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## A Systematic Review of Dental Late Effects in Survivors of Childhood Cancer

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### Abstract

Survivors of childhood cancer are at risk for dental late effects. This systematic review summarizes associations between treatment exposures and dental late effects among survivors of childhood cancer. We included investigations with at least 20 study participants conducted for 2 or more years after completion of childhood, adolescent, or young adult cancer therapy. This review suggests both independent and additive effects of radiotherapy and chemotherapy on dental complications, and identifies vulnerable groups with specific host and treatment characteristics. This summary provides information that will assist clinicians to prevent, detect, and facilitate early intervention for dental late effects.

### Keywords

pediatrics; tooth abnormalities; radiotherapy; chemotherapy

### INTRODUCTION

Five-year survival rates among children diagnosed with malignancies when younger than 19 years of age have improved from 62% in 1977 to almost 84% in 2009 in the United States

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[1]. Successes in surgery, radiotherapy, combination chemotherapy and supportive care are responsible for this increase in survival. However, survivors of childhood cancer remain at risk for radiation [2-4] and chemotherapy [2,5-8] associated dental complications such as caries, and dental developmental abnormalities including agenesis, dental hypoplasia, root stunting, and enamel defects. Survivors also have a higher prevalence of xerostomia, and cariogenic microflora, which have been linked to risk of periodontal disease [9-15]. In the general population, periodontal disease is known to be associated with systemic inflammation and atherogenesis [16,17]. Therefore, preventing dental complications is especially important in childhood cancer survivors at risk for early cardiac morbidity [18] and mortality [19].

Despite their increased risk for dental complications, investigators have reported suboptimal rates of regular dental care among childhood cancer survivors [20]. This is concerning as oral dental health among survivors can be optimized by identifying at-risk childhood cancer survivors and providing timely interventions. Fluoride therapy, chlorhexidine rinses, and dental restorations reduce dental complications in children during [21] and following cancer treatment [12,22]. Although there are multiple reports in the literature that describe dental outcomes among childhood cancer survivors, these data have not been systematically evaluated to better characterize childhood cancer survivors at greatest risk. Here we systematically review and summarize the existing knowledge about the dental late effects of childhood cancer treatment, delineating vulnerable groups according to specific host and treatment characteristics. We also review the potential interactions between radiation and chemotherapy that may have long-term dental consequences among childhood cancer survivors.

## METHODS

### Inclusion Criteria

We reviewed clinical trials, observational studies, case series, and review articles according to the Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic reviews and Meta-Analyses (PRISMA) guidelines [23]. Our review was limited to studies that discussed dental late effects among survivors of pediatric cancer where follow-up time among survivors was a minimum of 2 years after completion of childhood, adolescent or young adult cancer therapy. Primary outcomes were defined as occurrence of dental complications at least 2 years after completion of childhood cancer therapy. Studies evaluating salivary gland hypofunction [24] have been previously reviewed and were excluded. However, studies evaluating oral late effects at least 2 years after completion of HCT were separately evaluated. In addition, literature reviews were excluded.

### Search Strategies

For our initial search of the PubMed database (limits: English, human, and dates: 01/01/1970 to 12/01/2012) for clinical trials, observational studies, case series, and reviews, we used the search terms “tooth abnormalities”, “adverse effects”, “child”, “adolescent”, “adult, young”, “neoplasms”, “survivors”. All abstracts derived from this search were reviewed for relevance. The Web of Science was searched with similar terms to find

additional articles. Reference lists published in review articles and retrieved studies were also reviewed to identify potential manuscripts.

### **Validity Assessment and Data Extraction**

One author (PG) screened all retrieved studies for relevance and validity. The methodological quality of selected studies was independently evaluated by two authors (PG and KN) [25]. Study quality was determined using four criteria: comparability of subjects, clear definition of exposure or intervention, standard outcome measurement and appropriate statistical analysis. Any discrepancy in assessment of validity was resolved by discussion between authors. We extracted information about sample size, age at diagnosis, type of diagnosis, follow-up period, type and details of treatment and dental late effects from the selected studies.

## **RESULTS**

### **Search Results**

Our initial search of the PubMed database identified 2,354 studies; 14 of these were retained. An additional 33 studies that met the inclusion criteria were found in the reference lists of the retained studies (Figure 1). No additional articles were found in the Web of Science. Studies were evaluated according to the predominant anticancer therapy exposure (radiotherapy, chemotherapy, and hematopoietic cell transplant [HCT]) associated with dental effects. Of 47 studies evaluating dental late effects, 12 studies focused on effects of radiotherapy (Table I), 25 on effects of chemotherapy (Table II), and 10 on effects of HCT (Table III). We describe dental late effects in two categories including 1) caries and 2) dental developmental abnormalities, including dental agenesis, dental hypoplasia, root stunting, and enamel hypoplasia.

### **Study Quality and Risk of Bias**

We limited our search to studies with at least 20 participants. All studies included were determined to be valid and had clearly defined exposure and outcome measures. In all studies dental late effects were assessed clinically from medical charts or by self-report. Because most were retrospective and from single institutions, we were not able to compare outcomes across studies. Anticancer therapies varied by institution, cancer type, staging, and era of primary diagnosis. Additionally, because dental care during and following cancer treatment has improved, we were unable to compare rates of dental caries across studies from different eras. The cross-sectional nature of many studies also made them vulnerable to survivor bias. It is possible that patients with the most severe dental effects were not included because of death or inability to participate in follow-up testing.

### **Dental Late Effects of Radiotherapy in Survivors of Childhood Cancer**

Radiation interferes with dental development (odontogenesis) by directly inhibiting mitotic activity of odontoblasts. The abundance of rapidly dividing presecretory odontoblasts in children makes them particularly vulnerable to effects of radiation [26]. In contrast, radiation affects enamel formation (amelogenesis) indirectly by inducing formation of “osteodentin” which replaces normal dentin [27]. Osteodentin has reduced phosphorylated

phosphoprotein which inhibits nucleation of enamel crystals and leads to deficient enamel mineralization [28]. Tooth development is halted by 30 Gray (Gy) and mature ameloblasts are damaged by 10 Gy of direct irradiation [29]. However, dental late effects have been reported in patients treated with radiation doses as low as 4 Gy [30]. This dose spectrum is related to several variables, including patient age, total radiation dose, daily radiation fraction size, exposed tissue volume, interaction with specific chemotherapeutic agents, pre-existing dental health, and presence of chronic graft- vs-host disease in HCT survivors.

**Dental Caries after Radiotherapy**—Impaired dental health due to caries affects cosmesis, functioning, and quality of life of children [31]. Post-radiation salivary gland damage reduces salivary secretion, makes saliva more acidic, and promotes highly cariogenic oral microflora such as streptococci mutans and lactobacilli [9-15]. Early observational studies [2,30,32] describe a direct association between TBI of 10 Gy, cranial radiation of 24 Gy, and total tumor dose of 40 to 60 Gy and dental caries.. Pajari et al. [2] reported a higher average number of new caries per year ( $1.3 \pm 1.4$  vs.  $0.7 \pm 1.4$ ;  $P < 0.05$ ) and higher Decayed Missing Filled Teeth (DMFT) scores ( $5.9 \pm 5.9$  vs.  $1.7 \pm 2.3$ ,  $P < 0.01$ ) among 45 acute lymphoblastic leukemia (ALL) survivors (mean: age at diagnosis 5.4 years; follow-up 4 years) compared to 45 controls. In addition, the authors found that survivors treated with 24 Gy cranial irradiation or 10 Gy TBI had higher average DMFT scores than survivors treated with chemotherapy alone ( $7.1 \pm 4.6$  and  $12.0 \pm 11.5$  vs.  $3.4 \pm 4.4$ ,  $P < 0.05$ ) [2]. These DMFT scores are higher than those reported among American children between 12 and 15 years of age ( $1.78 \pm 0.08$ ,  $P < 0.01$ ) [33]. Additionally, Duggal et al. [34] reported higher mean numbers of untreated decayed teeth among 46 long-term survivors of various childhood cancers diagnosed when younger than 10 years of age when compared to their siblings ( $1.33 \pm 0.25$  vs.  $0.37 \pm 0.14$ ,  $P < 0.001$ ).

**Dental Developmental Abnormalities after Radiotherapy**—Radiation damages tooth buds at early stages of development and is associated with dental developmental abnormalities including dental agenesis (commonly manifested as partial agenesis or hypodontia), dental hypoplasia, root stunting, and enamel hypoplasia. These abnormalities influence functional and aesthetic outcomes among survivors [35,36]. Children treated with local radiation [3,32,37-42], are at high risk for dental developmental abnormalities later in life. Among 5-year survivors of ALL, Sonis et al. [41] observed severe dental developmental abnormalities (root stunting = 20/20, hypodontia = 5/20, and microdontia = 15/20) among survivors who had received 24 Gy of cranial radiation when younger than 5 years of age. In a study of 22 head and neck rhabdomyosarcoma survivors treated with 34-67 Gy radiation and chemotherapy when younger than 18 years of age, the authors also found severe dental abnormalities (root stunting = 12, hypodontia = 11, and microdontia = 5) [39].

The risk of dental abnormalities after radiotherapy is influenced by both younger age at irradiation [38,41,43], and by higher doses of radiation [32,42]. In a study of 423 ALL survivors, Kaste et al. [43] observed a higher prevalence of dental abnormalities (root stunting, microdontia, hypodontia, taurodontia, and over-retention of primary dentition) in survivors treated when younger than 8 years of age (138/331, 42%) when compared to those

treated when 8 years of age or older (29/92, 32%,  $P < 0.05$ ), and among those who were treated (122/244, 50%) when compared to those not treated (45/179, 25%,  $P < 0.01$ ). Kaste et al. [42], in a multivariable analysis adjusting for chemotherapy, also reported a dose-dependent risk of having at least one dental abnormality (1 hypodontia, microdontia, enamel hypoplasia, abnormal root development, 6 missing teeth, denture use, and dental prosthesis) among survivors with jaw radiation exposure when compared to those without jaw radiation exposure ( $> 0$  to  $< 20$  Gy: [OR: 1.3; 95% CI: 1.2-1.5];  $\geq 20$  Gy: [OR: 5.6; 95% CI: 3.7-8.5]).

### Dental Late Effects of Chemotherapy in Survivors of Childhood Cancer

Because many children treated with chemotherapy also received concomitant radiation, it is difficult to determine the independent effects of chemotherapy on dental outcomes. This is an area in need of future research. Nevertheless, both vincristine [44,45] and alkylating agents [42,46] have been associated with dental abnormalities among survivors of childhood cancer. Two studies have reported prominent incremental lines on the dentine of extracted teeth among survivors of various childhood cancers corresponding to cycles of intravenous chemotherapy including vincristine [44,45]. This effect is likely related to the inhibitory effect of vincristine on the secretion of collagenous dentine matrix by odontoblasts [47,48]. In a multivariable analysis adjusting for radiation to the jaw, Kaste et al. [42] reported a dose-dependent risk of having at least one dental abnormality among survivors treated with alkylating agents when compared to those who received no alkylating agents (alkylating score 1: [OR: 1.4; 95% CI: 1.2-1.6]; alkylating score 2: [OR: 1.7; 95% CI: 1.5-2.0]; alkylating score 3: [OR: 2.0; 95% CI: 1.6-2.4]). Evaluating the risk for individual dental abnormalities, the authors observed dose-dependent association between alkylating agents and 1 anatomical abnormality, dental appliance, abnormal roots, abnormal shaped or small teeth, and 1 missing teeth among survivors diagnosed when younger than 5 years [42]. This study may have underestimated the prevalence of dental abnormalities since data was self-reported by survivors. Another study [46] of 106 survivors of childhood cancer treated at a mean age of 5 years and examined at least 5 years post-treatment reported a dose-dependent association (unadjusted  $P_{\text{trend}} < 0.001$ ) between cyclophosphamide and Holtta's Defect Index (HDI) scores which includes hypodontia, microdontia, and root/crown ratios measured using panoramic radiographs [49]. In a multivariable analysis adjusted for age at treatment, sex, HCT, surgery, and radiotherapy, the authors observed that survivors treated with  $7,500 \text{ mg/m}^2$  cyclophosphamide had a 13 point increase (equivalent to at least 2 missing or 3 microdontic teeth) in HDI [49] scores compared to those not exposed to cyclophosphamide ( $P = 0.01$ ) [46].

**Dental Caries after Chemotherapy**—Dental caries [6,8,30,42,50-54], often reported as a higher number of teeth fillings [8], a higher DMFT score [50,51,55,56], or a higher Decayed, Missing, Filled Surface (DMFS) score [6,51,55], are the most commonly reported dental late effect following chemotherapy. A case-control study reported that 96 survivors of childhood cancer (mean follow-up: 2.5 years) treated with chemotherapy and no radiation to the teeth had lower salivary flow rate (median: 1.2 vs. 1.4 ml/min) and higher cariogenic bacteria such as mutans streptococci and lactobacillus than 96 healthy controls [54]. The authors also reported a higher prevalence of dental caries (82% vs. 54%) and a higher

DMFT score ( $7.8 \pm 4.9$  vs.  $4.2 \pm 3.8$ ) among survivors than among healthy controls. Another case-control study reported a three-fold increase in risk for dental caries and fillings in permanent dentition among 45 survivors of childhood cancer, a mean age at examination of 10 years, treated with chemotherapy alone, when compared to 300 healthy controls [8]. In a case-control study of 45 ALL survivors and 45 healthy controls, Pajari et al. [2] observed a higher proportion of filled anterior permanent tooth-surfaces at the age of twelve years among those treated with chemotherapy alone (7.4%), chemotherapy and cranial radiation (6.6%), and chemotherapy and TBI (29.7%) when compared to controls ( $P < 0.001$ ).

There is evidence to support the use of preventive dental care to improve post-chemotherapy dental outcomes. A Danish population-based study [57] compared the prevalence of caries among 869 cancer survivors diagnosed between the ages of 0 and 6 years with a national sample. The authors observed a decline in risk of dental caries as the age of the follow-up examination increased from 7, 12 and 15 years for children diagnosed when younger than 5 years (OR: 1.05, 1.03 and 0.91) and also for those diagnosed between 5 and 6 years (OR: 1.18, 1.20 and 1.02) of age. The authors proposed that the gradual decline in risk was a result of individualized dental procedures and oral hygiene plans for cancer patients. These findings are supported by previous studies that show a declining risk of dental caries with time from cancer treatment [44,58].

**Dental Developmental Abnormalities after Chemotherapy**—There is strong evidence to support the association between chemotherapy and dental developmental abnormalities, including dental agenesis, dental hypoplasia, root stunting, and enamel hypoplasia. Chemotherapy has been reported to impact both odontogenesis and amelogenesis in cohorts of survivors with hematological cancers [59-61], solid tumors [52,62-64], and various childhood cancers [8,44,54]. A case-control study of 56 survivors of ALL treated at a mean age of 5.3 years when compared to 56 age- and sex-matched controls reported a higher prevalence of survivors with hypodontia (28 vs. 9), microdontia (14 vs. 0), and root stunting (12 vs. 0) [59]. In a study of 30 survivors of lymphoma treated with chemotherapy between 4 and 15 years of age, the authors observed higher prevalence of survivors with hypodontia (15 vs. 2), enamel hypoplasia (14 vs. 3), and enamel discoloration (17 vs. 1) when compared to 20 healthy controls [60]. In a cohort of 52 neuroblastoma survivors, most who were treated with chemotherapy alone (8 received radiotherapy), Kaste et al. [52] observed high rates of hypodontia (17%), microdontia (38%), root stunting (17%), enamel hypoplasia (17%), and severe tooth decay (> 4 teeth; 29%). The authors hypothesized that dental abnormalities were a result of inhibitory effect of cyclophosphamide on odontogenesis [48,65]. Avsar et al. [54] observed an association between chemotherapy and dental abnormalities in a case-control study of childhood cancer survivors with various diagnoses treated at mean age of 6.4 years and followed for 2.5 years. Survivors had higher rates of arrested root development with short V-shaped root formation (52.1% vs. 17.7%) and white/cream enamel opacity (49% vs. 13.5%) when compared to 96 controls matched on age, sex, and socioeconomic status [54].

The association between chemotherapy and dental abnormalities is influenced by younger age at chemotherapy [59,66,67] and concomitant radiation [40,59]. The effects of chemotherapy are amplified when the dental cells are rapidly proliferating at a young age



[68]. In a study of 76 ALL survivors, treated at a mean age of 5 years and followed for a mean of 3 years post-treatment, Minicucci et al. [67] reported that younger age at treatment (1 to 6 years vs. 7 to 12 years) was associated with an increased prevalence of dental abnormalities (56.6% vs. 26.3%), including delayed development, microdontia, malformed roots, and enamel hypoplasia. Maciel et al. [59] reported a higher mean number of teeth with abnormalities (agenesis, dental hypoplasia, supernumerary teeth, microdontia, taurodontism, tapering roots, short roots and enlarged pulp chamber) among survivors of ALL treated with chemotherapy, radiotherapy and HCT ( $n = 8$ ;  $15.4 \pm 15.1$ ) when compared to those treated with chemotherapy and radiotherapy ( $n = 18$ ;  $5.0 \pm 6.1$ ) or chemotherapy alone ( $n = 30$ ;  $3.9 \pm 6.2$ ) ( $P < 0.05$ ).

### Dental Late Effects of HCT in Survivors of Childhood Cancer

**Dental Caries after HCT**—The evidence regarding long-term effect of HCT on dental caries is conflicting. Two studies ( $n = 26$ , age range 4 - 12 years and  $n = 19$ , mean age  $6.5 \pm 3.5$  years) among HCT survivors reported no difference in mean number of decayed and filled surfaces between those conditioned with 10 Gy TBI and cyclophosphamide and controls ( $2.5 \pm 2.9$  vs.  $3.5 \pm 3.9$  and  $3.5 \pm 2.8$  vs.  $2.7 \pm 3.5$ ) [12,15]. These null associations were attributed to the use of fluoride prophylaxis, chlorhexidine rinse and parental training in dental care. However, two other studies [56,69] reported higher DMFT scores among survivors treated with HCT compared to those treated with chemotherapy alone. Hutton et al. [56] observed higher mean DMFT scores for primary teeth among 14 survivors (mean follow-up 52 months) conditioned with high dose chemotherapy prior to HCT compared to 106 survivors whose chemotherapy was less intense ( $\sim 3$  versus  $<1$ , no P-value reported). Uderzo et al. [69] also observed higher DMFT scores for permanent teeth when survivors treated with HCT (median follow-up 2 years) were compared to survivors treated with chemotherapy alone (11-15 years: 7.6 vs. 4.1 and 16-20 years: 12.4 vs. 8.0, no P-values reported).

**Dental Developmental Abnormalities after HCT**—Children conditioned with TBI and high-dose chemotherapy before HCT [12,15,69-72], are at high risk for dental developmental abnormalities later in life. Nasman et al. [12] compared dental abnormalities among 1) survivors conditioned with 8-10 Gy of TBI and cyclophosphamide for HCT, 2) survivors of leukemia, lymphoma, sarcomas, central nervous system tumors and neuroblastoma who had received combination chemotherapy but no radiation, and 3) a healthy age- and sex-matched control group. Two years after HCT, survivors treated with TBI had a higher mean number of teeth with arrested root development than those treated with chemotherapy alone ( $15.9 \pm 8.2$  vs.  $1.2 \pm 1.6$ ;  $P < 0.001$ ). Rates of enamel hypoplasia, microdontia, and hypodontia were also higher among those treated with TBI. No dental abnormalities were found in the control group [12].

Younger age at treatment [12,69-71,73,74] and intensive chemotherapy [12,15,69-71,73] increase the risk of long-term dental abnormalities among survivors treated with HCT. Nasman et al. [12] observed a higher number of dental abnormalities such as dental hypoplasia, root growth impairment, and enamel defects among those who had TBI when younger than 6 years of age than among those irradiated when 7 to 12 years of age. In

another study of 55 survivors of hematological cancer conditioned with chemotherapy for HCT, survivors who were younger than 3 years of age at treatment (77%) had a higher prevalence of dental agenesis of permanent teeth (third molars excluded) compared to those between 3 and 5 years (40%) and older than 5 years of age (0%) at treatment ( $P$ -values  $< 0.001$ ) [73]. Another study of 39 survivors of hematological malignancies conditioned with high dose cyclophosphamide, busulfan and/or 10 Gy TBI for HCT, observed smaller mean areas of mandibular central incisors (0.75 vs. 0.97) and first (2.35 vs. 2.87) and second molars (1.93 vs. 2.83) when compared to the 78 healthy controls (all  $P$ -values  $< 0.001$ ) [71]. The authors also reported that the severity of tooth area loss was strongly influenced by younger age at treatment ( $P < 0.001$ ).

## CONCLUSION AND FUTURE DIRECTIONS

This systematic review summarizes the literature on treatment-related dental late effects in survivors of childhood cancer. Younger age at treatment, higher radiation dose, and treatment with radiotherapy, chemotherapy, and HCT appear to be associated with an increased risk for dental agenesis, dental hypoplasia, root stunting, and enamel hypoplasia. Fortunately, risk for dental caries among survivors treated with HCT [12,15,72] or chemotherapy [57] has declined over time as regular, individualized preventive dental care has been implemented. In addition to the established risk factors for dental late effects included in the current Children's Oncology Group (COG) long term follow-up guidelines [75], recent studies have reported an age-specific and dose-dependent increased risk for dental abnormalities among those treated with alkylating agents [42,46]. Using this information, health care providers can offer targeted surveillance for early detection and intervention among at-risk survivors. Some of the dental late effects such as caries are preventable and can be managed by following the COG guidelines for dental health [76]. However, survivors at risk for non-preventable late effects such as agenesis or microdontia should regularly follow-up with a dentist or orthodontist experienced in survivorship care [77].

Limitations of studies included in this review should be considered. First, cross-sectional observation of survivors may have resulted in selection bias in many studies. It is possible that children with adverse dental outcomes were more likely to return for evaluation and care which would lead to an inflation of the reported estimates. Conversely, if children who died prior to returning for evaluation were more likely than those who survived to have adverse dental outcome, the reported estimates would be biased toward the null. Family history, hygiene patterns, and socioeconomic status play a crucial role in dental health [78]. However, few studies included in this review attempted to control for these confounders by comparing survivors with their siblings [34,42,44,58]. None of the studies specifically evaluated the effect of preventive oral care, screening, or follow-up with dentist on dental complications. Finally, most studies did not clearly differentiate between dental outcomes in deciduous and permanent dentition.

Further studies are required to characterize dental late effects and associated risk factors among survivors treated with newer salivary gland sparing intensity-modulated radiation [79], targeted chemotherapies [80], and advanced preventive dental care during and after



cancer treatment [81,82]. Studies are also required to evaluate the modification in risk of cardiovascular morbidity and mortality with dental care intervention among survivors. Additional investigations evaluating effects of diet, oral hygiene, psychosocial status, and genetics on dental abnormalities may improve the precision to identify survivors at risk for dental late effects. Educating parents and health care providers in early prevention is vital for minimizing deleterious effects of cancer treatment. Comprehensive survivor clinics and dentists with expertise in survivor care are not accessible for all survivors. However, a reduction in the burden of dental complications among vulnerable survivors is possible with early and regular dental follow-up.

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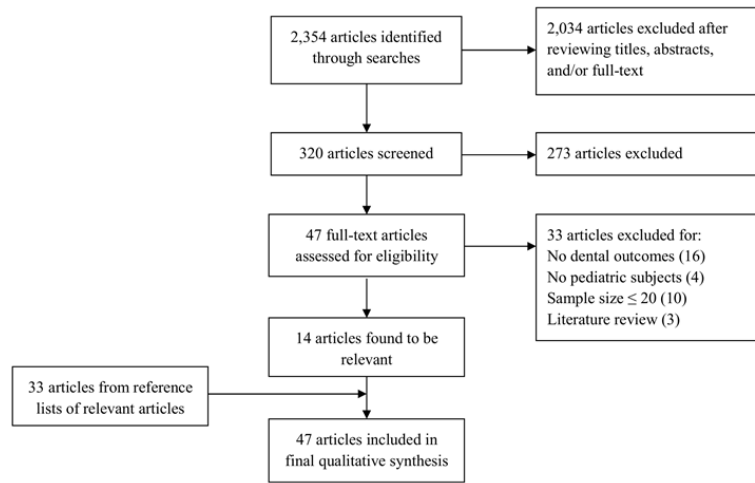
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**Figure 1.**  
Flowchart of study selection.









