



# EGFR exon 19 deletion switch and development of p.L792Q mutation as a new resistance mechanism to osimertinib: a case report and literature review

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**Abstract:** Epidermal growth factor receptor (*EGFR*) gene mutations play an important role in the treatment management of non-small cell lung cancer (NSCLC) patients. After a first- or second-generation *EGFR* tyrosine kinase inhibitor (TKI) therapy, the most common resistance mechanism involves the selection of a resistant clone carrying the exon 20 p.T790M point mutation. However, also for these patients, treated with a third-generation TKI (osimertinib) several mechanisms of acquired resistance are described. Here we report the case of a 68-year-old man with an *EGFR* exon 19 deletion treated with gefitinib in first line and osimertinib in second line besides on the presence of a p.T790M mutation, who developed an uncommon *EGFR* exon 20 p.L792Q point mutation at the progression to osimertinib, with the concomitant modification of the original sensitizing *EGFR* exon 19 deletion and the loss of p.T790M mutation.

**Keywords:** Epidermal growth factor receptor (EGFR); osimertinib; exon 20; fine needle aspiration (FNA); liquid biopsy; next generation sequencing (NGS)

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## Introduction

The identification of genomic alterations harbored in non-small cell lung cancer (NSCLC) patients, in particular in epidermal growth factor receptor (*EGFR*) gene, led to a milestone in the improvement of treatment choices with first (gefitinib and erlotinib) and second (afatinib) generation tyrosine kinase inhibitors (TKIs) (1-4). However, the appearance of *EGFR* p.T790M exon 20 point mutation, represents the most common resistance mechanism for the first and second generation TKIs; afterwards this evidence, a third generation *EGFR* TKIs, such as osimertinib, have been introduced to treat these patients (5). Therefore, new mechanisms of resistance also against third generation TKI were recently described (1-5); the first of these identified mechanisms was the *EGFR* exon 20 p.C797S point

mutation (6). Recently, we assessed the mutational status of a never-smoker male 68-year-old with lung adenocarcinoma (ADC) diagnosed in stage IV, harboring an exon 19 *EGFR* p.E746\_A750del treated with gefitinib for 18 months. At the progression to first line treatment, the oncologist requested a liquid biopsy analysis showing the appearance of a resistant point mutation in *EGFR* exon 20 (p.T790M) in concomitance with the initial *EGFR* p.E746\_A750del. Thus, the patient started a therapy with osimertinib. After 9 months of treatment with osimertinib, a total body computed tomography (CT) shows the development of a progression and the oncologist requested another liquid biopsy analysis. The obtained results showed, in absence of a previously detected *EGFR* p.E746\_A750del and p.T790M mutation, the presence of a new exon 19 deletion (p.L747\_

A750>P) in concomitance with an uncommon *EGFR* exon 20 point mutation (p.L792Q). Here we aim to describe and discuss this case in the landscape of literature data.

### Case presentation

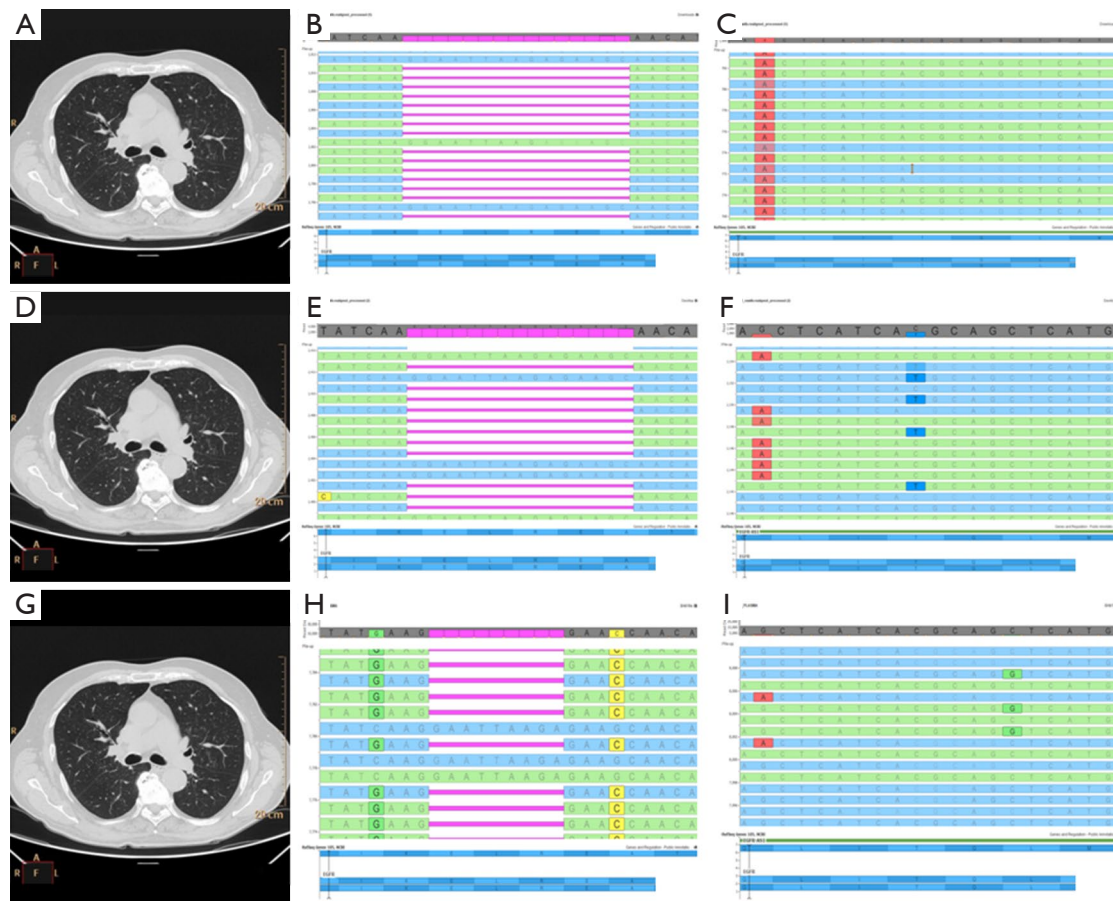
A 68-year-old man, with an history of smoking, showed dyspnea and abdominal pain in the liver region. Thus, a total body CT was performed and showed a mass (40 mm × 27 mm) in the right lung and two additional masses (26–71 mm) in the liver. On December 2013 a CT-guided fine needle aspiration (FNA) on a liver lesion was performed. The microscopic analysis showed poorly differentiated neoplastic cells and, according to immunophenotypical features (nuclear positivity for TTF-1), a diagnosis of NSCLC favor ADC was made. At the time of the diagnosis the patient presented liver metastasis, so the tumor was classified in stage IV.

The previous international guidelines [2013] from the College of American Pathologists (CAP), International Association for the Study of Lung Cancer (IASLC), and Association for Molecular Pathology (AMP) suggested that in case of newly diagnosed IIIB/IV NSCLC molecular tests were recommended to better define the therapeutic strategy (7). Consistent with these, on January 2014 we performed a fragment analysis assay (for exon 19 deletions) and a TaqMan based real-time polymerase chain reaction (RT-PCR—for exon 21 point mutations), following a previously validated protocol (8,9). The result was a 15 base pairs deletion in *EGFR* exon 19, confirmed by a Sanger sequencing and re-analyzed by a next generation sequencing (NGS) approach, which showed a p.E746\_A750del. Besides on this result, the patient started a treatment with gefitinib. This latter had been carried out from January 2014 to June 2015. Due to progression disease with the increase of the previously described lesions and appearance of new lesions, on August 2015 the patient started a treatment with 4 cycles of carboplatin-paclitaxel. In October 2015 was requested at our Institution the assessment, on circulating tumor DNA (ctDNA) derived from liquid biopsy, of exon 20 *EGFR* resistance mutation (p.T790M) in order to administrate a third generation TKI in the osimertinib expanded access study (10). The *EGFR* mutational status assessment was performed by the previously validated SiRe<sup>®</sup> NGS panel on Ion Torrent Personal Genome Machine (PGM, ThermoFisher, Waltham, Massachusetts, USA) (11). The patient showed the resistance point mutation in *EGFR* exon 20 (p.T790M) in concomitance

with the exon 19 deletion (p.E746\_A750del) and underwent a treatment with osimertinib. In May 2017 the patient underwent another liquid biopsy analysis due to the re-presentation of abdominal pain and asthenia. We identified a mutation switch respect to the initial *EGFR* exon 19 deletion (p.L747\_A750>P), and the uncommon point mutation in *EGFR* exon 20 (p.L792Q), without the evidence of p.T790M (Figure 1).

### Discussion

Treatment with first or second generation TKIs leads to the development of resistance mutations (e.g., p.T790M) which make consequently neoplastic cells responsive to the third generation TKIs (e.g., osimertinib) (5). In these patients, the ctDNA analysis could be a valid option to investigate the development of others *EGFR* gene mutations (12,13). However, even under treatment with third generation TKI, neoplastic cells can develop several resistance mechanisms (Tables 1,2) (6,14-23). The first described is the point mutation p.C797S in *EGFR* exon 20 (6). In the study from Thress *et al.*, six patients showed, in plasma samples, the p.C797S in association with the an exon 19 deletion and the p.T790M mutation (6). Other known resistance mutations involve *EGFR* codon 796 (14,15). In fact, Zheng *et al.*, by using a NGS approach, detected a p.G796D mutation whose mechanism is a conformational interference in the interaction between osimertinib and *EGFR* kinase domain (14). Also this patients, as reported in our case, lost the initial sensitizing mutation (p.L858R) and p.T790M after progression to osimertinib (14). Ou *et al.* reported in a single patient the development of different resistance mutations (p.G796S/R, p.L792F/H, p.C797S/G and V802F) all *in trans* with each other and *in cis* with the p.T790M (15). As in our case, Chen *et al.* identified on ctDNA derived from three patients (n=2 plasma samples and n=1 pleural effusion), acquired resistance mutations on *EGFR* in codon 792 (L792F, L792Y and L792H) (16). Interestingly, all these alterations were *in cis* with the p.T790M and *in trans* with the p.C797S (16). In a case by Bersanelli *et al.* a novel p.L718Q *EGFR* point mutation was evaluated as a resistance mechanism against osimertinib, without the evidence of p.C797S or other known *EGFR*-independent mechanisms of resistance (17). Oztan *et al.* described other two cases (in tissue and blood samples respectively) in which an *EGFR* p.G724S was detected, with or without the p.T790M (18). Alternative mechanism of acquired resistance to osimertinib involved the *BRAF*



**Figure 1** In the figure was reported the clinical evolution of patient's disease in relation to *EGFR* mutational assessment. From the top to the bottom: (A) thoracic assessment by CT of the disease at diagnosis; (B) molecular characterization at diagnosis of the *EGFR* exon 19 deletion (p.E746\_A750del) and (C) the absence of *EGFR* exon 20 resistant mutation (p.T790M); (D) thoracic assessment by CT after treatment with gefitinib showed the progression of the disease; (E) molecular evidence of the persistence of the *EGFR* exon 19 deletion (p.E746\_A750del) and (F) the presentation of *EGFR* exon 20 resistant mutation (p.T790M); (G) thoracic assessment by CT after treatment with osimertinib showed another progression of the disease; (H) molecular evidence of the *EGFR* exon 19 deletion (p.L747\_A750>P) in concomitance (I) with an uncommon *EGFR* exon 20 point mutation (p.L792Q) without p.T790M.

pathway, as shown by Ho *et al.* (19). In this study, by using matrix-assisted laser desorption/ionization time-of-flight mass spectrometry (MALDI-TOF MS), they identified, on tissue sample, a *BRAF* p.V600E mutation (19); in particular, the first *EGFR* mutation (p.L858R) was lost or not yet detectable, after treatment with gefitinib and erlotinib, and the patient acquired a concomitant exon 19 deletion with p.T790M that can be detected also after progression to osimertinib in concomitance with the *BRAF* p.V600E (19). Furthermore, Planchard *et al.* described other mechanisms of resistance, in two different patients who underwent a therapy with a third generation TKI (20); the authors identified by comparative

genomic hybridization (CGH) and fluorescent *in situ* hybridization (FISH), *HER2* and *MET* amplification (20). In both cases these alterations were correlated with the loss of the *EGFR* p.T790M mutation (20). In another experience, Ou *et al.* also identified a *MET* amplification developed after treatment with osimertinib, and in accordance with Planchard *et al.*, no evidence of this alteration was found before treatment (21). Another recent experience, reported by Knebel *et al.* showed, by using digital droplet PCR (ddPCR), an amplification of the *EGFR* exon 19 deleted allele without the evidence of other known resistance mechanisms to osimertinib (22). Ham *et al.* in two different cases, harboring two different *EGFR* sensitizing

**Table 1** *EGFR* resistance mechanisms against third generation TKIs and methodology adopted to their identification

First author	<i>EGFR</i> initial mutation (persistence at the progression to osimertinib)	First TKI adopted	Resistance mechanism described	Persistence at the progression to osimertinib of p.T790	Methodology adopted
Thress <i>et al.</i> (6)	Exon 19del (Y)	NR	p.C797S	Y	NGS
Zheng <i>et al.</i> (14)	p.L858R (N)	Gefitinib	p.G796D	N	NGS
Ou <i>et al.</i> (15)	p.L858R (Y)	Erlotinib	p.G796S/R, p.L792F/H, p.C797S/G, p.V802F	Y	HC NGS
Chen <i>et al.</i> (16)	Exon 19del (Y)	Gefitinib	p.L792H/F, p.C797S/G/N, p.L718Q	Y	Targeted NGS
	Exon 19del (Y)	Gefitinib	p.L792H/F/Y, p.C797S	Y	
	Exon 19del (Y)	Gefitinib	p.L792F, p.C797S, p.P794S	Y	
Bersanelli <i>et al.</i> (17)	p.L858R (Y)	Gefitinib	p.L718Q	Y	NGS
Oztan <i>et al.</i> (18)	Exon 19del (Y)	Erlotinib	p.G724S	Y	CGP
	Exon 19del (Y)	Erlotinib	p.G724S	N	
Pisapia, <i>et al.</i> (present study)	Exon 19del (N)	Gefitinib	p.L792Q	N	NGS

TKI, tyrosine kinase inhibitor; HC NGS, hybrid capture based next generation sequencing; CGP, comprehensive genome profiling.

**Table 2** *EGFR* independent resistance mechanisms against third generation TKIs and methodology adopted to their identification

First author	<i>EGFR</i> initial mutation (persistence at the progression to osimertinib)	First TKI adopted	Resistance mechanism described	Persistence at the progression to osimertinib of p.T790	Methodology adopted
Ho <i>et al.</i> (19)	p.L858R (N)	Gefitinib and erlotinib	p.V600E (BRAF)	Y	MALDI-TOF MS
Planchard <i>et al.</i> (20)	p.E746_A750del (Y)	Gefitinib	HER2 amplification	N	CGH, FISH
	p.L858R (Y)	Erlotinib	MET amplification	N	
Ou <i>et al.</i> (21)	Exon 19del (NR)	Erlotinib	MET amplification	Y	CGP
Knebel <i>et al.</i> (22)	Exon 19del (Y)	Erlotinib	EGFR amplification	Y	ddPCR
Ham <i>et al.</i> (23)	p.L858R (Y)	Erlotinib	SCLC transformation	N	NGS
	Exon 19del (Y)	Erlotinib	SCLC transformation	N	

CGH, comparative genomic hybridization; CGP, comprehensive genome profiling; ddPCR, digital droplet polymerase chain reaction; FISH, fluorescent *in situ* hybridization; HC NGS, hybrid capture based next generation sequencing; MALDI-TOF MS, matrix-assisted laser desorption/ionization time-of-flight mass spectrometry; NGS, next generation sequencing; NR, not reported; SCLC, small cell lung cancer; Y, yes; N, no.

mutation, identified a transition from adenocarcinoma to small cell carcinoma after osimertinib with the concomitant loss of the p.T790M mutation (23). As in our case, Ho *et al.* showed the switch of the initial sensitizing *EGFR* mutation (p.L858R) with another mutation (exon 19 deletion) (19). Instead, different from our experience,

their case retain the p.T790M mutation with the acquisition of a concomitant *BRAF* p.V600E (19). The heterogeneity of *EGFR* mutational status has been described in literature, and also the possibility of arising of different clones after target treatment (24,25). Moreover, the development of an osimertinib resistance mutation (e.g., *EGFR* p.C797S)

with the concomitant loss of p.T790M and persistence of an EGFR sensitizing mutation allows the re-treatment with a first or second generation TKI, as recently reported by Chic *et al.* (26).

In conclusion, we report an uncommon mechanism of resistance to osimertinib, identified with a validated NGS approach, different from the classic point mutation p.C797S, which involved, in addition to the uncommon point mutation p.L792Q, the switch from the original sensitizing *EGFR* deletion (from p.E746\_A750del to p.L747\_A750>P) and the loss of p.T790M mutation.

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