Expression of Ki67 and CerbB-2 in Gall Bladder, Oesophageal, Small Intestinal and Colorectal Adenocarcinomas: A Study from a Tertiary Care Hospital in Western U.P.

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ABSTRACT

Introduction: Gall bladder cancer is the commonest biliary tract malignancy with poor prognosis. Oesophageal adenocarcinomas are aggressive with very poor survival. Adenocarcinomas of small intestine are rare, in comparison to colorectal carcinomas. We studied the expression of two commonly studied immunohistochemical markers Ki67 and CerbB-2 in gall bladder and gastrointestinal carcinomas, to find out their prognostic significance.

Material and Methods: Histopathologically confirmed cases of adenocarcinomas of gall bladder (19 cases), oesophagus (3 cases), small intestine (3 cases) and colorectal region (8 cases) were included. Formalin fixed paraffin embedded tissue blocks were retrieved and sections were studied immunohistochemically for expression of Ki67 and CerbB-2. Tumors of all stages and grades were studied.

Results: Our study revealed a significantly high Ki67 in neoplastic glands of gall bladder, oesophageal, small intestinal and colorectal adenocarcinomas as compared to the non neoplastic areas. The Ki67 labelling index was higher in moderately and poorly differentiated areas as well as mucinous and signet ring type adenocarcinomas. There was no relation with stage/depth of tumor invasion. CerbB-2 was significantly overexpressed in gall bladder and colorectal adenocarcinomas. Expression was higher in advanced stage and greater depth of invasion. There was no association with tumor grade or type. In esophageal and small intestine adenocarcinomas, expression was not related to either tumor stage or grade.

Conclusion: A panel of Ki67 and CerbB-2 in gastrointestinal and biliary tract malignancies may correlate well with different prognostic indicators in these malignancies, like tumor stage, histologic type and grade.

Keywords: Gall Bladder, Oesophagus, S.I., Colorectal, Ki67, CerbB2.

INTRODUCTION

Gall bladder cancer is the commonest biliary tract malignancy and carries a poor prognosis. Oesophageal adenocarcinomas also have an aggressive course with very poor survival. Adenocarcinomas of small intestine are rare, in comparison to colorectal carcinomas, especially in the industrialized world.

C-erbB2, a cell surface growth factor receptor, has gained popularity as a candidate for targeted therapy in different cancers. There is an increasing evidence that over-expression of tyrosine kinase growth factor receptors such as C-erbB2 may play an important role in the development of biliary tract carcinomas. Over-expression of C-erbB2 has been studied in various tumors like breast, gastric, colorectal, pulmonary, and gallbladder, and has become a valid indication for targeted therapy by trastuzumab in breast cancer. HER2 (CerbB2) overexpression or amplification has been studied in patients with gastrointestinal tumors such as esophageal adenocarcinoma, gastric adenocarcinoma, and colorectal adenocarcinoma. Ki-67 labeling index has been a marker of proliferation and long studied in several cancers. It has been found to be significantly higher in gall bladder malignancies in patients in age group <40 years (P = 0.027), and poorly differentiated tumors (P = 0.023).

So far, not much work has been done in relation with these markers in gall bladder and gastrointestinal tract cancers. Only scanty data is available from India on the expression of these biomarkers in these malignancies. We studied the expression of these two commonly studied immunohistochemical markers Ki67 and CerbB2 in gall bladder and gastrointestinal carcinomas, to find out their prognostic significance and potential etiological relationship.

MATERIAL AND METHODS

Histopathologically confirmed cases of adenocarcinomas of gall bladder, oesophagus, small intestine and colorectal region over a half yearly period in histopathology laboratory of Rohilkhand Medical college (Bareilly, UP), were included. Formalin fixed paraffin embedded tissue blocks were taken and desired sections were studied immunohistochemically for expression of Ki67 (Mouse Monoclonal antibody from Dako, Germany) and CerbB2 (Dako, Germany). Positive control for KI67 was a known case of acute lymphoblastic leukaemia, while that for CerbB2 was a known case of Her2neu positive breast cancer. Areas unstained with respective IHC in the stained slides were taken as negative

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How to cite this article: Cheena Garg, Arjun Agarwal, Ranjan Agrawal. Expression of Ki67 and CerbB-2 in gall bladder, oesophageal, small intestinal and colorectal adenocarcinomas: a study from a tertiary care hospital in Western U.P. International Journal of Contemporary Medical Research 2019;6(9):I1-I5.

DOI: http://dx.doi.org/10.21276/ijcmr.2019.6.9.17
controls. Tumours of all stages and grades were studied. CerbB2 evaluation of the results was done according to the criteria as recommended by the manufacturer using the scores from 0 to 3+. Score 0 is defined as no staining at all or membrane staining in < 10% of tumour cells. Score 1+ is defined as faint/barely perceptable membrane staining in > 10% of tumour cells. The cells are only stained in part of the membrane. 2+ is defined as weak to moderate staining of the entire membrane in > 10% of the tumour cells. And 3+ is defined as strong staining of the entire membrane in > 10%. Score of 0 and 1+ indicates a negative tumour like in breast carcinoma, while only 3+ is considered positive. 2+ is equivocal. Cytoplasmic staining was taken negative. Ki67 was expressed as MIB 1 Labelling Index. It is the number of positive nuclear staining cells out of total number of cells counted (upto 1000) multiplied by 100. (<10 is taken negative).

**RESULTS**

Total 33 cases were studied, of which 19 (57.6%) were gall bladder adenocarcinomas, 3 (9.1%) were oesophageal adenocarcinomas and small intestinal adenocarcinomas, each. Another 8 (24.2%) were colorectal adenocarcinomas. Mean age for gall bladder adenocarcinoma was 49.5 years,

| Tumour stage/depth of invasion | Total | CerbB2 (No. and % of positive cases) | Ki67 no. of positive cases (mean MIB 1 LI) |
|--------------------------------|-------|-------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------|
| Upto mucosa                    | 0     | 0                                   | 0                                          |
| Upto ms propria                | 3     | 2 (67%)                             | 2 (26.5)                                   |
| Full thickness (all layers)    | 16    | 12 (75%)                            | 11 (37.4)                                  |
| Total cases                    | 19    | 14                                  | 13                                         |
| Lymphovascular/perineural invasion | 5  | 2 (40%)                             | 3 (40)                                     |
| Hepatic metastasis             | 5     | 4 (80%)                             | 4 (52)                                     |
| Total cases                    | 8     | 3                                   | 5                                          |

| Tumour grade/Differentiation    | Total | CerbB2 (No. of positive cases) | Ki67 no. of positive cases (mean MIB 1 LI) |
|--------------------------------|-------|-------------------------------|--------------------------------------------|
| Well differentiated             | 13    | 9 (69%)                       | 7 (21)                                     |
| Moderately differentiated       | 2     | 1 (50%)                       | 2 (35)                                     |
| Poorly differentiated           | 4     | 4 (100%)                      | 4 (62)                                     |
| Total cases                     | 19    | 14                             | 13                                         |

**Table-1:** Immunohistochemical Expression of CerbB2 and Ki67 in GB adenocarcinoma

| Tumour stage | Total | CerbB2 (No. of positive cases) | Ki67 no. of positive cases (mean MIB 1 LI) |
|--------------|-------|-------------------------------|--------------------------------------------|
| Upto mucosa  | 1     | 0                             | 1 (30)                                     |
| Upto ms propria | 3 | 0                             | 2 (54.5)                                   |
| Full thickness | 4  | 3 (75%)                       | 2 (69)                                     |
| Total cases  | 8     | 3                             | 5                                          |
| Omental metastasis | 2 | 1 (50%)                       | 2 (69)                                     |
| Total cases  | 8     | 3                             | 5                                          |

**Table-2:** Immunohistochemical Expression of CerbB2 and Ki67 in Colorectal adenocarcinoma

| Tumor subtype | Total no. of cases having identifiable subtype | CerbB2 (no. and % of positive cases) | Ki67 No. of positive cases (Mean MIB1 LI) |
|---------------|-----------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------|------------------------------------------|
| Mucous secreting | 4 | 1(20%)                                          | 1 (32)                                 |
| Papillary      | 5 | 4 (80%)                                         | 5 (43)                                 |
| Mucous secreting + papillary | 2 | 0                                             | 1 (62)                                 |
| Signet ring type | 3 | 3(100%)                                        | 3 (64.3)                                |

**Table-3:** CerbB2 and Ki67 expression according to tumor histologic subtype
Pathogenesis involves several molecular alterations and altered gene expression. Ki67 and CerbB-2 overexpression has been studied extensively in several malignancies with an established prognostic or causative pathogenetic role. In India, gall bladder carcinomas are reported frequently in the Gangetic belt region.

In colorectal carcinomas, CerbB2 was positive in cases of full thickness invasion and omental metastasis. However, the results were statistically insignificant (p value=0.263 for tumour stage and 0.408 for grade).

There are two cases of colorectal adenocarcinomas in signet ring type carcinomas. Both showed some expression, that was more than the non neoplastic zones. None of the cases of lower stage tumours showed CerbB2 expression. However, some well differentiated tumors did express CerbB2 along with a poorly differentiated one.

In colorectal adenocarcinoma expression of Ki67 among different tumour stages / depth of invasion was statistically insignificant (p value=0.561). Tumor stage could not lead to a significant relationship as the number of cases were too small to be analysed statistically.

DISCUSSION

Ki67 and CerbB-2 overexpression has been studied extensively in several malignancies with an established prognostic or causative pathogenetic role. In India, gall bladder carcinomas are reported frequently in the Gangetic belt region. Pathogenesis involves several molecular alterations and altered gene expression.

Out of 33 cases studied, majority were gall bladder adenocarcinoma with CerbB2 positivity (3+), (IHC x 400); b: Shows moderately differentiated oesophageal adenocarcinoma with strong Ki67 positivity (MIB 1 LI= 80%). (IHC x 40); c: Shows CerbB2 positivity (3+) in well differentiated transmural invasion of colorectal adenocarcinoma. (IHC x 100); d: Shows Ki67 positivity (MIB 1 LI= 62) in a poorly differentiated colorectal adenocarcinoma. (IHC x 400); e: Shows well differentiated small intestinal adenocarcinoma. (H&E x 40); f: Shows Ki67 negativity (MIB 1 LI= 8) in a well differentiated small intestinal adenocarcinoma. (IHC x 100).

In colorectal carcinomas, CerbB2 was positive for both CerbB2 as well as Ki67. This case was moderately differentiated. The remaining 2 cases were well differentiated (Figure 2e) without positive expression of CerbB2, however, one was 2+ and another 1+, none being 0.

Ki67 expression in these 2 cases was < 10% (Figure 2f) but both showed some expression, that was more than the non neoplastic areas. CerbB2 was positive in majority cases of papillary and signet ring type carcinoma (Table 3) (Figure 3a), but the significance of this relation needs to be established by further studies. Whereas, MIB1LI was higher in mucopapillary (Table 2) as well as those with full thickness invasion and omental metastasis. However, the results were statistically insignificant (p value= 0.263 for tumour stage and 0.408 for grade).

Amongst the 2 cases of colorectal adenocarcinomas with omental metastasis, one each was well and poorly differentiated tumour. One out of three cases of small intestine adenocarcinoma was positive for both CerbB2 as well as Ki67. This case was moderately differentiated. The remaining 2 cases were well differentiated (Figure 2e) without positive expression of CerbB2, however, one was 2+ and another 1+, none being 0.

Ki67 expression in these 2 cases was < 10% (Figure 2f) but both showed some expression, that was more than the non neoplastic areas. CerbB2 was positive in majority cases of papillary and signet ring type carcinoma (Table 3) (Figure 3a), but the significance of this relation needs to be established by further studies. Whereas, MIB1LI was higher in mucopapillary (Table 3) (Figure 3b) and signet ring type carcinomas.

Section: Pathology

Figure-2: a: Shows moderately differentiated oesophageal adenocarcinoma with CerbB2 positivity (3+). (IHC x 400); b: Shows moderately differentiated oesophageal adenocarcinoma with strong Ki67 positivity (MIB 1 LI= 80%). (IHC x 40); c: Shows CerbB2 positivity (3+) in well differentiated transmural invasion of colorectal adenocarcinoma. (IHC x 100); d: Shows Ki67 positivity (MIB 1 LI= 62) in a poorly differentiated colorectal adenocarcinoma. (IHC x 400); e: Shows well differentiated small intestinal adenocarcinoma. (H&E x 40); f: Shows Ki67 negativity (MIB 1 LI= 8) in a well differentiated small intestinal adenocarcinoma. (IHC x 100).

Figure-3: a: Shows CerbB2 positivity (3+) in signet ring type adenocarcinoma. (IHC x 100); b: Shows Ki67 positivity (MIB 1 LI= 80) in a mucopapillary type adenocarcinoma. (IHC x 40X).
adenocarcinomas, followed by colorectal and then oesophageal and small intestine. Patients were mostly in their middle ages except for oesophageal adenocarcinoma where mean age was 65 years. Females predominated the gall bladder adenocarcinoma cases, while males were commoner in oesophageal cases. Colorectal malignancy showed equal distribution while small intestinal adenocarcinomas were commoner in females. These trends were in concordance with the existing literature.

Majority of gall bladder carcinomas were well differentiated (13 out of 19) while only 4 were poorly differentiated. Ki67 was highly expressed in these poorly differentiated cases (mean MIB1 LI= 62) as compared to 21 in well differentiated ones (p= 0.000). Ki67 overexpression has been related to poor tumor differentiation in some of the previous studies as well.\(^6\)

CerbB-2 has been related to advanced tumor stage\(^7\) in gall bladder adenocarcinomas. In our cases, 12 out of 16 cases (75\%) which showed full thickness invasion, were positive for CerbB2 as compared to only 67\% of those with muscular propria invasion. 80\% of those with hepatic metastasis were also CerbB2 positive. The results, though in trend with the previous mentioned study, were statistically insignificant. This shows that more studies would be needed on a larger number of patients in our region, to validate the same.

There is also proven overexpression of Ki67 and CerbB-2 in esophageal adenocarcinomas.\(^8,9,10\) However, in our cases stage could not be assessed as all the samples received were endoscopic biopsy specimens. None of the cases got resected at our institution, thus the lack of assessment of IHC in different stages. Only one out of three cases showed CerbB2 positivity. All the three cases showed Ki67 positivity in the neoplastic area while the non neoplastic zones were negative.

Colorectal adenocarcinomas overexpress both Ki67 and CerbB-2\(^11\) in comparison to non-neoplastic tissue. In our study, CerbB2 was positive in cases of full thickness invasion (3 out of 4, i.e. 75\%) as well as one case out of 2, of omental metastasis (50\%). None of the cases of lower stage tumours showed CerbB2 expression. 5 out of 8 cases of colorectal carcinoma expressed Ki67 positivity. MIB 1 LI was higher in poorly differentiated cases as well as those with full thickness invasion and omental metastasis.

Increased Ki67 has been found in poorly differentiated small intestine adenocarcinomas\(^10\), however, CerbB-2 was not overexpressed\(^10\) in some studies. One out of our three cases of small intestine adenocarcinoma was positive for both CerbB2 as well as Ki67. This case was moderately differentiated. The remaining 2 cases were well differentiated without positive expression of CerbB2, however, one was 2+ and another 1+, none being 0. Ki 67 expression in these 2 cases was < 10\% but both showed some expression, that was more than the non neoplastic areas. There is a need to carry out further study to evaluate the nature of expression of these markers in small intestinal adenocarcinoma, as the literature is very variable.

None of the studies so far, highlight the expression of Ki67 and CerbB2 in different types of adenocarcinomas. In our study, CerbB2 was positive in majority cases of papillary and signet ring type carcinoma, but the significance of this relation needs to be established by further studies. Whereas, MIB1 LI was higher in mucopapillary and signet ring type carcinomas.

**CONCLUSION**

Evaluation of a panel of Ki67 and CerbB-2 in gastrointestinal and biliary tract malignancies correlate well with different prognostic indicators in these malignancies, like tumor stage, histologic type and grade. In the Indian scenario, where such studies are still meagre future studies with larger sample size on these lines may provide more important insights that may be utilized in the diagnosis and treatment of gastrointestinal and biliary tract malignancies.

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Source of Support: Nil; Conflict of Interest: None
Submitted: 08-08-2019; Accepted: 01-09-2019; Published: 16-09-2019