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Oral Oncology

Letter to the editor

Letter to the Editor regarding, "The prognostic role of PD-L1 expression for survival in head and neck squamous cell carcinoma: A systematic review and meta-analysis"

Dear Editor,

We have been greatly interested in the study carried out by Yang et al. titled, "The prognostic role of PD-L1 expression for survival in head and neck squamous cell carcinoma: A systematic review and meta-analysis", published in the Oral Oncology journal in November of 2018 [1]. We would like to take this opportunity to present our views and opinions on this study, especially as we believe that this study holds potential future value, particularly due to the extensive search strategy that forms the basis for the presented analyses.

Adaptation of systematic review guidelines and registrations

A significant issue that presents itself when systematic reviews and meta-analysis are viewed retrospectively is the lack of homogeneity between similar such studies. For this reason, it is suggested that systematic reviews and meta-analysis follow a set of strict established guidelines, such as PRISMA, JBI or MOOSE, to better enable future research [2–4]. Furthermore, it is also suggested that the protocol of a systematic review or meta-analysis be registered in the PROSPERO database, to enable replication of the study as well as act as a guide for other similar studies [5]. Another study in the same issue of oral oncology conforms to the very guidelines that we have mentioned here [6]. As both these steps above were not mentioned in the study conducted by Yang et al., it would benefit readers if the authors elaborated on their reasons for forgoing this step while conducting the study.

HNSCC comprises neoplasms of nasopharynx region

Furthermore, we believe that not including neoplasms originating the nasopharynx region under HNSCC is an oversight. Cancers arising in the nasopharynx region are traditionally classified under head and neck cancers based on the standard topographical classification of cancers [6]. By excluding cancers occurring in the nasopharyngeal region, the systematic review and meta-analysis exclude a significant subset of HNSCC, thereby reducing the applicability of the results presented in the study.

TNM staging of the included studies

We would also like to suggest that including the TNM staging information for each included study, would enrich the data presented in this study. It also offers future researchers to use the presented data more flexible for their studies and would serve to increase the utility of Yang et al. 's work.

Recent advances

PD-L1 has been shown as a viable target for anti-cancer therapy, with potential for widespread clinical application. Recent studies have both, discussed and demonstrated its practical use, with a study discussing a circulating tumour-cell based assay to screen for PD-L1/anti-PD-L1 treatment sensitive patients, while the other study used PD-L1 as a marker to gauge sensitivity of HNC to nivolumab [7,8]. Furthermore, PD-L1's effectiveness as a treatment target in specific cases like HIV-infected HNC has also been explored, with promising results [9]. As Yang et. al.'s study aims to cumulate data and inform on the prognostic utility of PD-L1, the aforementioned recent findings in the field could also be described and discussed.

We hope that the authors address the points presented and that the overall discussion of the presented points will only serve to benefit the research community at large.

Declarations

Ethics approval and consent to participate

Not applicable.

Consent for publication

Not applicable.

Availability of data and materials

Not applicable.

Competing interests

The authors confirmed that they have no competing interests.

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Authors' contributions

RJ is primarily conceived of this critical review and led the development of the letter to the editor. Both RJ and CK wrote the first draft of the letter, and coordinated and integrated comments from co-authors, SR and PS critically revised and edited successive drafts of the manuscript. RJ, CK, SR and PS read and approved the final version of the manuscript

Conflict of interest

All authors declared that they have no conflict of interest.

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