. Recipients in life-threatening conditions cannot wait until results are available, so the opportunity to receive a transplant should be balanced against a transmission risk that has been shown to be low. Cerebral hemorrhage is the most frequently reported cause of death in our study donor population, ie, those with associated cancer transmissions; some of the tumors from these donors could be metastases of unknown primary, so particular attention should be paid to donors with

cerebrovascular hemorrhagic accidents of young age or without stroke risk factors. Indeed, a similar consideration is present in the early reports of choriocarcinoma transmission dating back to the late 1980s to early 1990s in which the donors were all young women dying of cerebral hemorrhage with no cerebrovascular risk factors.

Lymphoproliferative neoplasms are unlikely to be discovered before transplantation in the time constraints of donor evaluation because a neoplastic clone present in the donor cannot be discovered with routine evaluation, and therefore, there will always be a risk of transmission. Thus, a high level of suspicion during the first 2 years after transplantation to allow early detection is warranted. As already stated elsewhere, there is still ongoing controversy regarding whether lymphoma should be defined as DDC or DTC,^(1,27) with the majority of posttransplant lymphoproliferative disease of recipient origin, often after reactivation of previously acquired Epstein-Barr infection.⁽²⁸⁾ All the cases included in this study were of proven donor origin and diagnosed in the first 2 years after transplantation. Indeed, in 62% of patients, donor origin was established with molecular techniques clearly reported, whereas in the other 38% an epidemiological criterion was considered. Our study highlighted a median time to diagnosis of 7 months for lymphomas, and this is in line with present literature. In general, tumors arising after long intervals are regarded as DDC, but there is currently no established time limit to differentiate them.⁽⁹⁾ These tumors came from younger donors and were limited to the graft once developing, in contrast with what is more frequently encountered in lymphoproliferative disorders of host origin.⁽²⁹⁾ Therefore, such epidemiological considerations should be taken into account in the perspective of establishing updated guidelines both for management of donors with different characteristics and of recipients with different disease.⁽³⁰⁾

To the best of our knowledge, this is the first systematic review of published data on transmitted cancer in liver transplant recipients. We provide insights on the distribution and prognosis of recipients with transmitted cancers, confirming the worse prognosis of some cancer types and suggesting some important time points for recipients' follow-up. The main limitation of this study resides in the nature of the primary studies, which are mainly patient reports distributed over a wide time span. The lack of complete data could

have affected the reported distribution of donor and recipient characteristics and the estimates of times to diagnosis and survival probabilities. Indeed, inconsistent reporting of the various items, highly variable follow-up times, and the low number of some cancer types precluded a reliable evaluation of potential confounders, and for this reason, the analysis had to be limited to a few clear characteristics, such as age and sex of recipients, localization of tumor, and retransplant as reference treatment. Moreover, we could not address the issue that cancers with highest malignant potential were mostly metastatic, whereas lymphoma and colorectal cancers were localized. We were aware of this when considering the entire recipient population and trying to subgroup for the 3 most frequent tumors.

In conclusion, the present findings are similar to those of previous studies, but this more extensive study illuminated the importance of lymphomas, melanomas, and neuroendocrine tumors as the most frequently transmitted cancers in liver transplant recipients. Approximately 80% of cancer diagnoses were established in the first year after transplant. Melanomas and neuroendocrine cancers have the worst prognosis. Findings are comparable with those in the literature but will be refined in light of new treatment options. The results emphasize the importance of preventing tumor transmission and highlight how the localization of a tumor to the graft is the most important factor affecting prognosis, allowing for removal of the tumor by retransplantation.

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