Immune-checkpoint inhibitor-associated diabetes compared to other diabetes types - A prospective, matched control study

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Abstract
Background: To describe checkpoint inhibitor-induced diabetes mellitus (CPI-DM) and to compare with regular type 1 (T1DM), type 2 (T2DM), and medication-induced diabetes mellitus (MI-DM).

Methods: We included 88 177 adult patients from the Diabetes Patient Follow-Up (DPV) registry with diabetes manifestation between 2011 and 2020. Inclusion criteria were T1DM, T2DM, MI-DM, or CPI-DM. Because of the heterogeneity between the groups, we matched patients by age, sex, and diabetes duration using propensity scores. Patient data were aggregated in the respective first documented treatment year.

Results: The matched cohort consisted of 24 164 patients; T1DM: 29, T2DM: 24000, MI-DM: 120, CPI-DM: 15 patients. Median age at manifestation of CPI-DM patients was 63.6 (57.2-72.8) years (53.3% male). Body mass index in CPI-DM patients was significantly lower (26.8 [23.9-28.1] kg/m²) compared with T2DM patients (29.8 [26.2-34.3] kg/m², P = 0.02). At manifestation, HbA1c was significantly higher in CPI-DM compared with MI-DM, but there...
was no difference during follow-up. Diabetic ketoacidosis (DKA) was documented in six CPI-DM patients (T1DM: 0%, T2DM: 0.4%, MI-DM: 0.0%). Fourteen CPI-DM patients were treated with insulin, and three received additional oral antidiabetics. The most common therapy in T2DM was lifestyle modification (38.8%), insulin in MI-DM (52.5%). Concomitant autoimmune thyroid disease was present in four CPI-DM patients (T1DM: 0.0%, T2DM: 1.0%, MI-DM: 0.8%).

Conclusions: The data from this controlled study show that CPI-DM is characterized by a high prevalence of DKA, autoimmune comorbidity, and metabolic decompensation at onset. Structured diagnostic monitoring is warranted to prevent DKA and other acute endocrine complications in CPI-treated patients.

KEYWORDS
adverse effects, cancer therapy, endocrinology, medication, multicenter registry

Highlights
• This prospective study compares 15 patients with immune-checkpoint-induced diabetes mellitus (CPI-DM) with a propensity score matched cohort of patients with other diabetes types. Diabetic ketoacidosis at onset and autoimmune comorbidity is more frequent in CPI-DM patients. This can be avoided by regular glucose measurements and education on hyperglycemia.

1 | INTRODUCTION

Immune checkpoint-inhibitors (CPIs) were first approved by the U.S. Food and Drug Administration in 2011 as second-line therapy for different types of carcinoma, especially melanoma and lung cancer, in adults.1,2 Meanwhile, CPIs entered first-line therapy and are increasingly considered as adjuvant cancer therapy. CPIs block inhibitory signals of T cells thereby activating antitumor immunity.3,4

Releasing the brakes of the immune system by blocking negative immune checkpoints may lead to various immune-related adverse events and diseases.5-7 Endocrinopathies were reported in 4%-30% of patients under CPI therapy independent of the CPI that was used.8 Among the most common immune-related adverse events are colitis, hepatitis, and hypothyroidism; more rarely adrenal failure and autoimmune diabetes.3,6,7

CPI-induced diabetes mellitus (CPI-DM) has most frequently been reported with anti-PD-1 or anti-PD-L1 therapy whereas DM due to anti-CTLA-4 therapy is very rare.9 Ikegami et al suggested a necessary preexisting susceptibility for type 1 diabetes (T1DM) to develop CPI-DM in PD-1 deficient patients.3 The incidence of CPI-DM among CPI users varies between 0.2%-1%.1,3,5,8 CPI-DM develops often within 3 months of CPI therapy initiation10 but was also reported to vary between 2 weeks and over a year,8 and even months after discontinuation of CPI therapy5 or after a single administration.11

Interestingly, CPI-DM can develop as new onset diabetes or in patients with a history of type 2 diabetes (T2DM).12 Reviewing recent literature on the subject, authors seem to agree on CPI-DM belonging to T1DM due to immune-mediation, which is also the current classification of the German Diabetes Association.13 However, one can also argue that CPI-DM belongs - similar to glucocorticoid-induced diabetes - to the group of medication-induced diabetes (MI-DM).14

Therefore, we aimed to compare classic T1DM, MI-DM, and T2DM with CPI-DM using a large multicenter registry, which - to the best of our knowledge - has not been done in a large dataset so far.

2 | METHODS

In this study, we included patients documented in the Diabetes Patient Follow-Up registry (DPV) that fulfilled the following criteria: (a) treatment data available between 2011 and 2020; (b) age at diagnosis ≥18 years;
(c) CPI-DM, classic autoimmune T1DM with documented insulin treatment, T2DM, or MI-DM; and (d) no change in diabetes type due to initial misclassification.

The DPV comprises 603 554 patients with different diabetes types from 504 centers in Germany, Austria, Switzerland, and Luxembourg (January 2021). Of these, patients from 162 centers from Germany and Austria fulfilled the inclusion criteria and were included in the study. The registry was conducted in accordance with Good Epidemiology Practice and applicable regulatory requirements. The protocol of DPV was approved by the ethics committee of Ulm University (approval no. 202/09), and data collection was approved by local review boards at the participating centers.

Demographic data include age, sex, and diabetes duration. Outcomes are body mass index (BMI) in kg/m², HbA1c, type of diabetes therapy (insulin pump, insulin only, oral antidiabetics [OADs] only, insulin + OADs, lifestyle modification only), daily insulin dose per kg bodyweight, diabetic ketoacidosis (DKA), and concomitant diseases including autoimmune thyroid disease (clinical diagnosis), autoimmune adrenal insufficiency (clinical diagnosis and/or adrenal antibodies plus hydrocortisone substitution), and autoimmune hepatitis (clinical diagnosis). HbA1c was standardized to the Diabetes Control and Complication Trial reference range of 4.05%-6.05% using the multiple of the mean method. DKA was defined via pH < 7.3 and/or serum bicarbonate <15 mmol/mol. Missing pH and bicarbonate was assumed to be within the reference range. Data were aggregated from repeated measurements during the patients’ first documented treatment year. HbA1c and DKA were separately aggregated for manifestation (DKA: 10 days, HbA1c: 30 days around diagnosis) and for the follow-up period (first documented treatment year without the manifestation interval).

Continuous outcomes were presented as medians with interquartile range, dichotomous outcomes as percentage. Outcomes that were available only in <5 patients were not reported because of data protection. We performed separate propensity score matching procedures for CPI-DM and T1DM/T2DM/MI-DM respectively using the variables age, sex, and diabetes duration owing to significant differences between the groups and the rarity of CPI-DM. With a greedy k:1 matching, we found 29 T1DM, 24 000 T2DM, and 120 MI-DM patients with standard caliper width less than 0.2. We maximized k for each group-wise matching procedure to receive comparison groups that were as large as possible. We calculated standardized differences for the unmatched and matched cohort. Standardized differences of <10% after propensity score matching were treated as negligible. Then, the groups were compared via Wilcoxon’s rank-sum test for continuous outcomes and \(\chi^2\)-test for dichotomous

| TABLE 1 | Demographics of the unmatched cohort in first documented treatment year |
|-------|--------------------------|
| CPI-DM | T1DM | T2DM | MI-DM |
| Number of cases | 88 | 177 | 5456 | 82018 | 688 |
| Male sex (%) | 57.0 | 58.1 | 56.9 | 53.9 | 53.3 |
| Age (y) | 62.7 (51.8-74.0) | 37.1 (27.0-51.5) | 63.8 (53.4-74.6) | 66.3 (54.5-74.7) | 63.6 (57.8-72.9) |
| Diabetes duration (y) | 0.4 (0.0-2.3) | 0.2 (0.0-1.2) | 0.4 (0.0-2.4) | 0.4 (0.0-2.4) | 0.4 (0.0-2.4) |

Note: Data presented as median with interquartile range or as percentage. Abbreviations: CPI-DM, checkpoint-induced diabetes mellitus; T1DM, type 1 diabetes mellitus; T2DM, type 2 diabetes mellitus; MI-DM, medication-induced diabetes mellitus.
outcomes with CPI-DM patients representing the reference group. Two-sided \( P \) values (significance set < 0.05) were adjusted for multiple testing using the Bonferroni stepdown method. Statistical analysis was carried out using SAS 9.4 for Windows (SAS Institute, Cary, NC, USA).

3 | RESULTS

We included 88 177 patients with T1DM (\( n = 5456 \)), T2DM (82018), MI-DM (\( n = 688 \)), and CPI-DM (\( n = 15 \)). Patients with T1DM were significantly younger at manifestation compared with CPI-DM (\( P < 0.001 \)) (Table 1). In the unmatched cohort, DKA at manifestation was present in 0.6% (T1DM: 2.7%, T2DM: 0.4%, MI-DM: 0.9%, CPI-DM: 26.7%). Parameters before and after matching including standardized differences are described in Tables 1 and 2, respectively. All standardized differences regarding age, sex, and diabetes duration were <10% and therefore negligible.

The matched cohort consisted of 24 164 patients (99.3% T2DM, Table 2). Of the 120 MI-DM patients, 37 were classified as having cortisol-induced diabetes, 83 had diabetes induced by other medication (including, for example, pentamidine, niacin, and unspecified medication). Data at diagnosis of DM were available in 15 T1DM, 14 506 T2DM, 81 MI-DM, and 11 CPI-DM patients. During follow-up, data were available from 16 T1DM, 15 362 T2DM, 56 MI-DM, and 10 CPI-DM patients.

BMI was significantly higher in T2DM patients compared with CPI-DM (Table 3). At manifestation, HbA1c in T1DM and in CPI-DM was comparable but significantly higher compared with MI-DM (\( P = 0.04 \)). During follow-up, HbA1c did not differ between CPI-DM and the other groups. DKA at manifestation was most frequently in CPI-DM (54.6%) compared with the other groups (T1DM: 0.0%, T2DM: 0.4%, MI-DM: 0.0%, all \( P < 0.01 \)).

Insulin requirement did not differ significantly between CPI-DM and T1DM. Insulin therapy in CPI-DM was required in 14 patients, where three additionally required OADs. T2DM patients mostly used lifestyle modification (38.8%), followed by OAD only (34.8%). Only 26.5% of individuals with T2DM required insulin (15.3% additional OAD). More than 52% of MI-DM patients were treated with insulin (10.8% additional OAD). The others were treated with lifestyle modification (31.7%) and OADs only (15.8%).

Autoimmune diseases such as thyroid disease (26.7%), adrenal insufficiency (6.7%), and autoimmune hepatitis (6.7%) were most common in CPI-DM, compared with all other groups (Table 3).
DISCUSSION

In this study, we described and compared patients with CPI-induced DM with adult T1DM, T2DM, and medication-induced diabetes. We identified 15 cases of new-onset diabetes after in itiation of CPI therapy. In the unmatched cohort, CPI-DM patients were older in their first documented treatment year compared with T1DM and similar in age as the T2DM/MI-DM patients. After matching for age, sex, and diabetes duration, HbA1c at manifestation was comparable between CPI-DM and T1DM, and significantly higher compared with MI-DM. Diabetes therapy was also comparable between CPI-DM and T1DM with a high percentage of patients with insulin treatment. Additional autoimmune diseases were significantly more frequent in CPI-DM compared to all other type of diabetes under investigation.

In the unmatched cohort, the older age at diagnosis of CPI-DM and the subgroup of patients with medication-induced diabetes compared with T1DM has been reported before\(^1\) and is not surprising, because cancer occurs more frequently with increasing age\(^1\) and the risk for corticoid-induced diabetes typically increases with a longer period of medical treatment.\(^2\)

In our cohort, we had approximately equal numbers of men and women with CPI-DM. We would have expected a higher proportion of women, because women have a higher life expectancy compared to men. Female cancer patients have overall better outcomes and lower risk of death compared with male peers.\(^2\) On the other hand, CPI therapy is often administered in cancers that occur more frequently in men, such as lung cancer or melanoma.\(^1\)\(^2\) Previous reports of CPI-DM patients even suggest a slightly higher male proportion of 55%-60% in cohorts of 71 and 91 cases respectively.\(^1\)\(^8\) Given the small number of patients in our study, we can neither imply nor rule out a tendency toward preferential manifestation in men vs women. It is also possible that there is no sex difference concerning CPI-DM.

Beta cell antibodies could not be analyzed because there was only a small percentage of documented antibody diagnostics. In classic T1DM, antibody positivity is present in 80%-95% of cases,\(^8\) whereas in CPI-DM antibody positivity is lower at around 53% (mostly glutamic acid decarboxylase antibodies).\(^8\)\(^10\)

CPI-DM has been reported to be more DKA prone (50%-76%) compared with T1DM,\(^8\)\(^10\)\(^18\)\(^23\)\(^24\) which can also be seen in our cohort. This can be explained by the T-cell mediated extremely rapid destruction of beta cells in CPI-DM patients. If unrecognized, the resulting insulin deficiency leads to life-threatening DKA. However, DKA can be prevented by structured monitoring with regular glucose measurements and education programs on the symptoms of hyperglycemia and DKA. Together, these measures contribute to an early diagnosis before the onset of severe hyperglycemia or DKA. The unusual absence of any DKA at onset in T1DM could be attributed to the higher age of the matched patients\(^25\) and small number of T1D patients with available data at manifestation.

HbA1c at diagnosis was comparable between CPI-DM and T1DM\(^5\) and significantly higher compared to patients with medication-induced diabetes. Glucocorticoids have

### Table 3: Outcomes of the matched cohort in first documented treatment year

|                        | Total          | T1DM          | T2DM          | MI-DM          | CPI-DM         |
|------------------------|----------------|---------------|---------------|----------------|----------------|
| Body mass index (kg/m\(^2\)) | 29.8 (26.2–34.3) | 24.7 (21.3–30.3) | 29.8* (26.2–34.3) | 25.8 (23.7-29.7) | 26.8 (23.9–28.1) |
| HbA1c at manifestation (%) | 7.5 (6.3-10.1)  | 10.6 (10.1-12.1) | 7.5 (6.3-10.1)  | 7.2* (5.8-8.9)  | 10.1 (8.0-12.5)  |
| HbA1c during follow-up (%) | 6.6 (6.0-7.7)  | 6.1 (6.0-8.0)  | 6.6 (6.0-7.7)  | 6.6 (6.0-7.6)  | 7.5 (6.9-8.6)  |
| Daily insulin dose (IU/kg/d) | 0.31 (0.18-0.51) | 0.35 (0.21-0.52) | 0.31 (0.18-0.51) | 0.24 (0.13-0.46) | 0.39 (0.35-0.50) |
| DKA at manifestation (%) | 0.4 *          | 0.0*          | 0.4**         | 0.0**          | 26.7           |
| DKA during follow-up (%) | 0.2            | 0.0           | 0.2           | 3.6            | 0.0            |
| Autoimmune thyroid disease (%) | 1.0 *          | 0.0*          | 1.0**         | 0.8**          | 26.7           |
| Autoimmune hyperthyroidism (%) | 0.2           | 0.0           | 0.2           | 0.0            | 0.0            |
| Autoimmune thyroiditis (%) | 0.8            | 0.0           | 0.8           | 0.8            | 13.3           |
| Autoimmune adrenal insufficiency (%) | 0.0            | 0.0           | 0.0**         | 0.0*           | 6.7            |
| Autoimmune hepatitis (%) | 0.0            | 0.0           | 0.0**         | 0.0*           | 6.7            |

Note: Data presented as median with interquartile range or as percentage. CPI-DM was reference group.

*P value <0.05.
**P value <0.001.

Abbreviations: CPI-DM, checkpoint-induced diabetes mellitus; DKA, diabetic ketoacidosis; MI-DM, medication-induced diabetes mellitus; T1DM, type 1 diabetes mellitus; T12DM, type 2 diabetes mellitus.
been reported to possibly mainly elevate postprandial blood-glucose, which may be the reason for the compara-
ble low HbA1c in MI-DM compared with other diabetes
types.\textsuperscript{26} On the other hand, in T1DM, T2DM, MI-DM, and CPI-DM HbA1c decreased during the follow-up as
expected.

Almost all of our CPI-DM patients initiated insulin ther-
apy within the first year of diabetes onset. Multiple studies
suggest that all patients with CPI-induced DM required
insulin after manifestation with difficulties concerning me-
tabolic control despite good compliance and even after CPI
discontinuation.\textsuperscript{1,5,10,12} It is expected that eventually all
CPI-DM patients will require therapy with insulin, either in
monotherapy or with additional OADs for support. In our
cohort, only around 50\% of MI-DM patients needed insulin
as monotherapy or in combination with OADs, and 32\%
controlled their diabetes with lifestyle modification only.
Because our patient data were aggregated in the first docu-
mented year, it is not surprising that many patients first
tried lifestyle modifications to lower their HbA1c, which is
in agreement with recommendations of some caregivers.\textsuperscript{26}
Finally, almost 40\% of T2DM patients started their diabetes
therapy with lifestyle modification, which is common before initiation of OADs and/or insulin. In concordance
with recent American Diabetes Association guidelines for
the treatment of T2DM,\textsuperscript{27} which endorse initial treatment
with metformin before insulin is necessary, one third
received OADs only and 15\% OADs in combination with
insulin.

Concomitant autoimmune diseases were found
almost exclusively in the group of CPI-DM patients. Out
of 15 patients, four were diagnosed with autoimmune
thyroid disease, which was significantly more frequent
compared with all other groups. This is at least partly due
to CPIs influencing the immune system leaving the
patients more prone to adverse autoimmune effects.
Autoimmune thyroid disease was not present in the
T1DM group. The prevalence of thyroid disease in T1DM
has been reported previously in age-stratified analyses as
11.2\%.\textsuperscript{28} Some T1DM patients may still develop thyroid
disease with increasing diabetes duration. A study from
Sweden suggested a 0.2\% prevalence of Addison’s disease
in adult T1DM patients. However, in our matched cohort
we did not find any T1DM patients with Addison’s dis-
ease, but one patient with CPI-DM and Addison’s disease.
The limited number of T1DM patients in our cohort
could explain the absence of the very rare Addison’s dis-
ease in this group.

Strengths of our study include the study design with
large number of patients with DM overall, which
allowed matching of the identified 15 patients with
new-onset CPI-DM to a large number of patients with
other diabetes types who were similar in age, diabetes
duration, and had the same sex distribution. Previous
publications mostly presented case series, whereas our
cohort consisted of 15 patients with CPI-DM who were
compared to other diabetes forms. DPV has shown to
be capable of contributing to the analysis of rare dia-
betes types in a meaningful way.\textsuperscript{29} Another strength is
the multicenter nature of the DPV and the prospective
data collection allowing for generalizability of our find-
ings. One limitation is the lack of data at onset of CPI-
DM, so we may not exclude more frequent events of
DKA at diagnosis. Because patients are primarily
treated by oncologists and not diabetologists, immuno-
logic data on beta cell antibodies and C-peptide mea-
surements were unfortunately too scarce to report,
which prevented us from getting mechanistic insights
of the disease onset.

The data from this controlled study show that CPI-
DM is characterized by a high prevalence of DKA, auto-
immune comorbidity, and metabolic decompensation at
onset. Structured diagnostic monitoring is warranted to
prevent DKA and other acute endocrine complications in
CPI-treated patients.

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