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Factors Associated with Time to Conversion from Active Surveillance to Treatment for Prostate Cancer in a Multiinstitutional Cohort

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Abstract

Purpose: We examined the demographic and clinicopathological parameters associated with the time to convert from active surveillance to treatment among men with prostate cancer.

Materials and Methods: A multi-institutional cohort of 7,279 patients managed with active surveillance had data and biospecimens collected for germline genetic analyses.

Results: Of 6,775 men included in the analysis, 2,260 (33.4%) converted to treatment at a median followup of 6.7 years. Earlier conversion was associated with higher Gleason grade groups (GG2 vs GG1 adjusted hazard ratio [aHR] 1.57, 95% CI 1.36–1.82; ≥GG3 vs GG1 aHR 1.77, 95% CI 1.29–2.43), serum prostate specific antigen concentrations (aHR per 5 ng/ml increment 1.18, 95% CI 1.11–1.25), tumor stages (cT2 vs cT1 aHR 1.58, 95% CI 1.41–1.77; cT3 vs cT1 aHR 4.36, 95% CI 3.19–5.96) and number of cancerous biopsy cores (3 vs 1–2 cores aHR 1.59, 95% CI 1.37–1.84; $4 \text{ vs } 1-2 \text{ cores }$ aHR 3.29, 95% CI 2.94–3.69), and younger age (age continuous per 5-year increase aHR 0.96, 95% CI 0.93–0.99). Patients with high-volume GG1 tumors had a shorter interval to conversion than those with low-volume GG1 tumors and behaved like the higher-risk patients. We found no significant association between the time to conversion and self-reported race or genetic ancestry.

Conclusions: A shorter time to conversion from active surveillance to treatment was associated with higher-risk clinicopathological tumor features. Furthermore, patients with high-volume GG1 tumors behaved similarly to those with intermediate and high-risk tumors. An exploratory analysis of self-reported race and genetic ancestry revealed no association with the time to conversion.

Keywords

prostatic neoplasms; watchful waiting; race factors; human genetics

INTRODUCTION

THE preferred management of patients with lower-risk prostate cancer (PC) has evolved to active surveillance (AS) to reduce the morbidity and mortality of overtreatment of indolent disease.¹ There are limited published data on the associations of demographic and clinicopathological parameters with the time to converting from AS to treatment.²⁻⁹

Conflicting results have been reported on AS outcomes among different racial groups.6,10-19 The literature suggests Black men generally harbor more aggressive tumors with worse clinical outcomes and may be managed with AS less frequently in clinical practice.10,11,13,16,18,20 Yet some studies have reported similar risks for adverse outcomes on AS for Black and White patients with comparable tumor features.^{6,19} In this cohort study, we assessed the parameters associated with the time to conversion from AS to treatment and undertook an exploratory analysis of the self-reported race and genetic ancestry.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

A detailed description of the Methods is shown in supplementary Appendix 1 ([https://](https://www.jurology.com) www.jurology.com).

Study Population

This study is an institutional review board-approved (IRB No. STU00077147) Specialized Program of Research Excellence (SPORE) project. We evaluated the association of germline genetic variants to conversion from AS to treatment for PC among 7,279 patients at 28 institutions (1991–2018) in a genome-wide association study. Some sites used the terms "AS" and "watchful waiting" interchangeably (supplementary Appendix 1, [https://](https://www.jurology.com) www.jurology.com). As we did not impose strict inclusion/exclusion criteria on patient eligibility for AS, the surveillance protocols used varied among institutions.^{1,21}

Risk Groups and Definitions

Patients were classified into low, intermediate or high-risk groups based on our modification of previous and current National Comprehensive Cancer Network® and the American Urological Association guidelines (supplementary Appendix 1, [https://](https://www.jurology.com) www.jurology.com).^{1,12,22} Data on prostate specific antigen (PSA) density and clinical tumor stage (cT2a vs cT2b vs cT2c) were not uniformly available, limiting our ability to assign patients to risk strata incorporating those parameters.

Low-risk patients met the following criteria: Gleason grade group (GG) 1 (Gleason score 3+3), PSA <10 ng/ml, clinical-stage cT1, and <3 positive biopsy cores. Intermediate-risk patients had any of the following without any high-risk or high-volume criteria: GG2 (Gleason 3+4), PSA 10–20 ng/ml, stage cT2 or 3 positive biopsy cores of any Gleason grade. High-risk patients had any of the following: $GG3$ ($Gleason 4+3$), PSA 20 ng/ml, stage cT3 or 4 positive biopsy cores of any GG. We included patients with cribriform morphology or intraductal carcinoma. In a subgroup analysis, we also compared low-volume GG1, high-volume (4 biopsy cores involved) GG1, intermediate-risk and high-risk patients.

Outcomes

Our primary outcome was the time from PC diagnosis to the time to conversion to treatment. Patients who were followed without a strict AS protocol were analyzed in the same manner as those on AS.

Statistical Analyses

A detailed description of our statistical analysis methods is presented in supplementary Appendix 2 (<https://www.iurology.com>).^{23,24} Briefly, variables examined for the association with the time to conversion were summarized using the median and interquartile range for continuous variables and frequencies and percentages for categorical variables. For each patient, the time to conversion was calculated from the date of diagnosis until the date of starting treatment. Patients who died during followup or were on AS at the end of followup were treated as censored observations at the time of death or their last followup, respectively. We estimated the distribution for the time to conversion using Kaplan-Meier curves and calculated the median followup time using the reverse Kaplan-Meier method.²³ We assessed whether the time to conversion was associated with the demographic or clinicopathological factors in Cox proportional hazards models. We also performed an exploratory subgroup analysis of the self-reported race and genetically inferred ancestry with time to conversion. We used the ADMIXTURE software program (University of Wisconsin, Madison, Wisconsin) to model genetic ancestry from our patient data of uncorrelated single nucleotide polymorphisms, in addition to reference data from the 1000 Genome Project for ancestry populations (supplementary Appendix 2, [https://](https://www.jurology.com) www.jurology.com).²⁴

RESULTS

Study Participants

The characteristics of the 6,775 men meeting the inclusion criteria are shown in table 1. Those who were included and excluded from the analysis are shown in supplementary tables 1 and 2 [\(https://www.jurology.com\)](https://www.jurology.com). Classification as low-risk PC (4,604, 68.0%) and/or low-risk features were most common: GG1 (6,207, 91.6%), tumor stage cT1 (5,387, 79.5%), 1–2 positive biopsy cores (5,260, 77.6%) and a median PSA of 5.0 ng/ml (IQR 3.7–6.7). However, 882 men (13.0%) met our high-risk criteria: ≥GG3 (81, 1.2%), ≥cT3 (48, 0.7%) or $\dot{4}$ positive cores of any GG (768, 11.3%). Of the high-risk patients, 360 had $\dot{4}$ cores of GG1 with all other features being low risk. Black patients had higher proportions of intermediate and high-risk disease (13.8%) compared to White patients (11.8%; p value for chi-square test= 0.044; supplementary table 3, [https://www.jurology.com\)](https://www.jurology.com).

Clinical Outcomes

The median followup time for the entire cohort was 6.7 years (IQR 4.3–9.4), during which 2,260 of 6,775 men (33.4%) converted to treatment. In the overall cohort, the median time to conversion was 6.8, 6.1, and 7.0 years for low, intermediate and high-risk/high-volume disease, respectively. Figure 1 shows the reasons for conversion. The most common reason for conversion was grade reclassification alone (48.8%), followed by PSA progression (8.5%), tumor volume progression (7.2%), anxiety (5.0%) and other reasons (9.0%). Of the men who died, 11 (<1%) died of PC, while 91 (1.3%) died of a competing cause.

Associations with Conversion to Treatment

In univariable analysis, higher GG, serum PSA, clinical tumor stage, number of positive biopsy cores, risk-group classification and more recent year of diagnosis were significantly associated with a shorter time to conversion (table 2 and fig. 2, A). The multivariable model included age at diagnosis, GG, PSA, tumor stage, number of positive biopsy cores and year of diagnosis, and was stratified on self-reported race categories. Higher GG, PSA, clinical tumor stage, number of positive biopsy cores and more recent year of diagnosis were significantly associated with earlier time to conversion (table 2). Additional sensitivity analyses with grade reclassification or grade or volume reclassification as the sole outcome, although limited by statistical power, also revealed trends for an association with these same 5 parameters with time to conversion (supplementary tables 4 and 5, [https://](https://www.jurology.com) www.jurology.com).

In an exploratory analysis, men with ≥4 GG1 cores were more likely than those with ≤3 GG1 cores to convert to treatment (63.6% vs 26.0%) with a 5-year conversion-free probability of 35.8% vs 78.6%. Conversion rates were similar between high-volume GG1 patients and other high-risk patients (63.6% vs 65.7%, with a 5-year conversion-free probability of 35.8% vs 38.0%) and higher than those with intermediate-risk disease (38.3% converted with 64.1% 5-year conversion-free probability; supplementary table 6, <https://www.jurology.com>). Similarly in a multivariable model, high-volume GG1 patients converted to treatment sooner than low-volume, GG1 patients (adjusted hazard ratio [aHR] 3.46, 95% CI 2.92–4.10), and their risk for conversion was higher than for intermediate-risk patients (aHR 1.78, 95% CI 1.59–1.99) and similar to all other high-risk patients (aHR 4.00 95% CI 3.48–4.59; supplementary table 7, <https://www.jurology.com>).

Our study required germline DNA for genetic analyses; however, patients from UCSF (University of California, San Francisco) and Australia collected samples only from the patients who had undergone prostatectomy. Removing these patients from the analysis, 2,004 of the 6,519 men (30.7%) converted to treatment. As this could introduce a selection bias, we undertook a separate sensitivity analysis including and excluding them. Excluding them did not change the results (supplementary table 8, <https://www.jurology.com>).

Parameters Not Associated with Conversion to Treatment

Neither age nor a positive family history of PC was associated with the time to conversion in univariable analysis (table 2, fig. 2, B and supplementary tables 4, 5 and 7 to 9, [https://](https://www.jurology.com) www.jurology.com). However, in the multivariable model, increasing age was associated with longer time on AS (table 2). Family history was not included in the multivariable model because data were missing for 11% of the patients. The time to conversion did not differ for patients from different countries, and a sensitivity analysis that excluded the Australia and UCSF sites did not affect the associations for the other variables (supplementary table 8, <https://www.jurology.com>).

Adjusted HRs for the self-reported race could not be estimated directly because the proportional hazards assumption was not satisfied when including men whose race was unknown or underrepresented. Excluding these men allowed the calculation of an aHR for

race, and no significant association was observed in the multivariable model (supplementary table 8, <https://www.jurology.com>). Furthermore, there was no difference in the time to conversion between Black and White men across risk group strata (fig. 2, B, supplementary table 8 and supplementary fig. 1, [https://www.jurology.com\)](https://www.jurology.com).

In the exploratory analysis of genetic ancestry, 121 of 141 men who self-reported Asian (85.8%) were estimated to be of Asian ancestry, 292/315 of Black men (92.7%) were estimated to be of African ancestry and 4,079/4,152 of White men (98.2%) were estimated to be of European ancestry. No genetic ancestry group had a significantly earlier time to conversion (fig. 2, B, table 2, supplementary tables 9 and 10, and supplementary fig. 2, <https://www.jurology.com>).

Outcomes following Treatment

Of the 2,260 men who converted to treatment (1,107 prostatectomy, 565 radiotherapy and 588 other treatments), 124 (5.5%) subsequently developed a PSA recurrence, 29 (1.3%) developed metastasis and 11 (<1%) died of PC.

DISCUSSION

Our study is the largest non-VA study to assess the time to conversion from AS to treatment. Unlike most of the AS studies that used strict enrollment criteria, ours is more risk-inclusive, more accurately reflecting real-world practice patterns.^{2-5,7-9} The clinicopathological variables associated with earlier time to conversion to treatment were higher GG, serum PSA level, clinical stage, number of cancerous biopsy cores, age, and risk-group classification. These findings mirror the results of prior studies in men on AS who met stricter enrollment criteria.^{2-5,7-9,25,26} Despite our cohort including a larger proportion of high-risk patients, adverse outcomes were uncommon during our limited followup (median 6.7 years for the entire cohort). High-volume ($\,$ 4 cores) GG1 patients converted to treatment sooner than their low-volume ($\sqrt{3}$ cores) and intermediate-risk tumor counterparts but at a similar interval to patients with high-risk tumors (supplementary tables 6 and 7, [https://www.jurology.com\)](https://www.jurology.com). This finding warrants future investigation regarding tumor biology and counseling of men with high-volume GG1 disease.

Previous studies have reported that Black men have more biologically aggressive PC, a higher risk of grade reclassification or adverse surgical pathology after initial AS and are more likely than White men to die of PC.^{10,11,15,16,18,20} AS outcomes in Black men have been difficult to interpret because of small sample sizes and uncertainty as to the extent to which the reported differences were due to health care disparities.^{6,13,14} The largest studies reported to date comparing Black and White men on AS are from the Veterans Administration database. These studies reported that Black men had an increased risk for disease progression, a greater likelihood to receive definitive treatment and converted to treatment at an earlier time than White men.^{13,14} Our exploratory analysis of the selfreported race bolstered by the genetic ancestry markers found no significant difference between Black and White men, which adds substantially to the literature on this issue (fig. 2, B, supplementary tables 3 and 9 to 11, and supplementary figs. 1 and 2, [https://](https://www.jurology.com) www.jurology.com).

Unlike a previous report, we found no association of the time to conversion with a family history of PC.²⁶ Similarly, patients diagnosed during the more recent years (2014–2018) had a shorter time on AS, which likely reflects the more recent adoption of more liberal AS eligibility criteria (supplementary Appendix 2, <https://www.jurology.com>).²⁷

The study has several limitations, including the lack of data on PSA density, biopsy-based genomic biomarkers and multiparametric magnetic resonance imaging.28 At the start of our study, these parameters were not commonly utilized, and there was more variability in the interpretation of multiparametric magnetic resonance imaging among radiologists.²⁹ Second, the study lacks data on comorbidities, interval PSA values, and confirmatory and surveillance biopsies that would have rendered interpretation of the outcomes more granular. The extent to which these limitations affect the findings is unknown.

Despite these limitations, our study adds quantification as to the degree to which demographic and clinicopathological parameters are associated with the time to conversion to treatment across a broad spectrum of risk groups, especially among high-risk and highvolume GG1 patients. Furthermore, we mitigated the intrinsic limitations of studying selfreported race by including genetic ancestry. These topics need to be further explored over a longer followup period.

CONCLUSIONS

Approximately a third of patients in a large multi-institutional cohort managed with AS converted to treatment with a median followup of 6.7 years. The time to conversion was independently associated with the age, year of diagnosis, GG group, serum PSA level, clinical stage and the number of cancerous biopsy cores. The risk of conversion for patients with high-volume GG1 tumors was higher than for low and intermediate-risk patients and approached the patterns seen in high-risk patients. An exploratory analysis of patientreported race and genetic ancestry revealed no difference between Black and White patients for the time to conversion to treatment.

Supplementary Material

Refer to Web version on PubMed Central for supplementary material.

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Appendix

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DEDICATION

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Conflict of Interest Disclosures: Dr. Finelli—Consultant/Advisory Board (Abbvie, Astellas, Amgen, Astra Zeneca, Bayer, Janssen, Sanofi, TerSera). Dr. Fleshner—Honoraria/advisory/ speaker bureau (Astellas, Janssen, Abbvie, Ferring, Sanofi, Merck); Research funding (Janssen, Astellas, Bayer); Stock (Verity Pharma). Dr. Eastham—Stock (3D biopsy). Dr. Ehdaie—Consulting (Myriad, Inc); Honorarium (Koelis webinar). Dr. Gregg— Advisory board for Genentech, not related to the manuscript. Dr. Marks—Co-founder (Avenda Health). Dr. Higano—Institutional research funding (Aptevo, Aragon, Astellas, AstraZeneca, Clovis, Dendreon, eFFECTOR Therapeutics, Emergent, Ferring, Genentech, Hoffman-Laroche, Medivation, Pfizer); Consulting, scientific advisory boards (Astellas, Bayer, Blue Earth Diagnostics, Clovis, Dendreon, Ferring, Hinova, Janssen, Merck, Orion, Pfizer, Tolmar, Carrick Therapeutics, Novartis, Genentech); Other (spouse holds stock and former officer of CTI Biopharma). Dr. Pavlovich—Clinical trial Steering Committee member and clinical trial site Principal Investigator (PI) (Dendreon); clinical trial site PI (Profound Medical, Canada); clinical trial site PI (Nanostics, Canada). Dr. Carroll—advisory board (Nutcracker Therapeutics [messenger RNA therapy], Francis Medical [tissue ablation] and Insightec [tissue ablation]), not relevant to this study. Dr. Cooperberg—reports personal fees from Astellas, Bayer, MDx Health, Myriad Genetics, Dendreon, Steba Biotech, Astra Zeneca and Abbvie, outside the submitted work. Dr. Chan—Husband is a full-time employee of GRAIL, Inc. Dr. Barocas—Advisory Boards for Progenics. Dr. Dall'Era—Clinical trial (Janssen); Grant (Tempus); Speaker (Photocure). Dr. Rais-Bahrami—Consultant (Philips/InVivo Corp, Genomic Health Inc, Bayer Healthcare, Blue Earth Diagnostics and Intuitive Surgical). Research funding support (NIH/NCI, U.S. Department of Defense, Blue Earth Diagnostics, Genomic Health Inc, and Astellas). Dr. Karnes—Institutional and personal IP-royalties (Decipher Biosciences). Dr. Cookson—Advisory Board (Astellas, Janssen, Merck, Bayer). Dr. Stratton—Advisor (Dendreon); Honoraria (Bayer). Dr. Stadler—Consultant (DSMB; Astra-Zeneca, Bayer, Eisai, Merck, Pfizer, Sotio); Consultant (Caremark/CVS, Genentech, Pfizer); Speakers Bureau (CME providers [sponsorship unknown]: Applied Clinical Education, Dava Oncology, Global Academy for Medical Education, OncLive, PeerView, Vindico); Grant/ Research Support to institution (Abbvie, Astra-Zeneca, Astellas [Medivation], Bayer, Bristol-Myers-Squibb, Boehringer-Ingelheim, Calithera, Clovis, Corvus, Eisai, Exilixis,

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Abbreviations and Acronyms

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Tumor Volume Progression **PSA Progression**

Figure 1.

Scaled Venn diagram shows reason for conversion to treatment including grade reclassification, tumor volume progression and/or PSA progression (a), and anxiety alone without other reasons (b) . Percentages are out of total number of men who converted (2,260). Overlap between anxiety with other reasons for conversion: grade reclassification, 5 (0.2%); tumor volume progression, 0; PSA progression, 6 (0.3%).

Figure 2.

Kaplan-Meier analysis of time to conversion to treatment by patient demographic and cancer clinical factors. A, Kaplan-Meier plots of prostate cancer clinical variables in relation to time to conversion. P value is reported from log-rank test. B, Kaplan-Meier plots of race, genetic ancestry and family history of prostate cancer in relation to time to conversion. P value is reported from log-rank test. CFP, conversion-free probability.

Table 1.

Baseline characteristics of 6,775 patients at active surveillance enrollment

Baseline characteristics were missing for following proportion of study participants: age at diagnosis, <0.1%; self-reported race, 20.5%; genetic ancestry, 12.4%; Gleason GG, <0.1%; PSA concentration, 3.3%; clinical tumor stage, 6.9%; number of positive biopsy cores, 2.5%; risk group classification, <0.1%; family history of PC, 11%.

* Unknown: 1,390 (20.5%). "Underrepresented" includes American Indian/Alaska Native (10; <1%) and Native Hawaiian/Other Pacific Islander (8; $<1\%$).

† Percentages do not sum to 100% due to missing data.

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Table 2.

Associations between demographic and clinical characteristics and time to conversion to treatment among 6,775 men with prostate cancer Associations between demographic and clinical characteristics and time to conversion to treatment among 6,775 men with prostate cancer

Variables are mutually adjusted and hazard ratios are summarized across race strata. Characteristics with empty HRs are not included as model covariates. Variables are mutually adjusted and hazard ratios are summarized across race strata. Characteristics with empty HRs are not included as model covariates.

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