Panel-based testing for inherited colorectal cancer: a descriptive study of clinical testing performed by a US laboratory

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Next-generation sequencing enables testing for multiple genes simultaneously (‘panel-based testing’) as opposed to sequential testing for one inherited condition at a time (‘syndrome-based testing’). This study presents results from patients who underwent hereditary colorectal cancer (CRC) panel-based testing (‘ColoNext™’). De-identified data from a clinical testing laboratory were used to calculate (1) frequencies for patient demographic, clinical, and family history variables and (2) rates of pathogenic mutations and variants of uncertain significance (VUS). The proportion of individuals with a pathogenic mutation who met national syndrome-based testing criteria was also determined. Of 586 patients, a pathogenic mutation was identified in 10.4%, while 20.1% had at least one VUS. After removing eight patients with CHEK2 mutations and 11 MUTYH heterozygotes, the percentage of patients with ‘actionable’ mutations that would clearly alter cancer screening recommendations per national guidelines decreased to 7.2%. Of 42 patients with an ‘actionable’ result, 30 (71%) clearly met established syndrome-based testing guidelines. This descriptive study is among the first to report on a large clinical series of patients undergoing panel-based testing for inherited CRC. Results are discussed in the context of benefits and concerns that have been raised about panel-based testing implementation.

Conflict of interest
Cristi Radford and Jill Dolinsky are full-time employees for the commercial laboratory Ambry Genetics, which performs ColoNext™ testing. Elizabeth Chao is a paid consultant for Ambry. Deborah Cragun, Meghan Caldwell, and Tuya Pal report no potential conflicts of interest. Specifically, they are not employed by Ambry, and they did not receive any financial or other incentives from Ambry.

Colorectal cancer (CRC) is the second leading cause of cancer-related death in the United States when men and women are considered together (1). The estimated fraction of CRC attributed to inherited predisposition ranges between 10% and 30% (2). Identification of hereditary CRC syndromes can lead to reductions in morbidity and mortality through targeted risk management options (3, 4). Concurrently, advances in
Panel-based testing for inherited CRC

DNA sequencing technologies (called next-generation sequencing; NGS) now make it possible to test for multiple genes simultaneously (panel-based testing), at a cost comparable to testing for two genes using older methods (syndrome-based testing) (5). As a result, it is possible that the conventional syndrome-based approach to performing inherited cancer predisposition testing, which includes generating a differential diagnosis and sequentially testing for single genetic conditions, may shift to panel-based tests.

In March 2012, Ambry Genetics Corporation (Ambry; Aliso Viejo, CA) was the first clinical laboratory to offer hereditary cancer panel-based testing in the United States; subsequently, other laboratories have started offering cancer panels. The 14 genes included in Ambry’s colon panel-based testing (ColoNext™) are listed in Table 1 along with their associated cancer risks. Although hereditary cancer panels vary, they typically include both highly penetrant as well as moderately penetrant genes (6). For highly penetrant genes, clinical guidelines exist for the prevention or early detection of cancers (7). In other words, these are ‘actionable genes’ with known clinical utility (8). In contrast, the utility of moderately penetrant genes is less certain.

As panel-based testing is implemented into clinical practice, cost-saving opportunities need to be considered. In particular, the most common cause of hereditary CRC is Lynch syndrome, which is caused by mutations in five genes (i.e. MLH1, MSH2, MSH6, PMS2, EPCAM). When this study was initiated, syndrome-based testing for the Lynch syndrome genes through Ambry cost $100 more than ColoNext™. However, pricing has fluctuated and ColoNext™ testing has become more expensive than testing for the five Lynch syndrome genes. Cost analyses are further complicated because tumor screening for Lynch syndrome using immunohistochemical (IHC) testing may narrow down the number of genes that require testing (9).

Despite the potential for panel-based testing to identify more mutations, this testing is also expected to increase the complexity of results interpretation because of factors such as questionable or uncertain clinical utility of testing for moderate penetrance genes and the higher rate of inconclusive results because of an increase in the number of variants of uncertain significance (VUS) (6, 10, 11). Furthermore, given that widespread panel-based testing for hereditary CRC only began in 2012, little is known about patients who are tested or rates of identified mutations and variants. To address these questions, we examined a comprehensive data repository of panel-based testing for inherited susceptibility to CRC that is maintained through Ambry. Unlike prior validation studies of cancer panel-based tests (5, 12), the purpose of this study was to describe the clinical use and results of ColoNext™ testing performed on a clinical basis for diagnostic purposes in patients without previously identified mutations. The aims of this study were to estimate mutation and VUS rates identified through panel-based testing for hereditary CRC in real-world settings and to determine whether patients with a mutation met national genetic testing criteria for the respective cancer syndromes identified.

Materials and methods

Data source

A database maintained by Ambry includes demographic information as well as personal and family cancer history collected from ordering clinicians via test requisition forms (TRF). Data extracted by Ambry for use in this study included de-identified information on individuals for whom ColoNext™ testing was completed between March 2012 (when ColoNext™ became available) and March 2013. Following receipt of an exempt certification by the University of South Florida’s institutional review board, the first and senior authors (D. C. and T. P.) conducted secondary data analysis on the de-identified dataset.

ColoNext™ testing and results reporting

All genetic testing was performed by Ambry using the following protocol. Genomic deoxyribonucleic acid (gDNA) was isolated from patients’ whole blood specimens, or from saliva specimens collected using an Oragene kit. Sequence enrichment of each coding exon within the 14 genes was carried out by incorporating the gDNA into microdroplets along with primer pairs designed to the specified target. The enriched libraries were then applied to the solid surface flow cell for clonal amplification and sequencing using paired-end, 100-cycle chemistry on the Illumina Hiseq 2000 (Illumina, San Diego, CA). For 13 of the 14 cancer susceptibility genes, NGS/Sanger sequencing was performed for all coding domains plus at least five bases into the 5′ and 3′ ends of all introns and untranslated regions. Sequence analysis was not performed for EPCAM, as currently the only mutations in EPCAM associated with Lynch syndrome are gross deletions encompassing its 3′ terminus (13). Additional Sanger sequencing was performed for any regions with insufficient depth of coverage by NGS, with an initial read depth threshold of at least 10 times and a quality score of 20 or better. This threshold was later increased to a read depth of 50 times with a quality score of 20 or better. Variant calls other than known, non-pathogenic alterations were verified by Sanger sequencing in sense and antisense directions prior to reporting. A targeted chromosomal microarray (CMA) designed with increased probe density in regions of interest was used for the detection of gross deletions and duplications for each sample (Agilent, Santa Clara, CA). Owing to potential pseudogene interference (14), PMS2 sequence analysis was performed via long range PCR followed by Sanger sequencing and PMS2 deletion/duplication analysis was performed via MLPA. If a gross deletion was detected in exons 12, 13, 14, or 15 of PMS2, double stranded sequencing of the appropriate exon(s) of the pseudogene was performed to determine if the deletion was located...
| Cancer syndrome                        | Gene(s)         | Associated cancer sites (risks) | Actionable\(^c\) yes/no | Testing/screening/diagnostic criteria\(^d\)                                                                 |
|---------------------------------------|-----------------|---------------------------------|-------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Lynch syndrome (hereditary non-polyposis colorectal cancer; HNPCC) | MLH1, MSH2, MSH6, PMS2, EPCAM | Cancer site (risk up to age 70)  
Colon (40–80% MLH1, MSH2)  
(10–22% MSH6, PMS2)  
Endometrium (25–60% MLH1, MSH2)  
(15–26% MSH6, PMS2)  
Increased cancer risks: stomach, ovarian, hepatobiliary tract, urinary tract, small bowel, others | Yes  
Colon  
Endometrial  
Ovarian  
Urothelial | LS tumor screening recommended for all patients with CRC  
or  
CRC patients < 70 and those ≥ 70 meeting Revised Bethesda Criteria for testing\(^e\)  
or  
Amsterdam II criteria (diagnostic of HNPCC if all of following are present):  
Three or more relatives with an associated cancer (colorectal cancer, or cancer of the endometrium, small intestine, ureter or renal pelvis)  
Two or more successive generations affected  
One or more relatives diagnosed before the age of 50 years  
One should be a first-degree relative of the other two  
Familial adenomatous polyposis (FAP) should be excluded in cases of colorectal carcinoma  
Tumors should be verified by pathologic examination |
| Juvenile polyposis syndrome (JPS)     | BMPR1, SMAD4     | Cancer site (lifetime risk)  
Colon (40–50%)  
Stomach (21% if multiple polyps)  
Small intestine (rare)  
Pancreas (rare) | Yes  
Colon  
Stomach | At least 3–5 juvenile polyps of the colorectum  
or  
Multiple juvenile polyps throughout the GI tract  
or  
Any number of juvenile polyps and family history of juvenile polyps  
Individual with multiple GI hamartomatous polyps |
| Peutz–Jeghers (PJS)                  | STK11            | Cancer site (lifetime risk)  
Breast (45–50%)  
Colon (39%)  
Stomach (29%)  
Pancreas (11–36%)  
Small intestine (13%)  
Ovary (18–21%)  
Cervix, uterus, testes, lung | Yes  
Breast  
Colon  
Stomach  
Pancreas  
Small intestine  
Ovary, cervix, uterus, testes | |
| Familial adenomatous polyposis (classic FAP) and attenuated FAP (AFAP) | APC              | Colon (nearly 100% FAP)  
(70% AFAP)  
Duodenal (4–12%)  
Hepatoblastoma (1–2% by age 5)  
Thyroid (<2%) | Yes  
Colon  
Duodenal  
Gastric  
Thyroid  
Small bowel  
Hepatoblastoma  
Thyroid | Personal history of > 10 adenomas  
or  
Personal history of a desmoid tumor |
| MUTYH-associated polyposis (MAP)     | MUTYH (biallelic mutations) | Colon (63% risk up to age 60)  
(20)  
Duodenum (occurs in 5% of patients NCCN) | Yes  
Colon  
Duodenal | Personal history of > 10 adenomas  
or  
≥ 5 serrated polyps with at least some adenomas |
| Cancer syndrome | Gene(s) | Associated cancer sites (risks) | Actionable\(^c\) | Testing/screening/diagnostic criteria \(^d\) |
|----------------|--------|-------------------------------|-----------------|-------------------------------------------|
| No associated syndrome | CHEK2 | Moderate increased risk of developing many types of cancer including breast, prostate, colon, thyroid, ovarian, and kidney \(^{19}\) | No | Consensus for optimal management or surveillance has not been reached\(^g\) |
| Li–Fraumeni and Li–Fraumeni like syndrome (LFS) | TP53 | Bone and soft tissue sarcomas Premenopausal breast cancer Brain tumors (astrocytoma, glioblastoma, medulloblastoma Choroid plexus carcinoma) Adrenocortical carcinoma Colon cancer Acute leukemia 60% risk of developing associated cancers by age 45; 95% by age 70 | Yes | Classic LFS if all of the following: Proband with sarcoma diagnosed before age 45 years A first-degree relative with cancer before age 45 A first- or second-degree relative with any cancer before age 45 years or a sarcoma at any age or Chompret criteria any ONE of the following: Proband with a tumor belonging to the LFS tumor spectrum before age 46 years and at least one first- or second-degree relative with a LFS tumor (except breast cancer if the proband has breast cancer) before age 56 years or with multiple tumors Proband with multiple tumors (except multiple breast tumors), two of which belong to the LFS tumor spectrum and the first of which occurred before age 46 years Proband with adrenocortical carcinoma or choroid plexus tumor, regardless of family history or Early-onset breast cancer: Individual with breast cancer \(\leq 35\) y with negative BRCA test Individual with personal history of one of the following: Bannayan–Riley–Ruvalcaba syndrome Adult Lhermitte–Duclos disease Autism spectrum disorder and macrocephaly Two or more biopsy-proven trichilemmomas Two or more major criteria (one must be macrocephaly) Three major criteria, without macrocephaly One major and \(\geq 3\) minor criteria \(\geq 4\) minor criteria Major criteria | No defined criteria as this is a moderate penetrance gene | |
| PTEN Hammartoma tumor syndrome (PHTS); Cowden syndrome; Bannayan–Riley–Ruvalcaba syndrome | PTEN | Breast \((75–85\% \text{ lifetime})\) Thyroid \((3–35\% \text{ lifetime})\) Endometrium \((19–28\%)\) Colon \((9–16\%)\) Renal \((15–34\%)\) | Yes | Breast Thyroid Colon | |
### Table 1. Continued.

| Cancer syndrome<sup>a</sup> | Gene(s) | Associated cancer sites (risks)<sup>b</sup> | Actionable<sup>c</sup> | Testing/screening/diagnostic criteria<sup>d</sup> |
|---------------------------|---------|-------------------------------------------|----------------------|-----------------------------------------------|
| Hereditary diffuse gastric cancer (HDGC) | CDH1 | Cancer site (lifetime risk)  
Gastric cancer (67–83%)  
Lobular breast cancer (39–52%)  
CRC (risk undefined) | Yes  
Gastric<sup>g</sup>  
Breast  
No  
Colon | Specified mucocutaneous lesions (trichilemmoma, palmoplantar keratosis, oral mucosal papillomatosis, facial papules)  
Minor criteria  
Autism spectrum disorder  
Colon cancer  
Esophageal glycogenic acanthosis (≥3)  
Intellectual disability (IQ ≤75)  
Papillary or follicular variant of papillary thyroid cancer  
Other thyroid lesions (e.g., adenoma, goiter)  
Renal cell carcinoma  
Single GI hamartoma or ganglioneuroma  
Lipomas  
Testicular lipomatosis  
Vascular anomalies (multiple intracranial developmental venous anomalies)  
Testing criteria per consortium consensus guideline (Fitzgerald, et. al, 2010)  
Family with ≥2 cases of diffuse gastric cancer (DGC), with at least one DGC diagnosed < age 50  
or  
Three first or second degree relatives with DGC independent of age  
or  
Personal or family history of DGC and lobular breast cancer, one dx <50  
or  
Single individual with DGC dx before age 40 years |
in PMS2 or the pseudogene. Alterations were classified based on guidelines from the International Agency for Research on Cancer (IARC) (15) and the American College of Medical Genetics (ACMG) (16) into the following categories: (1) pathogenic mutation; (2) variant, likely pathogenic; (3) variant, unknown significance; (4) variant, likely benign; (5) benign.

Data analysis

Those patients with more than one gene alteration were categorized according to the most severe result as follows: (1) positive (mutation), pathogenic mutation or likely pathogenic variant (regardless of whether other variants were identified); (2) variant of unknown significance (VUS); (3) variant, likely benign (VLB); (4) negative, no mutations or variants. Those with a positive result were further sub-divided according to whether the mutation was actionable indicating that it would alter cancer screening recommendations per guidelines from the International Agency for Research on Cancer (IARC) (15) and the American College of Medical Genetics (ACMG) (16) into the following categories: (1) pathogenic mutation; (2) variant, likely pathogenic; (3) variant, unknown significance; (4) variant, likely benign; (5) benign.

Results

Demographic and clinical characteristics

Our series consisted of 586 individuals who underwent ColoNext™ testing between March 2012 and March 2013. Testing was ordered at 216 unique institutions across the US. The majority of individuals tested were female (60%) and White (72%). Just over half (n = 311; 53%) had a personal history of CRC (with or without a history of other cancers or polyps), 105 (18%) had a history of cancer other than CRC, and 123 (21%) had a history of polyps with no personal cancer history. The majority (n = 316; 54%) had a positive family history of CRC/other cancers. Most tests (89%) were ordered by genetic professionals or physicians who work closely with a genetic counselor. Provider settings were diverse, including private offices, community hospitals, and academic institutions. When sub-dividing by test result (i.e. positive and actionable), demographic and clinical characteristics remained similar across the groups (Table 2).

Test results

Pathogenic and actionable mutations

Results of ColoNext™ testing are summarized in Fig. 1. Of 586 patients, 61 (10.4%) were positive for a mutation in at least one of the genes analyzed. Only one person had two pathogenic mutations (MLH1 and CHEK2). After removing the 8 other patients with CHEK2 mutations and all 11 patients in whom only 1 MUTYH mutation was identified, the number of patients with actionable mutations decreased to 42 (7.2%), with over half of these occurring in Lynch syndrome genes.

Variants of unknown significance (VUS)

A total of 118 individuals (20.1%) had at least one VUS identified. These included: 14 with a pathogenic mutation and one or more VUS; 99 with one VUS; and 15 with more than one VUS (Fig. 1). Among all 159 VUS results, 77 (48%) occurred in one of the genes associated with Lynch syndrome.

Syndrome-based testing/screening guidelines

As shown in Fig. 1, of the 42 patients with an actionable mutation, 30 (71%) clearly met NCCN syndrome-based testing, screening, or diagnostic criteria listed in Table 1. Available information for those 12 not clearly meeting criteria is included in Table 3.

Description of patients with CHEK2 mutations

Table S1, Supporting Information summarizes information on the eight patients identified with CHEK2 mutations. All of these individuals had a personal history of adenomatous polyps or CRC. None of these individuals had a personal history of breast cancer, but six had at least one family member with breast cancer.

Discussion

To our knowledge, this study is among the first to report on a large clinical series of patients tested for inherited CRC through a NGS panel-based test.
Among 586 patients tested, 42 had clinically actionable mutations, 8 had mutations in \textit{CHEK2} (where clinical relevance remains uncertain), and 11 were \textit{MUTYH} heterozygotes. Of 42 with clinically actionable mutations, at least 71\% met national criteria for syndrome-based testing. The remaining 29\% could not be definitively classified because of the possibility that additional clinical or family history could exist, but was not provided at the time of testing. As illustrated in Table 3, a fair number of the unclassified patients had clinical histories suggestive of the condition identified through ColoNext\textsuperscript{TM}, whereas others appeared atypical. Among the atypical cases were two individuals in whom the panel-based testing identified a gene mutation indicating a diagnosis of juvenile polyposis; yet the polyp types reported on the TRF in one case

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\text{Pathogenic or likely pathogenic result, and further subdivided according to whether the result is 'actionable' in Table 3. A fair number of the unclassified patients had clinical histories suggestive of the condition identified through ColoNext\textsuperscript{TM}, whereas others appeared atypical. Among the atypical cases were two individuals in whom the panel-based testing identified a gene mutation indicating a diagnosis of juvenile polyposis; yet the polyp types reported on the TRF in one case.}
\]
Panel-based testing for inherited CRC

Fig. 1. Gene alterations identified through ColoNext™ testing and number of patients with actionable mutations who met NCCN testing, screening, or diagnostic criteria.

MLH1 5  MSH2 8  PMS2 6  MSH6 4  SMAD4 4  STK11 1  APC 6  MUTHY 15  CHEK2 8  TP53 1  PTEN 1  CDH1 2

- 5 met screen or dx criteria
- 6 met screen or dx criteria
- 5 met screen or dx criteria
- 3 met screen or dx criteria
- 2 met clinical dx criteria
- 1 met testing criteria
- 4 had >10 adenomas
- 2 of the 4 with biallelic mutations had >10 adenomas
- 1 met Chompret criteria
- None met Testing criteria
- 1 met testing criteria

VUS, variant of unknown significance; VLB, variant likely benign
Each gene (italicized) and associated syndrome-based screening, testing, or diagnostic (dx) criteria are described in Table 1.

*29 individuals had >1 finding, but are only counted once based on their most severe result as described in the analysis.
*One of the MSH2 mutations was likely pathogenic.
*MUTYH associated polyposis (MAP) is an autosomal recessive condition requiring biallelic mutations to be at high risk for colorectal cancer.
*There were no testing or diagnostic criteria for CHEK2. A total of 9 CHEK2 mutations were identified, but one person is not counted here because he also has a MLH1 mutation and history consistent with Lynch syndrome. One of the CHEK2 mutations was likely pathogenic.
*The TP53 mutation was likely pathogenic.

**Fig. 1.** Gene alterations identified through ColoNext™ testing and number of patients with actionable mutations who met NCCN testing, screening, or diagnostic criteria.

**Table 1.**

| Gene  | NCCN Criteria |
|-------|---------------|
| MLH1  | Met screen or dx criteria |
| MSH2  | Met screen or dx criteria |
| PMS2  | Met screen or dx criteria |
| MSH6  | Met screen or dx criteria |
| SMAD4 | Met clinical dx criteria |
| STK11 | Met testing criteria |
| APC   | 4 had >10 adenomas |
| MUTHY| 2 of the 4 with biallelic mutations had >10 adenomas |
| CHEK2 | Met Chompret criteria |
| TP53  | None met Testing criteria |
| PTEN  | Met testing criteria |
| CDH1  | Met testing criteria |

One had a CHEK2 mutation and another was a MUTYH heterozygote.

Despite limited published data on clinical outcomes of panel-based testing, its potential benefits in the context of hereditary CRC have been reported (5, 6). For example, panel-based testing can be less time consuming than syndrome-based testing (6). However, the cost-efficiency of panel vs syndrome-based testing will ultimately be determined by the relative costs of each, and costs continue to evolve within the current testing landscape. On the basis of our findings, although there are scenarios where panel-based testing may have been more cost-efficient, reality remains that syndrome-based testing would have been sufficient to identify the majority of patients with deleterious mutations. Consequently, the optimal and most cost-effective use of panel-based testing as a first-tier test (i.e. after syndrome-based testing is negative), remains to be determined. Although data suggest that several individuals in this study previously underwent syndrome-based testing, it is unknown whether these represent second-tier testing because initial testing could have been performed prior to the availability of panel-based testing. Furthermore, as information on tumor testing for Lynch Syndrome (either through IHC and/or MSI) was not included in the majority of TRFs, it was not possible for us to assess the efficacy of tumor testing to inform germline testing in our sample. Specifically, tumor testing (either through IHC and/or
### Table 3. General descriptions of individuals with a positive ‘actionable’ mutation who did not clearly meet the testing criteria listed in Table 1

| Gender | Gene and mutation | Personal history and age at diagnosis | Family history and age at diagnosis |
|--------|-------------------|--------------------------------------|------------------------------------|
| F      | MSH2 p.A636P      | No personal history of cancer        | Father – sarcoma, age 63           |
|        |                   |                                      | Paternal grandmother – CRC, age 60; uterine cancer, age 45 |
|        |                   |                                      | Paternal aunt – uterine cancer, age 45 |
| F      | MSH2 p.P349A (likely pathogenic) | Cervical cancer, age 34 | Mother – CRC, age 66 |
|        |                   |                                      | Maternal grandmother – stomach cancer, age 82; pancreatic cancer, age 84 |
| F      | PMS2 c.1067delA   | Breast cancer, age 55                | Mother – endometrial cancer, age 65 |
|        |                   | Cervical dysplasia, age 40s          | Maternal uncle – brain tumor, age 75 |
|        |                   | Endometrial cancer, age 53           | Maternal uncle – stomach cancer, age unknown |
|        |                   | Goiter, age 53                       | Maternal grandmother – CRC, age 56 |
| F      | MSH6 p.Q978X      | Endometrial cancer                   | Mother – CRC, age unknown |
|        |                   | Currently age 70                     | Maternal aunt – CRC, age unknown |
|        |                   |                                      | Maternal uncle – CRC, age unknown |
|        |                   |                                      | Maternal uncle – pancreatic cancer, age unknown |
| M      | SMAD4 p.Q449X     | 20–99 adenomatous polyps by age 50   | Father – melanoma, age 52 |
|        |                   | Gastric cancer, age 35               | Paternal aunt – breast cancer, age 48 |
|        |                   | Gastric hyperplastic polyps          | Paternal great grandmother – gastric cancer, age unknown |
|        |                   | Colon inflammation                   | Paternal grandfather – lung cancer, age 72 |
|        |                   | Small bowel polyps                  | Paternal uncle – prostate cancer, age unknown |
|        |                   | CRC, age 30                          | Father – colon cancer, age 46 |
| F      | SMAD4 c.1245_1248delCAGA |                               | Paternal Grandmother – breast cancer, ages 60 and 90 |
|        |                   |                                      | Paternal aunt – breast cancer, age 40’s |
|        |                   |                                      | Brother – CRC, age 55; thyroid cancer, age 55 |
|        |                   |                                      | Maternal Uncle – prostate cancer, age 65 |
| F      | APC c.2004delC    | CRC, age 39                          | Father – 6–7 polyps, age 54 |
|        |                   | 2–5 adenomatous polyps               | Paternal grandmother – lung cancer, age 50’s |
| F      | APC c.3260_3261delITC | CRC, age 29                       | Paternal great grandfather – lung cancer, age 60’s |
| F      | MUTYH p.Y179C & p.G396D | Medulloblastoma, age 12           | None reported |
|        |                   | CRC, age 41                          | Paternal grandmother – lung cancer, age 50’s |
|        |                   | Endometrial cancer, age 51           | Paternal great grandfather – lung cancer, age 60’s |
|        |                   | Prior Lynch testing negative         |                                 |
| F      | MUTYH p.Y179C & p.G396D | 2–5 adenomatous polyps, age 26     |                                 |
|        |                   | CRC, age 26                          |                                 |
| F      | PTEN p.G165X      | >100 adenomatous polyps              |                                 |
|        |                   | CRC, age unknown                     |                                 |
|        |                   | Breast cancer, age unknown           |                                 |
|        |                   | Age at testing 66                    |                                 |
| M      | CDH1 c.1565+1G>A  | ‘Few’ adenomatous colon polyps, age 54| Mother – breast cancer, age 63 |
|        |                   | Hyperplastic colorectal polyps       | Sister – renal cell carcinoma, age 60s |
|        |                   | CRC, age unknown                     |                                 |

CRC, colorectal cancer.

*Actionable is defined by the presence of general consensus guidelines for cancer prevention and/or early detection.

Note: Although the individuals in this table did not technically meet the syndrome-based testing or diagnostic criteria listed in Table 1, a knowledgeable health care provider may have offered the testing in a number of these cases.
MSI) was mentioned in 21 cases. Of these, four had either abnormal IHC and/or MSI-H tumors, of which one had a mutation in MLH1 and the other three had prior testing for one or two Lynch syndrome genes. The remaining 17 cases for which this data was available through the TRF had normal IHC and/or MSI tumor testing.

Despite potential benefits, several anticipated challenges have been cited when conducting panel-based testing for inherited cancer predisposition (6, 18). For example, testing for mutations in moderate penetrance genes could potentially lead to increased patient anxiety and/or excessive and unnecessary screening or preventive surgeries. Furthermore, there may be increased time for counseling when performing panel-based testing, in part because of the higher VUS rate and relaying information to patients about moderate penetrance genes. Nevertheless, as more individuals with mutations in moderate risk genes are identified, because of their inclusion on panel-based tests, additional information about their implications for cancer risk and medical management is expected to emerge.

The likelihood of detecting mutations in moderate penetrance genes is dependent on which of these genes are included on the specific panel-based test ordered. In our report focused on a colon-specific panel, CHEK2 is the only moderate penetrance gene included within this panel. Different mutations in CHEK2 may be associated with substantially different cancer risks (19). Clinical testing for CHEK2 has been available for years, yet medical management of patients with CHEK2 mutations is not well-defined; and cancer screening recommendations are primarily based on patients’ personal and family medical histories. Individuals with CHEK2 mutations in this study may have a higher incidence of CRC because of selection bias. However, prior to the introduction of panel-based testing, clinical testing for CHEK2 mutations was rare, and our results may reflect that these mutations are more common than previously believed. While most cancers in the eight CHEK2 families were later onset, seven of them had at least one individual with a cancer diagnosed before the age of 50. In these cases it may be appropriate to consider lowering the age they begin cancer screening for the affected organ (19).

Additional challenges can occur related to MUTYH associated polyposis (MAP) which confers up to 63% CRC risk by age 60 (20). Unlike other hereditary CRC syndromes that are included on ColoNext™ testing, MAP is an autosomal recessive condition; therefore, parents and children of individuals with MAP are rarely affected. Nevertheless, the question of whether monoallelic MUTYH mutation carriers have a moderately increased CRC risk remains unclear (20–22).

Another factor to consider with expansion of panel-based testing is an expected increase in the rate of VUS results. This study found a relatively high VUS rate, occurring in 20% of the individuals tested. Interestingly, nearly half of all VUS results in the current study occurred in four Lynch syndrome genes which comprised less than a third of the 14 ColoNext™ genes, which translates to a VUS rate of ~10% consistent with reports from other laboratories that perform LS genetic testing (23, 24). Although VUS results remain an important concern, it is anticipated that the ability to classify VUS results will improve with more widespread testing and data sharing among researchers and laboratories (including Ambry).

Study strengths include the large sample size from the first commercial laboratory to offer clinical panel-based testing for inherited cancer predisposition. Furthermore, generalizability of findings is enhanced given that our sample included a diverse group of patients from over 200 US institutions. Despite these strengths, our sample encompassed early adopters of a single cancer panel primarily ordered by genetics professionals. Therefore, mutation and VUS rates will vary across panels and may change over time as panel-based tests are more widely diffused. Furthermore, our reliance on information in the TRF without medical record and family history verification as well as lack of information about tumor testing preceding germline testing in most cases (to identify possible Lynch Syndrome) are inherent limitations; however this approach also enabled the large sample size for the study. Moreover, information contained in the TRF was sufficient to suggest that phenotypes associated with mutations in certain genes and criteria for testing may need to be expanded as more panel-based testing identifies other atypical cases.

As adoption of panel-based testing for hereditary cancer syndromes continues to spread it is important to ensure that patients receive accurate information about their test results, particularly for the substantial number of patients who will receive inconclusive results as well as those found to have mutations in rarer inherited cancer genes and moderate penetrance genes. This study suggests that genetics professionals comprise most of the early adopters of panel-based testing. However, it is anticipated that over time, the use of NGS panels will diffuse to providers with less specialized training in genetics. Educational efforts, preferably spearheaded by academic institutions or professional organizations rather than by commercial laboratories, will therefore be needed as many providers in the US have been shown to lack knowledge of fundamental genetic concepts and VUS results (25–27). Furthermore, although panel-based testing may reduce the need to perform a differential diagnosis up front, clinicians who order testing must still be knowledgeable about clinical diagnostic criteria for hereditary cancer syndromes and management recommendations in order to provide the most appropriate application of test results to patient care. Finally, it remains uncertain whether identification of moderate penetrance genes truly helps guide cancer screening decisions over and above what would be recommended based on comprehensive collection of family history without conducting testing.

Ultimately, to help prevent negative outcomes, it is imperative that additional guidelines regarding the use of panel-based testing be developed. The current
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2013 ‘NCCN guidelines for Colorectal Screening’ do not mention panel-based testing. Additional research is needed to update these practice guidelines so they may better address the unique practice-based issues and advantages of panel-based testing. Uncertainties associated with moderate penetrant genes, such as CHEK2, highlight the importance of research studies and academic registries. In addition, research is needed to identify the optimal counseling approach for panel-based testing.

Overall, this study provides a broader picture of panel-based testing for hereditary CRC than previously available and suggests that testing may: (1) cast a wider net, and in some cases identify mutations in genes that might not otherwise be tested because of an atypical phenotype and (2) be an efficient approach when patients present with features of more than one hereditary CRC syndrome. Despite highlighting these potential benefits of panel-based testing, this study raises additional questions and concerns that will need to be addressed through clinical research and education.

Supporting Information

The following Supporting information is available for this article:

Table S1. Descriptions of individuals with a pathogenic mutation in CHEK2 only.

Additional Supporting information may be found in the online version of this article.

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