ABSTRACT

Immunogenicity of SARS-CoV-2 mRNA vaccine in dialysis and kidney transplant patients: A systematic review

Kidney transplant recipients and dialysis patients constitute a risk group for severe COVID-19. They are highly advised to get vaccinated according to the current guidelines. However, data on antibody response, cell responses and protection from events, and factors that might alter this response after a routine full series of vaccination remain incomplete for these populations. The aim of this article was to analyze the antibody responses after a full series of...
mRNA-based SARS-CoV-2 vaccination in kidney transplantation and dialysis patients and to define the factors that alter seroconversion status in these populations. In this systematic review, 18 studies investigating the antibody response to full vaccination with two doses of COVID-19 mRNA vaccines in hemodialysis, peritoneal dialysis, and kidney transplant patients were included. Kidney transplant and dialysis patients have a lower seroconversion rate after mRNA-based SARS-CoV-2 vaccination than the healthy population: 27.2% for kidney transplantation, 88.5% for dialysis patients while all healthy control patients were seroconverted. Moreover, anti-S antibody titers were lower in seroconverted kidney transplantation or dialysis patients than in healthy control in all studies that assessed this variable. Older age and dialysis vintage, immunosuppressive or chemotherapy treatment, and lower serum albumin, white blood cell, lymphocyte and hemoglobin counts were associated with lower/no antibody response to vaccination. Dialysis patients and kidney transplant recipients have lower seroconversion rates after a full series of mRNA-based SARS-CoV-2 vaccination than the general population. Several factors are associated with an altered antibody response. A third dose could be considered in this patient group.

Key words: COVID-19; Biontech BNT162b2; Moderna mRNA-1273; vaccination

ÖZ

Diyaliz ve böbrek nakli hastalarda SARS-CoV-2 mRNA aşısı sonrası immunojenesite: Sistematik derleme

Böbrek nakilli ve diyaliz hastalar COVID-19 enleksiyonu açısından yüksek riskli gruplardır. Güncel klavuzlar bu nedenle bu hastaların öncelikli aşlanması gereken grupta olduğunu belirtmiştir. Bununla birlikte aşının yanısı antikor yanıtı, koruyuculuğu, hücresel immün yanıt üzerine etkileri net olarak bilinmemektedir. Bu sistematik derlemede mRNA-tipi SARS-CoV-2 aşılamanın böbrek nakli ve diyaliz hastalarda antikor yanıtını ve antikor yanıtın etkileyen faktörlerin araştırılması yapıldı. Bu sistemlik derlemeye 18 adet hemodiyaliz, periton diyaliz ve böbrek nakli hastalarında 2 doz COVID-19 mRNA aşısı uygulanan hastaların alınışı klinik çalışma dahil edildi. Çalışmalarda 2 doz COVID-19 mRNA aşısı sonrası böbrek nakli hastalarında %27,2, diyaliz hastalarında %88,5 antikor yanıtı saptantı olarak saflığı insanlarla %100 antikor yanıtı saptandı. İleri yaş, diyaziyal süresi, immünsüpresif tedavi, düşük serum alümin, düşük serum lökosit, düşük serum lenfosit, düşük hemoglobin düzeyleri düşük antikor yanıtı ile ilişkili olduğu saptandı. COVID-19 mRNA aşısı sonrası diyaliz ve böbrek nakli hastalarında antikor yanıtı düşüktür. Bu nedenle bu hasta grubunda üçüncü doz aşısı uygulanması uygun olabilir.

Anahtar kelimeler: COVID-19; Biontech BNT162b2; Moderna mRNA-1273; aşılama

INTRODUCTION

Coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19), caused by SARS-CoV-2, affects multiple organs including the kidneys and has spread to millions of people worldwide (1,2). COVID-19 in dialysis patients and solid organ transplant recipients is associated with a high morbidity and mortality (3-5). The reason is unclear, but it may be related to various immunosuppressive states or to cell and molecular changes secondary to uremia that facilitates virus entry into cells and proliferation. Transplant and dialysis patients are advised to get vaccinated against SARS-CoV-2 according to current guidelines despite the lack of data regarding efficacy in these populations (6-8). However, dialysis and kidney transplant patients present decreased immune responses to various vaccines (9). Furthermore, transplant recipients have not been included in phase 3 trials of SARS-CoV-2 vaccines, and no immunogenicity, efficacy and safety data is available from clinical trials for this vulnerable population (10,11). Therefore, we performed a systematic review, evaluating antibody response among hemodialysis (HD), peritoneal dialysis (PD) and kidney transplant (KT) patients 1-6 weeks after receiving the second dose of either one of the two mRNA vaccines (Biontech BNT162b2, Moderna mRNA-1273) currently in the market.

MATERIALS and METHODS

In this systematic review, we performed a literature search through three databases, including PubMed/ Medline, Google Scholar, and Web of Science from July 2020 to June 2021 by using the following key-words: “dialysis”, “chronic kidney disease”, “renal failure”, “renal transplant”, “kidney transplant”, “glomerulonephritis”, “COVID-19”, “coronavirus”, “vaccine”, “vaccination”, “antibody”, “efficacy”.

We independently assessed the titles, and the abstracts of each study, discussed and reexamined each article in detail until reaching a consensus if any conflicts were present and also analyzed the references of the selected studies. Following preliminary selection, we independently evaluated the full text versions of the selected studies.

Inclusion criteria for our systematic review were as follows: studies investigating the response to COVID-19 vaccine in HD, PD and KT patients. Studies in
which patients were fully vaccinated with 2 doses of COVID-19 mRNA vaccines, reported antibody response and determined outcomes as seroconverted and non-seroconverted were included.

We excluded studies in which patients were administered a single dose or an extra dose of COVID-19 mRNA vaccines and inactive COVID-19 vaccines. Preprints, editorials, case reports, systematic reviews and meta-analysis were excluded from this study.

Our literature search identified 74 results. After assessing each study according to our inclusion and exclusion criteria, we identified 18 manuscripts. Among the 18 studies, 4 studies included only KT patients (12-15), 10 studies included only HD (16-22) and/or PD patients (23-25) and 4 studies included both KT and HD/PD patients (26-29).

Table 1 shows a summary of the included studies. Table 2 delineates information on the baseline characteristics of KT patients and healthy controls (HC) and seroconversion status following a full series of SARS-CoV-2 vaccination. Table 3 provides information on the baseline characteristics of HD and PD patients and HC and seroconversion status following a full series of SARS-CoV-2 vaccination.

RESULTS

We included, in our final analysis, 18 prospective cohort studies (12-29) (Table 1). One study included KT, HD, PD, HC patients (29). One study included HD, PD, HC patients (25). Two studies included both HD and PD patients (23,24). Three studies included only HD patients (16-18). Four studies included both HD and HC patients (12,14). Two studies included KT and HC patients (13,15). One study included KT and HD patients (27). Two studies included KT, HD and HC patients (26,28). The total number of evaluated patients was 2453 which consisted of 1182 HD, 80 PD, 693 KT and 498 HC patients. All of the included studies used mRNA vaccines. Patients in each study received the BNT162b2 Pfizer-BioNTech mRNA vaccine. In addition, the mRNA-1273 Moderna vaccine was administered to the patients in two studies by Husain et al. (n= 12) and Broseta et al. (n= 100). All studies measured anti-spike protein antibody levels.

Antibody Response in KT Recipients

Table 2 depicts the baseline characteristics, seroconversion rates, comorbidities, primary kidney disease, and laboratory values of patients having undergone KT. The seroconversion rate in KT patients ranged from 2.5% to 37.5%. The overall seroconversion rate was 27.2% of KT studied. In 5 studies that also included HC, the seroconversion rate for KT ranged from 2.5% to 37.5% (overall 19.7%) and in HC it was 100%. However, the total number of HC (n= 129) was low, and they were generally younger (up to 13 years) than KT patients.

Rozen-Zvi et al. have reported that factors associated with positive antibody response are a higher estimated glomerular filtration rate (eGFR) (odds ratio (OR) 1.025 per mL/min/1.73 m², 95% confidence interval (CI) 1.014-1.037, p< 0.001), lower mycophenolic acid (MMF) dose (OR 2.347 per 360 mg decrease, 95% CI 1.782-3.089, p< 0.001), younger age (OR 1.032 per year decrease, 95%CI 1.015-1.05, p< 0.001) and lower calcineurin inhibitor (CNI) blood levels (14). Husain et al. have observed lower antibody responses in patients on immunosuppressive regimens, especially in those including belatacept and MMF (12). Bertrand et al. have identified a negative impact of the immunosuppressive regimen, particularly tacrolimus or belatacept, on antibody response (27). Korth et al. have reported no differences in age, sex and immunosuppressive drug regimens in patients who were seroconverted and non-seroconverted for anti-S IgG antibodies (15). In contrast, Danthu et al. have reported only 3 KT patients among 74 with a positive antibody response, all of whom were receiving cyclosporine monotherapy (28). However, most non-converters received MMF in their combination therapies. Sattler et al. have observed a non-significant trend for an association of seroconversion with younger age in KT patients (P=0.0568) (26). The poor immune response in their cohort has been associated with MMF use by all patients and a high percentage of patients using glucocorticoids. Grupper et al. have listed variables associated with absent antibody response as high-dose corticosteroids in the last 12 months (OR 1.3 [95% CI 1.09-1.86]), older age (OR 1.66 [95% CI 1.17-2.69]), maintenance of triple immunosuppression (OR 1.43 [95% CI 1.06-2.15]), and regimens that include MMF (OR 1.47 [95% CI 1.26-2.27]) (13). It has been concluded that positive antibody response is associated with younger age, shorter maintenance dialysis vintage before transplantation, longer time since transplantation, a higher prevalence of living donors, higher eGFR, higher mean hemoglobin and higher
## Table 1. Summary of the 18 included studies. Vaccines are as follow: mRNA-1273 (Moderna), BNT162b2 SARS-CoV-2 (Pfizer-BioNTech)

| Author         | Country   | Study design             | Patient population | Vaccine                          | Sample size | Outcome/Criteria for positive response | Timing of blood sampling after full vaccination | Seroconversion rate |
|----------------|-----------|--------------------------|--------------------|----------------------------------|-------------|----------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------|---------------------|
| Agur et al.    | Israel    | Prospective cohort       | HD, PD             | Pfizer-BioNTech, 21 days apart   | 122 HD, 23 PD | Anti-S IgG≥50 AU/mL                    | 2-6 weeks                                                      | 93.44% HD, 95.65% PD |
| Attias et al.  | France    | Cohort study             | HD                 | Pfizer-BioNTech                  | 52 HD       | Anti-S1 IgG signal-to-cutoff > 1; gray zone, 0.8-1. Anti-S1-RBD IgG >1 and identification of activated CD4+ 3 weeks after completion of vaccination | Weekly until 3 weeks after second dose | 82.69% HD          |
| Bros et al.    | Spain     | Prospective cohort       | HD                 | Moderna (100 pt), 28 days, Pfizer-BioNTech (75 pt), 21 days | 175 HD   | Seroconversion rate                    | 3 weeks                                                      | 95.42% HD          |
| Frantzen et al.| France    | Prospective cohort       | HD                 | Pfizer-BioNTech, 21 days apart   | 244 HD      | Anti-S, cut-off 15 U/mL                | 1 month                                                       | 90.57% HD          |
| Grupper et al. | Israel    | Prospective cohort       | HD, HC             | Pfizer-BioNTech, 21 days apart   | 56 HD, 95 HC | Anti-S IgG ≥50 AU/mL                   | 3 weeks                                                      | 96.43% HD, 100% HC |
| Jahn et al.    | Germany   | Cohort study/communication | HD, HC             | Pfizer-BioNTech, 3-4 weeks apart | 72 HD, 16 HC | Anti-S IgG ≥13.0 AU/mL                | 14 days                                                       | 93.06% HD, 100% HC |
| Longlune et al.| France    | Cohort study             | HD, PD             | Pfizer-BioNTech, 28 days apart   | 82 HD, 20 PD | Anti-S/Control > 1.1                  | 1 month                                                       | 84.15% HD, 85% PD  |
| Simon et al.   | Austria   | Cohort study             | HD, HC             | Pfizer-BioNTech, 21 days apart   | 81 HD, 80 HC | Anti-S >29 U/ml                       | 21 days                                                      | 72.83% HD, 100% HC |
| Speer et al.   | Germany   | Cohort study/ original article | HD, HC             | Pfizer-BioNTech, 19-22 days apart | 17 HD, 46 HC | Anti-S1 semi-quantitative index ≥ 1   | 18-22 days                                                  | 82.35% HD, 100% HC |
| Yanay et al.   | Israel    | Cohort study/ letter to the editor | HD, PD, HC         | Pfizer/BioNTech                  | 127 HD, 33 PD, 132 HC | Anti-S                              | Anti-S IgG ≥50 AU/mL | 2-6 weeks | 90.0% HD, 90% PD |
| Husain et al.  | USA       | Prospective cohort       | KT                 | Moderna (12), Pfizer-BionTech (16) | 28 KT       | Anti-S IgG                            | 1 month                                                      | 70.45% HD, 26% KT |
| Rincon-Areval oal et al. | Germany | Prospective cohort       | KT, HD, PD, HC     | Pfizer-BionTech, 21 days apart   | 40 HD, 4 PD, 40 KT, 35HC | IgG and IgA anti-S1                  | 7 ± 2 days                                                  | 70.45% HD, 26% KT |
| Bertrand et al.| France    | Prospective cohort       | KT, HD             | Pfizer-BionTech, 3 weeks apart   | 45 KT, 10 HD | Anti-S >50 AU/mL                      | 1 month                                                      | 77.8% HD, 80% HD   |
| Danthu et al.  | France    | Prospective cohort       | KT, HD, HC         | Pfizer-BionTech, 28 days apart   | 74 KT, 78 HD, 7 HC | Anti-Trimeric S IgG >13 AU/mL         | 8 days                                                       | 80.76% HD, 100% HC |
| Grupper et al. | Israel    | Prospective cohort       | KT, HC             | Pfizer-BionTech, 21 days apart   | 136 KT, 25 HC | Anti-S1/S2 IgG <12.0 AU/mL negative, 12.0 to 15.0 AU/mL equivocal, >15 AU/mL positive | 10 and 20 days | 37.5% KT, 100% HC |
| Korth et al.   | Germany   | Prospective cohort       | KT, HC             | Pfizer-BionTech, 22.0 +/- 0.6 days apart | 23 KT, 23 HC | Anti-S IgG AU/mL ≤13.0, negative, 13.0 positive | 14 days                                                      | 21.74% KT, 100% HC |
| Rozen-Zvi et al.| Israel    | Prospective cohort       | KT                 | Pfizer-BionTech, 21 days apart   | 308 KT      | Anti-S IgG 50 AU/mL                   | 2 to 4 weeks, followed for up to 6 weeks.                  | 36.36% KT         |
| Sattler et al. | Germany   | Prospective cohort       | KT, HD, HC         | Pfizer-BionTech, 21 days apart   | 39 KT, 26 HD, 39 HC | Anti-S                              | Anti-S IgG ≥50 AU/mL | 8 ± 1 days | 84.62% HD, 25.6% KT |

AU/mL: Arbitrary Units per milliliter, HD: Hemodialysis, PD: Peritoneal dialysis, KT: Kidney transplant, HC: Healthy control, Anti-S: Anti-Spike protein of SARS-CoV-2.
Table 2. Factors associated with vaccine response in kidney transplant (KT) patient

| Seroconversion | Patients, n (%) | Age, years | Male, n (%) | MMF n (%) | Corticosteroids n (%) | Tacrolimus n (%) | Cyclosporine n (%) | Belatacept n (%) |
|----------------|----------------|------------|-------------|-----------|----------------------|-----------------|-------------------|-----------------|
| Yes            | 112 (36.36%)   | 53.7       | 76 (64.0%)  | 66 (58.9%)| 4 (3.6%)             | 104 (92.9%)     | 8 (7.1%)          |
| No             | 196 (63.64%)   | 59.7       | 121 (61.7%) | 160 (81.6%)| 22 (11.2%)           | 181 (92.3%)     | 15 (7.7%)         |
| Yes            | 7 (25%)        | 60         | NA          | 2 (29%)   | 4 (57%)              | 6 (86%)         | 0 (0%)            |
| No             | 21 (75%)       | 60         | NA          | 15 (71%)  | 5 (24%)              | 15 (71%)        | 6 (29%)           |
| Yes            | 8 (17.78%)     | 63.5       | 23 (51.1%)  | 37 (82.2%)| 21 (46.7%)           | 24 (53.3%)      | 8 (17.8%)         | 10 (22.2%)       |
| No             | 37 (82.22%)    | 57.9       | 9 (50.0%)   | 15 (83%)  | 11 (61%)             | 12 (67%)        | 2 (11%)           | 1 (6%)           |
| Yes            | 8 (100%)       | 44.4       | 9 (39.0%)   |           |                      |                 |                   |                 |
| No             | 0              |            |             |           |                      |                 |                   |                 |
| Yes            | 3 (4.17%)      | 64.8       | 44 (61.1%)  | 34 (45.9%)|                      |                 | 2 (2.6%)          |
| No             | 69 (95.83%)    |            |             |           |                      |                 |                   |                 |
| Yes            | 7 (100%)       | 51.6       | 4 (58.0%)   |           |                      |                 |                   |                 |
| No             | 0              |            |             |           |                      |                 |                   |                 |
| Yes            | 1 (2.5%)       | 62.4       | 28 (70.0%)  | 39 (97.5%)| 37 (92.5%)           |                 |                   |                 |
| No             | 39 (97.5%)     |            |             |           |                      |                 |                   |                 |
| Yes            | 35 (100%)      |            |             |           |                      |                 |                   |                 |
| No             | 0              |            |             |           |                      |                 |                   |                 |
| Yes            | 1 (2.56%)      | 57.4       | 28 (71.8%)  | 39 (100%) | 38 (97.43%)          | 22 (56.41%)     | 14 (35.89%)       |
| No             | 38 (97.44%)    |            |             |           |                      |                 |                   |                 |
| Yes            | 39 (100%)      |            |             |           |                      |                 |                   |                 |
| No             | 0              |            |             |           |                      |                 |                   |                 |
| Yes            | 51 (37.50%)    | 54.5       | 34 (66.6%)  | 32 (62.7%)| 7 (13.7%)            |                 |                   |                 |
| No             | 85 (62.50%)    | 60.9       | 53 (62.4%)  | 72 (84.7%)| 25 (29.4%)           |                 |                   |                 |
| Yes            | 25 (100%)      | 52.7       | 8 (32.0%)   |           |                      |                 |                   |                 |
| No             | 0              |            |             |           |                      |                 |                   |                 |

HC: Healthy control.
| Author                  | Population | Seroconversion | Patient number | Age (years) | Male, n (%) | HD/ PD, n | Dialysis vintage (months) | BMI >30 kg/m², n (%) | Lymphocyte (10³/mm³) | Serum albumin (g/dL) |
|-------------------------|------------|----------------|----------------|-------------|-------------|-----------|--------------------------|----------------------|----------------------|---------------------|
| Longlune et al. (24)    | HD/PD      | Yes            | 86 (84.3%)     | 64          | 56 (65.1%)  | 69/17     | 37 ± 36                  | 993 ± 490            | 3.99 ± 0.35          | 1249 ± 664          |
|                         |            | No             | 16 (15.7)      | 70          | 9 (81.8%)   | 13/3      | 31 ± 49                  | 1249 ± 664           | 3.41 ± 0.56          |                     |
| Agur et al. (23)        | HD/PD      | Yes            | 136 (93.8%)    | 71          | 76 (66.7%)  | 114/22    | 40 ± 33                  | 29 (25.4%)           | 3.99 ± 0.35          | 1249 ± 664          |
|                         |            | No             | 9 (6.2%)       | 78          | 5 (62.5%)   | 8/1       | 39 ± 27                  | 2 (25%)              | 3.99 ± 0.35          | 1249 ± 664          |
| Frantzen et al. (18)    | HD         | Yes            | 221 (90.6%)    | 77          | 158 (71.5%) | 51 (23%)  | 67 ± 105                 | 1282 ± 635           | 4.1 ± 2.6            | 750 ± 484           |
|                         |            | No             | 23 (9.4%)      | 77          | 7 (87.5%)   | 8/1       | 79 ± 53                  | 750 ± 484            | 3.19 ± 0.62          |                     |
| Broseta et al. (17)     | HD         | Yes            | 167 (95.4%)    | 71          | 111 (66.5%) | 67 ± 105  | 1282 ± 635               | 4.1 ± 2.6            |                     |                     |
|                         |            | No             | 8 (4.6%)       | 73          | 7 (87.5%)   | 8/1       | 79 ± 53                  | 750 ± 484            | 3.99 ± 0.35          |                     |
| Bertrand et al. (27)    | HD         | Yes            | 8 (80%)        | 71          | 3 (37.5%)   | 49        | 3.1 years (0.6-12.6)*    | 1282 ± 635           | 4.1 ± 2.6            | 750 ± 484           |
|                         |            | No             | 2 (20%)        | 71          | 7 (87.5%)   | 8/1       | 79 ± 53                  | 750 ± 484            | 3.19 ± 0.62          |                     |
| Attias et al. (16)      | HD         | Yes            | 43 (82.7%)     | 68          | 35 (51.5%)  | 2 (20%)   | 3.1 years (0.6-12.6)*    | 1282 ± 635           | 4.1 ± 2.6            | 750 ± 484           |
|                         |            | No             | 9 (7.3%)       | 83          | 6 (66.7%)   | 3 (20%)   | 3.1 years (0.6-12.6)*    | 1282 ± 635           | 4.1 ± 2.6            | 750 ± 484           |
| Simon et al. (22)       | HD         | Yes            | 59 (72.8%)     | 67          | 58 (71.6%)  | 49        | 3.1 years (0.6-12.6)*    | 1282 ± 635           | 4.1 ± 2.6            | 750 ± 484           |
|                         |            | No             | 22 (27.2%)     | 67          | 19 (41.3%)  | 49        | 3.1 years (0.6-12.6)*    | 1282 ± 635           | 4.1 ± 2.6            | 750 ± 484           |
| HC                      | Yes        | 80 (100%)      | 49             | 30 (37.5%)  | 0          | 0         | 3.1 years (0.6-12.6)*    | 1282 ± 635           | 4.1 ± 2.6            | 750 ± 484           |
|                         | No         | 0              |                |             | 0          | 0         | 3.1 years (0.6-12.6)*    | 1282 ± 635           | 4.1 ± 2.6            | 750 ± 484           |
| Speer et al. (21)       | HD         | Yes            | 14 (82.4%)     | 74          | 12 (54.5%)  | 5 (20%)   | 3.1 years (0.6-12.6)*    | 1282 ± 635           | 4.1 ± 2.6            | 750 ± 484           |
|                         |            | No             | 3 (17.6%)      | 74          | 19 (41.3%)  | 49        | 3.1 years (0.6-12.6)*    | 1282 ± 635           | 4.1 ± 2.6            | 750 ± 484           |
| Grupper et al. (19)     | HD         | Yes            | 54 (96.4%)     | 74          | 42 (75.0%)  | 38±37     | 1500 ± 600               | 4.0 ± 0.35           |                     |                     |
|                         |            | No             | 2 (3.6%)       | 74          | 2 (3.6%)   | 38±37     | 1500 ± 600               | 4.0 ± 0.35           |                     |                     |
| HC                      | Yes        | 95 (100%)      | 57             | 26 (27.4%)  | 0          | 0         | 3.1 years (0.6-12.6)*    | 1282 ± 635           | 4.1 ± 2.6            | 750 ± 484           |
|                         | No         | 0              |                |             | 0          | 0         | 3.1 years (0.6-12.6)*    | 1282 ± 635           | 4.1 ± 2.6            | 750 ± 484           |
| Jahn et al. (20)        | HD         | Yes            | 67 (93.1%)     | 68          | 41 (56.9%)  | 5 (6.9%)  | 3.1 years (0.6-12.6)*    | 1282 ± 635           | 4.1 ± 2.6            | 750 ± 484           |
|                         |            | No             | 5 (6.9%)       | 68          | 7 (10%)    | 49        | 3.1 years (0.6-12.6)*    | 1282 ± 635           | 4.1 ± 2.6            | 750 ± 484           |
| HC                      | Yes        | 16 (100%)      | 45             | 7 (43.8%)   | 0          | 0         | 3.1 years (0.6-12.6)*    | 1282 ± 635           | 4.1 ± 2.6            | 750 ± 484           |
|                         | No         | 0              |                |             | 0          | 0         | 3.1 years (0.6-12.6)*    | 1282 ± 635           | 4.1 ± 2.6            | 750 ± 484           |
Table 3. Factors associated with vaccine response in dialysis (hemodialysis (HD), peritoneal dialysis (PD) patients and compared with healthy controls (HC) (continue)

| Author          | Population | Seroconversion | Patient number | Age (years) | Male, n (%) | HD/PD, n | Dialysis vintage (months) | BMI>30 kg/m², n (%) | Lymphocyte (10³/mm³) | Serum albumin (g/dL) |
|-----------------|------------|----------------|----------------|-------------|-------------|-----------|---------------------------|---------------------|---------------------|---------------------|
| Danthu et al. (28) | HD         | Yes            | 63 (85.9%)     | 73          | 46 (59%)    | 15 (4.1%) | 5 years ± 6                | 1200 ± 600          | 3.54 +/- 0.47       |                     |
|                 |            | No             | 15 (4.1%)      | 0           | 0           |           |                           |                     |                     |                     |
| Rincon-Arevalo et al. (29) | HD/PD  | Yes            | 31 (70.5%)     | 69/70       | 25 (62.5%)/3 (75%) | 40/4      | 5.5 years [2,9]*          |                     |                     |                     |
|                 |            | No             | 13 (29.5%)     | 0           | 0           |           |                           |                     |                     |                     |
| Sattler et al. (26) | HD         | Yes            | 22 (84.6%)     | 67          | 17 (65.4%) | 4 (15.4%) | 7 years ±5                 |                     |                     |                     |
|                 |            | No             | 4 (15.4%)      | 0           | 0           |           |                           |                     |                     |                     |
| Yanay et al. (25)   | HD+PD     | Yes            | 144 (90%)      | 69          | 101 (63.1%)| 127/33   | 3 years [2-5]*            |                     |                     |                     |
|                 |            | No             | 16 (10%)       | 0           | 0           |           |                           |                     |                     |                     |
|                 |            | Yes            | 132 (100%)     | 50          | 67 (50.8%) |           |                           |                     |                     |                     |

*: median, IQR
**: n= 22
BMI: Body mass index.
lymphocyte count (13). Treatment with MMF or triple maintenance immunosuppression has been found less frequent in seropositive than in seronegative patients (13). Rincon-Arevalo et al. have observed a lower antibody response with advanced age in KT patients (29) and reported seroconversion rate as 2.5% in KT, 70% in dialysis and 100% in the HC group (29).

The studies conducted by Korth et al. (15), Arevalo et al. (29) and Grupper et al. (13) have demonstrated a lower antibody titer in patients with KT than in HC: Korth et al. (50.9 +/- 138.7 AU/mL vs. 727.7 +/- 151.3 AU/mL, p = 0.0001) (15) and Grupper et al. (p< 0.001) (13).

**Antibody Response in HD and PD Patients**

Table 3 presents seroconversion rates, baseline characteristics, comorbidities, primary kidney disease, immunosuppressive treatment and laboratory values of HD, PD and HC patients. Seroconversion rate in HD patients ranged from 72.83% to 96.43% and in HD+PD patients from 70.45% to 90%. The overall seroconversion rate was 88.5 % of HD and 88.0% of HD+PD studied. In 8 studies that also included HC, seroconversion rate for dialysis patients ranged from 70.45 to 96.43% (85.0% overall) and in HC it was 100%. However, HC were generally younger (up to 23 years) than HD patients.

Longlune et al. have reported that immunosuppressive drug use, especially steroid use, is significantly higher among non-responder dialysis patients [OR 0.075 (95% CI 0.019-0.303), p = 0.0003] (24). Agur et al. have observed that younger age (Beta 0.021 per year decrease, 95% CI 0.011-0.031, p< 0.001), serum albumin above 3.5 g/dL (Beta 1.039, 95% CI 0.65-1.429, p< 0.001), lower intravenous iron dose (Beta 0.002 per mg/week decrease, 95% CI 0.000-0.004, p= 0.009) and body mass index under 30 kg/m2 (Beta 0.394, 95% CI 0.107- 0.681, p= 0.008) are positive predictor factors for antibody response (23). Frantzen et al. have found that older age is associated with a lower antibody response (OD 1.22 per 1-year older; 95% CI 1.13 to 1.68; p= 0.03 and OR, 0.83 per 10³/ml-higher lymphocyte count; 95% CI, 0.58 to 0.97; p= 0.05) in the dialysis patients (19). Jahn et al. have revealed that older age is negatively associated with antibody response in HD patients, with significantly lower titers over 60 years (280.0 AU/mL (45.7- 477.0), p< 0.0001) (20). Danthu et al. have found a similar association, indicating that those older than 75 years of age are more likely to be non-seroconverters (28). A higher serum albumin and Kt/Vurea levels have been significantly associated with higher seroconversion rate (p< 0.043 and p< 0.019, respectively) (28). Yanay et al. could not detect a difference in age, sex, dialysis modality, and dialysis vintage between seroconverters and non-seroconverters (25).

In addition to these findings, mean anti-S antibody titer of dialysis recipients has been found significantly lower than in HC in Simon et al. (22), Grupper et al. (19), Jahn et al. (20), Speer et al. (21), Danthu et al. (28), Rincon-Arevalo et al. (29) and Yanay et al. (25).

**DISCUSSION**

In this systematic review, we analyzed seroconversion rates after SARS-CoV-2 vaccination in KT and dialysis patients and defined the factors that associate with seroconversion status in these populations. The main findings are that the overall seroconversion rate
was 27.2% for KT, 88.5% for dialysis patients, while all HC in these studies seroconverted. Moreover, anti-S antibody titers were lower in seroconverted KT or dialysis patients than in HC in all studies that assessed this variable.

In KT patients, a lower seroconversion rate was associated with older age (13,29), and with immunosuppressive regimen use mostly consisting of MMF (12, 13,26,28,29), but even with glucocorticoids (13,26,29), calcineurin inhibitors (27,29) or belatacept (12,27), higher rate of triple immunosuppressive regimen (13), and higher MMF (13,14) or calcineurin inhibitor dose (14) (Figure 1). On the other hand, a higher seroconversion rate was associated with a higher eGFR (13,14), cyclosporine monotherapy (28), younger age (13,14,26), a shorter dialysis vintage before transplantation (13), a longer period of time since transplantation (13), a higher prevalence of living donor (13), and a higher mean hemoglobin and lymphocyte count (13) (Figure 1). Only Korth et al. found no difference in age, gender and immunosuppressive regimen between seroconverted and non-seroconverted groups (15). In general, a more aggressive immunosuppression regimen was associated with lower seroconversion rates, while factors associated with less intense current or past immunosuppression (e.g., longer time since transplantation, living donor) or lower exposure to uremia (higher eGFR, shorter dialysis vintage) or its consequences (higher hemoglobin and lymphocyte count) were associated with better antibody responses.

In dialysis patients, older age (18-20,28), current immunosuppressive therapy (17,18,24) or chemotherapy (18), lower serum albumin (17), lower white blood cell (17) or lymphocyte counts (17,19), lower hemoglobin (17) and lower dialysis vintage (17) were identified as indicators of a lower antibody response or non-response (Figure 2). Only Attias et al. failed to find any relation between immunosuppressive therapy and antibody response (16). This could be due to a smaller sample size (n=52) than Longlune et al. (n=97) (24), Broseta et al. (n=175) (17) and Frantzen et

![Factors associated with SARS-CoV-2 vaccine response in renal transplant patients](image)

**Figure 1.** Factors associated with a lower/non-response or a positive response in kidney transplant patients following a full series of SARS-CoV-2 vaccination.
Variation in the COVID-19 vaccine response in dialysis patients

On the other hand, younger age (23), higher serum albumin (23,28), lower intravenous iron dose (23), body mass index <30 kg/m² (23), HBV vaccine antibody response >20 IU/mL (22, 28), higher Kt/Vurea value (28) were correlated with higher seroconversion rates (Figure 2). Again, not all studies were concordant, Yanay et al. (25) and Speer et al. (21) could not detect age as a predictor of seroconversion status or confirm some of the above predictors of seroconversion status, while Attias et. al did not observe differences in patient characteristics between seroconverted and non-seroconverted groups (16).

Although seroconversion status was differently reported compared to other articles, Anand et al. also reported outcomes of fully vaccinated dialysis patients (30). In this rather large study, 610 fully vaccinated dialysis patients were divided in three groups according to follow-up antibody titers: absent, attenuated and medium-high antibody titers (30). Longer dialysis vintage and lower serum albumin were associated with higher likelihood of absent or attenuated antibody response (30).

Our literature review revealed a relatively poor seroconversion rate and antibody titers in dialysis patients compared to HC. These results are in line with the lower antibody response observed in chronic kidney disease patients compared to the general population. In our study, we additionally reported specific immunosuppressive drugs that might have a supplemental negative impact on the immune response after vaccination. Differently, we included studies that report patient data who received a full series of vaccination (31). Chronic kidney disease impairs both natural and adaptive immune response, which might be the culprit for the lower seroconversion rates seen in dialysis patients (32). Immune dysregulation caused by uremia is characterized not only by immune depression that makes this patient group prone to acquiring COVID-19 during their hospital visits, but also immune activation that predisposes to cardiovascular diseases, placing an additional risk for
severe COVID-19 disease (33). This immune dysregulation was also shown by the study Rincon-Arevalo et al. in which immunophenotyping of dialysis patients revealed predominance of pre-switch and naive receptor binding domain antigen-specific B cells, whereas HC group was dominated by plasmablast and post-switch memory B cell compartments (29). Furthermore, not only chronic kidney disease but dialysis itself may also weaken immune function (34). It compromises chemotactic and phagocytic function of neutrophils (32). Therefore, these patients may have higher risk of severe COVID-19 infection compared to the healthy population and could also be less protected after vaccination.

Similar to dialysis patients, KT patients are likely to develop poor antibody response to SARS-CoV-2 mRNA vaccines. Immunosuppressive treatment can dampen immunological responses; together with a high rate of comorbidities. KT patients do not only have a poor humoral response, but also an impaired cellular response to vaccination against SARS-CoV-2. Rincon-Arevalo et al. have shown that naive and pre-switch B cells were more abundant than post-switch and double negative memory B cells. This was similar to dialysis patients and differed from the HC group (29). Non-responder KT patients had reduced plasmablasts and T cells, as well (29). In addition, Sattler et al. have reported a reduction in the frequency of spike-specific Th cells and almost absence of CD8+ T cell responses among KT patients with impaired cytokine production and memory B cell differentiation (26). Immunosuppressive drug modulation/reduction can be considered to improve vaccination responses. However, in the absence of clinical trials, the optimal duration or intensity prior or post vaccination and the rejection risks associated with this strategy are unknown (35).

In most studies, immunosuppressive drug use was a negative predictor for seroconversion. A negative effect of MMF on antibody response in KT groups was observed almost in all studies (12-14, 26-29). In the study by Sattler et al., most KT patients were on MMF and the seroconversion rate was 2% (26). Similarly, Rozen-Zvi et al. and Grupper et al. have found a statistically significant difference in MMF use among seroconverted and non-seroconverted KT patients (13,14). Furthermore, lower MMF dose was associated with higher antibody titers (14). In line with these findings, the seroconversion rate was 2.5%, 70% and 100% in the KT, dialysis and HC groups, respectively and MMF use was the main differential factor of KT patients (29). MMF inhibits purine nucleotide synthesis in lymphocytes and prevents B cell and plasma cell formation (26), thereby decreasing antibody production. In previous reports, MMF has also been confirmed to decrease responses to influenza and cholera vaccine in a dose-dependent manner (13).

CNI and belatacept were also associated with poor vaccine responses (14,27,29) (12,27,36). CNI inhibit activation and proliferation of adaptive immune cells, namely B cells, CD4+ T cells and Th cells (29). Belatacept inhibits T cell activation by binding CD80 and CD86 to prevent their attachment with CD28, a T cell costimulator on multiple other immune cells (37). All these data suggest that MMF, CNI and belatacept might contribute to suppress anti-S antibody responses after vaccination.

Poor antibody response to SARS-CoV-2 mRNA vaccines among dialysis and KT patients might be overcome by a third additional dose which can be offered to the non-seroconverted patients after a full series of vaccination. In this regard 5 of 12 non-seroconverted dialysis patients that received a third dose of BNT162b2 vaccine one month after the second dose seroconverted and maintained anti-S antibody titers at one month-post vaccination without serious adverse effects (24). In another study, 8 of 24 solid organ transplant recipients who had negative antibody response to SARS-CoV-2 vaccination have seroconverted after a third vaccine dose (38). In a further study in 45 seronegative dialysis patients without history of prior COVID-19 infection, a third BNT162b2 dose has improved humoral response in almost all patients (39). These data suggest that a third additional dose could be administered to seronegative dialysis and KT patients.

Some demographic characteristics were also associated with the seroconversion rate. Age was an important factor affecting the seroconversion status in KT and dialysis patients. Older age (13,18-20,28,29) led to lower seroconversion rates in both KT and dialysis patients. This can partially be explained by a reduction in immunologic memory with increasing age as aged T cells produce short-lived inflammatory effector T-cells instead of memory or follicular helper T cells (33). Accordingly, younger age led to a higher seroconversion rate in many stud-
ies (13,14,23,26). In one study, a lower body mass index (<30 kg/m²) was associated with a higher seroconversion status (23). In contrast, in several studies did not correlations between seroconversion rates and demographic characteristics such as age, gender, body mass index (15,16,21,25,28). Therefore, further studies are needed to evaluate the relation between demographic data and seroconversion rates in both dialysis and KT patients.

In the majority of studies, the time interval between the first and second dose of vaccine varies between 21 days to 28 days. In several studies, the interval between doses was not reported (12,16,25). In studies with a time interval of 28 days on dialysis patients (24,28), the seroconversion rate ranges from 81% to 83%. On the other hand, the seroconversion rates varied between 73% (22) and 96% (19) in studies with a time interval of 21 days in dialysis patients. These suggest that there is no considerable difference in seroconversion when the interval between the two doses in dialysis patients is 21 to 28 days.

All studies investigated the presence of anti-spike protein IgG antibodies to evaluate the seroconversion status. The timing of blood sampling for antibody detection after a full series of vaccination ranged from seven days to six weeks. Seroconversion rates greatly varied between studies regardless of the time from the last dose to the blood sampling. Simon et al. have reported an additional increase in the seroconversion rates after a 10 week post-vaccination follow up in hemodialysis patients (22). This may warrant further investigations to determine the effect of blood sampling timing after full vaccination on seroconversion status. Among 18 studies, only Husain et al. have used the Moderna mRNA-1273 vaccine in addition to the Pfizer/Biontech BNT162b2 vaccine in KT patients (12). The seroconversion rates were equal (25%) for both. However, only 12 and 16 patients have been immunized with the Moderna mRNA-1273 and the Pfizer/Biontech BNT162b2 vaccines, respectively (12). All other studies only assessed Biontech BNT162b2. Therefore, additional studies with larger sample sizes are needed for the further assessment of efficacy of different mRNA vaccines.

Following SARS-CoV-2 infection, HD patients have a rapid decline in anti-SARS-CoV-2 antibody titers after COVID-19, which appears to be earlier than in general population studies (32). In another study, up to 85% of 136 HD patients who were antibody positive at baseline, maintained serologic evidence of immune responses at 6 months (40). In 8 patients who became seronegative at 6 months, there was evidence of a robust cellular immunity measured by T-cell response to SARS-CoV-2 structural proteins (40). Thus, whether cellular immunity develops in vaccinated seronegative KRT patients and whether this immunity confers clinically significant protection from severe COVID-19 should be studied. Additionally, given the potential shorter duration of seroconversion in KRT, the optimal timing of eventual booster doses of vaccine should be studied in this population.

**Future Directions**

Seroconversion rates following vaccination in both KT recipients and dialysis patients are suboptimal and this is an unmet clinical need. Future studies should address how to optimize patient management (e.g immunosuppressive regimens) in order to improve vaccination responses, including assessing the impact of a third dose or optimization of vaccine dosing, as well as studying the best way to assess clinically relevant immunological responses (e.g. are patients with low antibody titers but preserved cellular responses protected from clinically significant diseases?).

**CONCLUSION**

Dialysis patients and KT recipients have lower seroconversion rates after a full series of mRNA-based SARS-CoV-2 vaccination compared to the general population. Several factors are associated with the altered antibody response in these patients. These potential predictors should be kept in mind and managed during the vaccination of patients on KRT. A third dose could be considered in non-seroconverted patients and in those with early loss of anti-S antibodies.

**ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

MK gratefully acknowledge use of the services and facilities of the Koc University Research Center for Translational Medicine (KUTTAM), funded by the Presidency of Turkey, Presidency of Strategy and Budget. The content is solely the responsibility of the authors and does not necessarily represent the official views of the Presidency of Strategy and Budget.
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