Immune response in cervical intraepithelial neoplasms

Priscíla Thais Silva Mantoani1, Daniela Rodrigues Siqueira1, Millena Prata Jammal1, Eddie Fernando Candido Murta1, Rosekeila Simões Nomelini1,

1 Department of Gynecology and Obstetrics, Research Institute of Oncology (IPON), Federal University of Triângulo Mineiro, 38025-440 Uberaba, Brazil

*Correspondence: rosekeila@terra.com.br; rosekeila.nomelini@pesquisador.cnpq.br (Rosekeila Simões Nomelini)

DOI:10.31083/j.ejg04205146

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Submitted: 9 May 2021 Revised: 8 July 2021 Accepted: 20 July 2021 Published: 15 October 2021

Objective: The current study aims to perform a comprehensive overview of the topic immune response in cervical intraepithelial neoplasms, summarizing the findings of literature. Data sources: PubMed database. Methods of study selection: A search for the following descriptors was performed in the PubMed database: descriptor “immune response in cervical cancer and Human Papilloma Virus (HPV)” ; “immunotherapy in premalignant cervical lesions”. Tabulation, integration and results: The articles identified were published between 1967 and 2021. We selected 85 articles for review on the subject (reference 16 onwards). This literature review shows the important role that the immune system plays in the development and progression of cervical cancer. Immune response in pre-neoplastic cervical lesions includes host defense mechanisms against the HPV, adaptive immunity and the function of cytokines. Predictive factors of viral persistence and progression of premalignant lesions may also be associated with immune response. Conclusion: One of the determining factors for the persistence or elimination of HPV infections and their evolution to pre-neoplastic lesions is the cellular immune response, as the progression or regression of the tumor depends on the type and amount of cytokines secreted by the body. The investigation of these immune reactions may provide new therapeutic targets for cervical intraepithelial neoplasms.

Keywords
Cervical intraepithelial neoplasms, Immune response, Cervical cancer, Human Papilloma Virus, Immunotherapy

1. Introduction

Initially, cervical lesions that predispose to cervical cancer were classified as mild, moderate and severe dysplasias. With the Bethesda classification system, cytological changes were differentiated from histopathological changes, being called, respectively, intraepithelial lesion and cervical intraepithelial neoplasia. The low-grade squamous intraepithelial lesion (LSIL) is the cytological hallmark of cervical intraepithelial neoplasia (CIN) 1, representing a transient action of Human Papilloma Virus (HPV) virus in an episomal manner in the lower third of the cervical epithelium close to the basement membrane. Consequently, the high-grade squamous intraepithelial lesion (HSIL) would be the cytological correspondent of CIN 2 and 3, that represents the true precursor lesion of cervical cancer in which HPV causes more intense cytarchitectural changes in at least two thirds of the thickness epithelial of the uterine cervix [1].

Cervical cancer is characterized by uncontrolled cell replication of the epithelium, which can extend to the stroma and become invasive to adjacent structures and organs. The epidermoid histological type occurs in 90% of cervical neoplasms, affecting the squamous epithelium, while adenocarcinoma affects approximately 10% of women, with cellular changes in the glandular epithelium. Its main cause is persistent infection with oncogenic types of HPV, with approximately 570,000 new cases expected per year worldwide, 85% of which are diagnosed in developing countries and 15% in developed countries [2].

HPV is a virus with a diameter of 52 to 55 nm. It has an icosahedral capsule with 72 capsomeres whose double helix genome of DNA (deoxyribonucleic acid) contains approximately 8000 base pairs. These pairs are encoded in three main portions: early (E1 to E8) which encodes non-structural proteins that regulate cell activity, late (L1 and L2) responsible for coding capsid and regulatory proteins (long control region—LCR) capable of regulating gene expression and viral replication [3].

They are cutaneous-mucous tropism viruses with more than 200 subtypes classified as low and high risk according to the progression of the lesions to malignancy [4]. The oncogenic potential is directly related to the ability to integrate the viral genome into the host cell and the production of E6 and E7 oncoprotens that interfere with cell autoregulation by inhibiting p53 and pRb promoting their degradation or inactivation, preventing the apoptosis of cells from inadequate division cellular [5, 6].

The types of high-risk HPV that infect the ano-genital tract include 16, 18, 31, 33, 34, 35, 39, 45, 51, 52, 56, 58, 59, 66 and 68 leading to a greater propensity infected cells evolve into invasion [7]. The types of HPV of low oncogenic risk are found in the episomal form in the host cell, that is, they are not linked to its DNA and, thus, its cell clearance mechanism is facilitated.

HPV is transmitted through sexual contact and has a high prevalence worldwide, being the main sexually transmitted infection. It is known that up to 80% of women in the world have contact with the virus at some point in their lives [8, 9].

Factors related to the virus, such as its genotype and the presence of more than one oncogenic type, and to the host,
have been related to the persistence of the infection, which represents the central factor of progression. Factors related to the host are immunosuppression, smoking, other sexually transmitted infections, nutritional deficiencies and use of hormonal contraceptives [10]. Non-sexual transmission of HPV is still controversial, less important and therefore undervalued in the study of this viral infection. Another form of HPV transmission is vertical transmission, through the umbilical cord and placenta [11], leading to perinatal infection [12] and newborn laryngeal papilloma. In addition, there is transmission by fomites and self-inoculation [13], proving viral infectivity at room temperature, being considered important non-sexual forms of HPV transmission [14].

According to the International Agency for Research on Cancer [2], the number of new cases of cervical cancer worldwide reaches 569,847. Regarding deaths in the same period, 311,365 lives were lost globally, a total of 3.3% of all cancer deaths in women [15]. In Brazil, despite significant regional differences, cervical cancer is the third in incidence in women, surpassed only by malignant breast and colorectal neoplasms. There are an estimated 16,710 new cases, with an estimated risk of 16.35 cases per 100,000 women for the 2020–2022 period. It is the fourth leading cause of female death from cancer, with 6526 deaths expected in 2020 according to data from the National Cancer Institute. It is a rare malignant tumor before 30 years and has a peak incidence between 45 and 50 years, with progressive mortality rates from the fourth decade of life [2].

HPV infection induces innate and acquired immune responses in the cervical stroma. The current study aims to perform a comprehensive overview of the topic immune response in cervical intraepithelial neoplasms summarizing the findings of literature.

2. Methods

A search for the following descriptors was performed in the PubMed database: “immune response in cervical cancer and Human Papilloma Virus”; “immunotherapy in premalignant cervical lesions”. The articles identified were published between 1967 and 2021. We selected 85 articles for review on the subject (reference 16 onwards) by one of the authors and after, the other authors helped to write the topics covered.

3. Results

The articles identified were published between 1967 and 2021. We selected 85 articles for review on the subject. The flow diagram shows the number of articles included in the study (Fig. 1).

3.1 Immune response in pre-neoplastic cervical lesions

3.1.1 Host defense mechanisms against the Human Papilloma Virus

The host’s defense against various viral infections is based on the innate non-specific and adaptive immune response, which is specific and capable of preventing future reinfections. Physical barriers, such as intact epithelium and keratinocytes in proper differentiation, as well as protective substances in local mucosa such as antimicrobial peptides and cytokines making local mucus more viscous [16, 17], are the first barrier of host against HPV infection.

The innate immune response triggered by HPV infection recruits local defense cells such as natural killer cells, dendritic cells, Langerhans cells, and natural killer T cells for the HPV-infected microenvironment [18]. In the adaptive immune response, TCD4 lymphocytes generate an immune response in two Th1 and Th2 pathways depending on the type of cytokine produced. The Th1 pathway produces cytokines responsible for the activation of the cellular immune response and the Th2 pathway for the humoral immune response [19].

In general, the majority of the population has acquired HPV infections. However, only 10 to 15% of these individuals develop persistent infections throughout their lives, and of this group, few have the potential to progress to neoplasia, which suggests adequate immune defense for initial infections [20]. In a small portion of the infected population, the virus develops mechanisms to evade the host’s defenses.

Because it is an intraepithelial virus that does not generate systemic infections and does not have a viremia phase in its cycle, a small number of its copies are exposed to the host’s immune defense and remain invisible for long periods [21].

The infection and evolution potential of the HPV virus is totally dependent on the differentiation of keratinocytes from basal to superficial cells, thus small abrasions on the skin and mucosa damaging physical barriers facilitate the viral process.
However, being in keratinocytes, HPV is able to evade the innate immune response, with no mechanisms of apoptosis or cytolysis in these cells that complete their differentiation from the basal layer to the superficial layer away from the local immune defense, without an inflammatory process [21].

High-risk HPV is able to promote a reduction in the immune response dependent on IFN-α and IFN-β, which are fundamental in antiviral immune defense by activating the innate and adaptive immune response through viral transcription [22].

Through pinocytosis, HPV goes beyond the extracellular matrix reaching the interior of the host cell, passing through endosomes/lysosomes reaching the Golgi complex towards the cell nucleus [23, 24]. In the nucleus of the host cell, HPV finds a favorable environment for replication and proliferation, a fundamental point in the infectious process of this virus.

By escaping autophagy [25], promoting the loss of the nuclear envelope in the host cells [26] and inhibiting the action of α-defensins [27], HPV achieves success in the infection process.

### 3.1.2 Innate immunity

HPV is a DNA virus that migrates in the host cell towards the nucleus, where it finds a suitable environment for its replication using biological instruments already in activity. During this process of movement, the viral DNA would be easily recognized by the antiviral defense system that understands any genetic material outside the cell nucleus as foreign, with the immediate elimination of viral genetic material foreign to that of the host cell [28]. In the host cell, HPV has its DNA recognized and eliminated by substances such as interferon-γ (IFN-γ) 16 (IFI16), and cyclic guanosine-adenosine synthase (cGAS) [29]. In addition, inflammasome AIM2 is released by the host DNA itself, which fights viral DNA with caspase-1 and interleukin-1β (IL-1β), activated especially in keratinocytes infected by HPV 16 [30].

IFI16 restricts the replication of the HPV genome and the transcription of the gene, increasing the association of heterochromatin with early and late promoters [31].

The greater expression of toll-like receptors (TLR) (TLR2, TLR3, TLR7, TLR8 and TLR9) is common in women who manage to eliminate the initial HPV infection [32]. The increased production of cytokines IFN-α and IFN-β is the result of the recognition of the host cell of viral pathogens, including HPV [33], and treatment with IFN-β prevents the entry of the virus and promotes the elimination of latent episomal form in infected cells [34].

Dendritic cells (DC), Langerhans cells (LC), natural killer cells (NK) and natural killer T cells (NKT), essential in the innate immune response, are activated in response to HPV infection [18], with the release of several cytokines IFN-α, IL-6, tumor necrosis factor α (TNF-α) and IL-8 [35]. In addition, the increase in HPV infection and the incidence of cancer associated with HPV have been observed in individuals with various functional deficiencies of NK cells [36].

### 3.1.3 Adaptive immunity

As it does not cause viremia or cytolysis, HPV suffers a reduced action from the systemic immune response, despite the proven action of host T cells [37], which stands out in the host clearance of this viral infection [38-41].

In general, the antibody titers produced from the infection are low to be effectively protective, which suggests that HPV is able to efficiently prevent the host’s response during the natural course of the infection [33].

### 3.1.4 Escape mechanism of the host’s immune system

HPV has mechanisms that allow it to escape from the host’s immune system. During viral replication, the high expression of these proteins is limited to keratinocytes and as the viral infection is unable to lyse keratinocytes, antigen-presenting cells (APC) and Langerhans cells (LC) have minimal chance of initiating an immune response such as phagocyte virions and subsequently present viral antigens [42]. This, the cervical epithelium ends up being a protective niche for HPV [43]. Another escape mechanism is the resistance to apoptosis via the FAS receptor that cells infected with HPV acquire [44].

HPV is also able to modulate the expression of the host gene by deregulating the methylation of the host’s DNA, modifying histones and transcription factors [16]. In addition, viral infection disrupts the functions of numerous proteins, for example, HPV E6 and E7 oncoproteins have no enzymatic activity, desired locations and hijacking their activities to increase replication, virus persistence and inadvertently induce a greater degree of malignancy [45, 46]. These oncoproteins, E6 and E7, often inhibit the host protein functions by direct binding [16], repress the TNF-α-inducible NF-kB activity in cervical cancer cells, promoting the appearance of cervical cancer. This loss of NF-kB allows the virus to restrict the host’s immune response and stimulate continued HPV infection, promoting cancer growth and progression [47].

For effective control of HPV infection, both the innate and adaptive immune responses are critical. As previously described, HPV modulates a number of mechanisms to prevent host immune responses during persistent infection.

### 3.1.5 Cytokines in CIN and HPV

Cytokines are proteins produced by several cells of the innate and adaptive immune response with an important role in biological activities, mainly related to their capacity for pleiotropism and synergism. They act in regulating the magnitude of the immune response, inflammatory response and hematopoiesis, acting locally and systemic [48]. Thus, the individual analysis of the biological function of each of them, especially in tumor progression, is an extremely difficult task.

TCD4 lymphocytes generate an immune response in two Th1 and Th2 pathways depending on the type of cytokine produced. The Th1 pathway produces cytokines responsible for the activation of the cellular immune response and the Th2 pathway for the humoral immune response [19]. Re-
cently additional pathways of immune response have been identified Th17, Th9 and Th22 [49–51].

The antitumor immune response requires an adequate balance in the production of cytokines and, consequently, tumor progression or regression depends on the type and amount of cytokines secreted in the body [52].

Tumor progression is dependent on suppression of cellular immunity and the development of an immunosuppressive pathway for T reg lymphocytes. Cytokines of T reg lymphocytes are considered to suppress immune response and T reg lymphocytes are potent inhibitors of the antitumor immune response associated with a worse prognosis in many types of cancer [53, 54].

The amount of T reg lymphocytes does not seem to be important in the progression of the lesion, but rather the amount of cytokines produced. In this way, patients with a small amount of these cells but with a large release of cytokines have a greater chance of progressing the tumor lesion. The alteration of the cytokine balance in the tumor microenvironment seems to be the fundamental point of cervical tumor progression when generating conditions for these cells to evade the surveillance of the immune system [52].

Studies suggest that in the evolution of high-grade cervical lesions and cervical cancer, there is a reduction in the amount of Th1 cells and an increase in Th2 cells [55, 56].

The progression of cervical intraepithelial neoplasia leads to a change in the pattern of cytokine secretion. There is a reduction of IL-2, IL-12 and TNF, and an increase of TGF-β. Furthermore, regulatory T lymphocytes actively participate in the induction of cell damage [52].

The reduction in the synthesis of IFN-γ and IL-2 has been associated with an evolution of the histological grade of CIN and progression to cancer [57, 58]. Likewise, the development of an injury has been associated with cytokine secretion from the Th2 pathway with a reduction in IL-2 and IL-10 [59]. Immunosuppressive cytokines such as IL-10, IL-4 and TGF-B increase with tumor progression [60].

### 3.1.6 Predictors of viral persistence and progression of premalignant lesions

HPV infection in the metaplastic transformation zone with viral persistence, the progression of intraepithelial lesions and the invasion of altered cells beyond the basement membrane of the epithelium are decisive factors in the development of cervical cancer [20].

The cellular immune response has been shown to be one of the most important determining factors in the persistence or clearing of HPV infections and their evolution to pre-neoplastic lesions [61, 62]. Although the role of T cells in this process is not yet fully understood, it is known that in many epidemiological studies the expression of the leukocyte antigen-DRB1*1301 can be considered a protective factor [63]. In addition, the innate immune response present in the cervical mucosa plays an important role in viral clearance [61].

The integration of viral DNA with that of the host cell with persistent infection and viral load are decisive points in the evolution to high-grade neoplasms and cervical cancer [10, 64]. Although some studies question whether viral load should really be considered clinically important in this evolution, as it may not be directly implicated in the higher risk of disease progression, except for HPV 16 [65, 66].

The evolution from cervical preneoplastic lesions to invasive cancer can occur after decades in a small number of cases. In less than 10% of HPV infections, there is viral persistence and cervical intraepithelial neoplasms, which occur between 5 and 10 years of evolution. Most HPV infections with or without cytological abnormalities undergo a process of suppression or clearing by cell immunity between 1 and 2 years [61].

The longer the period of persistence of a particular viral type in the cervical epithelium, the greater the chances of an increase in the interval for clearing the virus and the possibility of establishing pre-neoplastic lesions [67].

Rarely after the viral bleaching process, HPV can reappear, occurring mainly due to a viral replication from a previous latent infection as occurs in cases of patients immunosuppressed by the HIV virus [68].

The viral types of HPV that promote persistent infections are more common, such as HPV 16. The risk conditions that lead to viral persistence are not fully understood, however the HPV subtype involved seems to be the main determining factor that leads to a persistent viral infection, progressing to pre-neoplastic lesions [69, 70].

Although the dimension in which it occurs is not fully elucidated, it is known that women with viral infections due to multiple HPV subtypes are at higher risk of developing pre-neoplastic lesions when compared to women with only one viral subtype [71].

Some studies suggest an association between condom use and decreased viral persistence and progression of cervical lesions [72, 73].

Immunosuppression favors the persistence and progression of cervical lesions. Patients with autoimmune diseases, particularly systemic lupus erythematosus, may be prone to HPV infection and cervical dysplasia. However, the risk factors for the development of persistent HPV-related infection should be further assessed and the issue seems to be unclear [74]. Transplant patients have a chronic condition of immunological depression that predisposes them to the appearance of tumors, in particular those that are induced by cervical, vaginal, vulvar and perianal viruses [75, 76]. Studies have shown an increased susceptibility of transplant patients to human papillomavirus cervical infection [77, 78].

### 3.2 Immunotherapy in premalignant cervical lesions

The search for conservative treatments in pre-neoplastic and cervical neoplastic diseases, aiming at preserving the reproductive future of some women and avoiding the persistence of HPV, motivates current studies that establish efficacy and safety in new therapies.
The immunotherapy shows great possibilities and expectations in the less aggressive and more effective treatment of CIN. Currently, a large number of new and recent researches promote constant changes and questions aiming at better and less traumatic therapeutic practices [79, 80].

Immunotherapy is a recent and promising biological treatment for several diseases, including cancer, based on the stimulation of innate and adaptive immune responses, enhancing and promoting the detection of malignant cells or cells with malignancy potential. Thus, tumor treatment is more selective and with less damage to normal cells. They can be made in the form of monoclonal antibodies (artificial versions of proteins of the immune system), immune control inhibitors (drugs that increase the action of the immune system) and vaccines (produced from the body's own tumor cells). The focus of the target immunotherapy is to eliminate or decrease cell infection through the action of cytotoxic T cells against infected cells by increasing the expression of MHC I [81].

Two distinct phases of the oncogenic infection process, the initial and the one already established over the years, are targets of immune therapy based on vaccination. With a focus on preventing initial HPV infection, the use of prophylactic vaccines is already well established in clinical practice. These vaccines induce the formation of antibodies against the viral L1 portion, preventing HPV from promoting its adhesion and entry into the host cell. Prophylactic vaccines have no global coverage and have no therapeutic effect [82, 83]. On the other hand, prophylactic vaccines for HPV infection of high oncogenic risk for cervical cancer are accepted worldwide with their established and widespread use in prevention programs, other less invasive and safe therapeutic alternatives for the treatment of pre-neoplastic cervical lesions are studied, with emphasis therapeutic vaccines.

Therapeutic vaccines have their models based on the episomal form of viral replication or on the viral sequence already integrated into the cell, with a primary focus on viral proteins E6 and E7 from infected cells of the basal layer of epithelium and cervical cancer cells that do not express viral proteins strongly L1/L2. HPV oncogenes are the main target of immunotherapy in cervical cancer. Therapeutic HVP DNA vaccines have been shown to be effective, safe and have great immunogenic potential. For this reason, they have been studied with great success, becoming more and more a modern and real possibility of pharmacotherapy against cervical diseases. The combination of anti-HPV DNA vaccines with radiotherapy, chemotherapy, immunomodulators or immune adjuvants shows a great perspective in the treatment of cervical malignant tumors [84].

Therapeutic vaccine technology is based on peptide/protein vaccines, nucleic acid vaccines (DNA for NIC), viral or bacterial vector vaccines. These cells present in vaccines are derived from dendritic cells (applied in the treatment of CINs) or tumor cells [79, 80].

Therapies with blockade of the Hippo-YAP pathway would be promising in the treatment of malignant cervical tumors. The Hippo-YAP regulatory pathway for growth, homeostasis and tumorigenesis is already well established, aiming at cell growth through the adequate control of nuclear proteins YAP1/TAZ. Its localization or regulation abnormalities lead to the formation, progression and metastasis of numerous malignant tumors, especially squamous cell carcinoma. In the laboratory, cofactors increase YAP1/TAZ in these tumors, promoting the rapid appearance of carcinoma in situ and its evolution. In cervical squamous cell carcinoma, in addition to inhibition of P53 by the E6 and E7 portions of HPV, E6 also promotes activation and accumulation of the YAP1 pathway. As a result, there is uncontrolled abnormal cell proliferation, lymph node metastasis and recurrence. Thus, anticancer treatment models such as therapeutic vaccines with blockade of the Hippo-YAP pathway would be revolutionary [85].

Studies have shown that patients with advanced or recurrent cervical cancer treated with autologous dendritic cell-derived monocytes associated with recombinant HPV-16/18 E6 or E7 vaccines have an adequate T cell response [86, 87]. A large number of studies involving gene optimization, strong viral epitopes, advanced methods of local immune reach and great molecular adjuvant efficiency in addition to immunomodulators are promising in clinical research of therapeutic vaccines. Therapeutic vaccines are not only safe and generate an immune response, but also have great clinical efficacy. In addition, they may be more advantageous in pre-neoplastic cervical lesions when they demonstrate the same efficacy and safety as surgical treatments, being less invasive. And they can also be a therapeutic option in conjunction with other established clinical therapies [84].

Antigen-presenting cells such as dendritic cells have the role of increasing the activity of T cells by presenting antigens from infected or tumor cells. Therapeutic vaccines trigger the activation and maturation of dendritic cells promoting the formation of cytotoxic CD8 + anti-tumor T cells. E6 and E7 viral proteins are considered ideal target molecules to trigger a strong immune response against cells infected by HPV [88].

The study by Trimble et al. [89] in 2015 was the first therapeutic study of DNA vaccines not associated with surgical treatment with proven efficacy. They demonstrated a regression of 48.2% of treated CIN II/III cases [89]. Currently, there are eighteen therapeutic vaccines in phase 2 and 3 of studies with different stages of evaluation showing good and promising clinical results, most of which are well tolerated with mild adverse effects at the application site and nonspecific flu-like symptoms. The use of therapeutic vaccines showed efficacy in regression from CIN 2/3 to CIN 1 or absence of CIN between 17 and 59% over at least 12 weeks of follow-up [90].

Although specific therapeutic vaccines for tumor antigens (NY-ESO-1 or HER2) and therapeutic vaccines against viral antigens of HPV 16 and 18 have shown great efficacy, these studies do not include infections by other types of HPV [91].

Imiquimod is an immunomodulatory drug capable of ini-
tiating the local immune response, through the expression of dendritic dermal cells of cytokines such as TNF-alpha, interferon (IFN)-alpha and interleukins 1, 6 and 8. There is an increase in the production of INF by dendritic plasma cells attracted from the bloodstream. This increase in cytokine production stimulates natural killer cells to eliminate cells infected with HPV or already undergoing carcinogenic transformation. Imiquimod has an action on the innate and adaptive immune response, through the migration of mature Langenhans cells to lymph nodes, presenting viral antigens and initiating the Th1 response. Specific tumor T cells produced infiltrate the affected skin. B cells produce antibodies that enhance the presentation of antigens. Thus, imiquimod has a synergistic antiviral and antitumor effect [92, 93].

The activation of innate immune response leads to adverse local changes such as hyperemia, burning and edema. Simple side effects are common such as vaginal desquamation with mild leukorrhea, vulvar itching, adynamia, fatigue and headache. In more complex situations, mucosal erosions and fever can occur. Symptoms and signs similar to a common cold can be noticed by patients. These adverse effects are most often mild and of low intensity, with complete remission with discontinuation of use. In cases of side effects, the use of low doses does not harm the treatment in the long term, and can minimize surgical or ablative treatments that may be necessary [94].

The use of imiquimod in the treatment of vulvar intraepithelial neoplasms is already well established in the literature, with good results when compared to excisional treatment. With regard to the treatment of CIN and vaginal intraepithelial neoplasia with imiquimod, studies have limited evidence [95].

Since the early 1980s, several studies have used interferon to treat gynecological cancer [96]. Interferons (IFNs) are glycoproteins that were initially described with antiviral effects [97]. Conservative therapy with pegylated interferon may be a therapeutic option for patients of childbearing age, since it does not alter the anatomy of the cervix, which is the factor most responsible for generating complications during pregnancy [98].

A study by Ramos et al. [99] demonstrated that women with CIN 3 treated with IFN-α and who had tumor regression expressed more helper T-profile (Th1) type 1 cytokines (IFN-γ, tumor necrosis factor (TNF)-α, interleukin (IL)-2), with a significant reduction in the viral load of high-risk HPV in the lesions.

Another study quantified cytokine levels after CIN treatment with Pegylated-interferon-alpha-2b, demonstrating the profile of the local and systemic immune response. The study showed that this treatment could modulate the immune response profile through the production of some cytokines [100].

The association of joint or sequential therapies of efficacy and safety already established in the literature with the application of immunotherapy is the center of modern practices of great expectation for the future treatment of malignant and pre-neoplastic cervical lesions [84].

4. Conclusions

The cellular immune response is one of the determining factors in the persistence or elimination of HPV infections and its evolution to pre-neoplastic lesions. Although the dimension in which it occurs is not entirely clear, it is known that the progression of the cervical neoplastic lesion promotes a change in the pattern of cytokine secretion, with active participation of regulatory T lymphocytes. Thus, the antitumor immune response requires a balance in the production of cytokines because the progression or regression of the tumor depends on the type and amount of cytokines secreted. In response to HPV infection, activation of dendritic cells, Langenhan cells and natural killer cells is essential. With a focus on preventing early HPV infection, the use of prophylactic vaccines is already well established in clinical practice. Investigation of these immune reactions may provide new therapeutic targets for cervical intraepithelial neoplasms.

Author contributions

RSN and EFCM designed the research study. RSN, MPJ, EFCM, PTSM and DRS performed the research. PTSM selected the articles. PTSM, MPJ and DRS wrote the manuscript. RSN and EFCM reviewed the manuscript. All authors contributed to editorial changes in the manuscript. All authors read and approved the final manuscript.

Ethics approval and consent to participate

Not applicable.

Acknowledgment

The authors would like to express their gratitude to all those who helped them during the writing of this manuscript. Thanks to all the peer reviewers for their opinions and suggestions.

Funding

This project was supported by the CNPq - National Council for Scientific and Technological Development (Grant No.: 301115/2018-4), FUNEP - Uberaba Education and Research Foundation (Grant No.: 02 2011), FAPEMIG - Minas Gerais Research Funding Foundation (Grant No.: RED-00011-14), and CAPES - Coordination for the Improvement of Higher Education Personnel (Grant No.: 32012012001P5).

Conflict of interest

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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