



Published in final edited form as:

*Kidney Int.* 2022 October ; 102(4): 930–935. doi:10.1016/j.kint.2022.07.019.

## Acute kidney injury in patients receiving pembrolizumab combination therapy versus pembrolizumab monotherapy for advanced lung cancer

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SG, IAS, MES, DEL, FBC, MJM, and KLR were responsible for conceptualization, methodology, and software. SG, IAS, MES, and DEL contributed to data curation and writing—original draft preparation, visualization, investigation, writing, reviewing, and editing. QW, PEH, JMP, SMH, AA, ABM, SL, CAC, W-TC, PB, ZM, CVS, ADR, SDS, LC, AK, DSS, GC, NL, PG, DIO-M, AR, BS, VA, KB, KDJ, AW, and YZ performed data collection. MES and DEL provided supervision. All authors approved the final version of the manuscript.

### SUPPLEMENTARY MATERIAL

Supplementary File (Word)

ICPi-AKI Consortium Investigators.

Supplementary Methods.

Supplementary References.

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The addition of the immune checkpoint inhibitor (ICPi), pembrolizumab, to standard pemetrexed- and platinum-based chemotherapy has improved progression-free and overall survival in patients with metastatic nonsquamous non-small cell lung cancer (NSCLC) regardless of programmed death-ligand 1 expression.<sup>1</sup> However, ICPis, pemetrexed-, and platinum-based chemotherapies each have nephrotoxic potential,<sup>2-5</sup> raising concern that combination therapy may result in a higher incidence and severity of acute kidney injury (AKI) compared with pembrolizumab monotherapy.<sup>6</sup> In a phase-3 multicenter trial (KEYNOTE-189), which compared pemetrexed- and a platinum-based agent (either cisplatin or carboplatin) with versus without pembrolizumab in patients with metastatic nonsquamous NSCLC, AKI occurred in 12.2% of patients in the pembrolizumab-carboplatin-pemetrexed group (here-after referred to as “triplet therapy”) compared with 7.6% in the carboplatin-pemetrexed group, suggesting a higher incidence of AKI with triplet therapy.<sup>1</sup> Triplet therapy is now first-line treatment for patients with nonsquamous NSCLC with low programmed death-ligand 1 expression, lacking a targetable mutation in *EGFR* or *ALK*, and pembrolizumab monotherapy is first-line treatment for patients with high programmed death-ligand 1 expression. Despite the growing use of these therapies, there are few data regarding the incidence and severity of AKI, along with kidney recovery in patients receiving triplet therapy versus pembrolizumab monotherapy.

To address this knowledge gap, we used data from 2 separate cohorts to characterize the clinical features and outcomes of AKI in patients receiving triplet therapy versus pembrolizumab monotherapy for nonsquamous NSCLC. The Massachusetts General Brigham (MGB) cohort consisted of adult patients receiving first-line pembrolizumab for nonsquamous NSCLC, whereas the ICPI-associated AKI (ICPI-AKI) cohort was a multicenter study of adults diagnosed with AKI directly attributable to the ICPI. The primary objective was to determine the incidence of AKI in the MGB cohort, AKI severity and treatment, and kidney recovery rates in patients receiving triplet therapy versus pembrolizumab in both cohorts.

## RESULTS

### Baseline characteristics

In the MGB cohort, 1584 patients received pembrolizumab for thoracic cancer. After applying the exclusions shown in Supplementary Figure S1A, the cohort consisted of 872 patients with nonsquamous NSCLC, 361 (41%) of whom received triplet therapy and 511 (59%) of whom received pembrolizumab monotherapy (Table 1).<sup>7</sup> Patients in the pembrolizumab monotherapy group were older and had a lower baseline estimated glomerular filtration rate than those in the triplet therapy group (mean age: 70 [SD  $\pm$  12] years vs. 65 [SD  $\pm$  10] years,  $P < 0.01$ ; mean estimated glomerular filtration rate: 80 [SD  $\pm$  23] ml/min per 1.73 m<sup>2</sup> vs. 87 [SD  $\pm$  18] ml/min per 1.73 m<sup>2</sup>,  $P < 0.01$ ). Patients receiving pembrolizumab monotherapy were more likely to have eosinophilia at the time of AKI (21% vs. 2%;  $P < 0.01$ ) but had mostly similar rates of extrarenal immune-related adverse events before or concomitant with AKI diagnosis (23% vs. 15%;  $P = 0.21$ ; Table 1, Supplementary Table S1A and B). Proton pump inhibitor use was similar between the groups.

In the ICPi-AKI cohort, 63 patients with nonsquamous NSCLC received pembrolizumab, of whom 23 (37%) received triplet therapy and 40 (63%) received pembrolizumab monotherapy (Supplementary Figure S1B). Patients who received triplet versus pembrolizumab monotherapy were similar with respect to age, sex, comorbidities, baseline estimated glomerular filtration rate, and proton pump inhibitor use (Table 1). Prior or concomitant extrarenal immune-related adverse events were more common among those receiving pembrolizumab monotherapy compared with triplet therapy, though this trend did not reach statistical significance (43% vs. 17%;  $P = 0.10$ ; Table 1, Supplementary Table S1A and B).

### AKI incidence, etiology, and severity

In the MGB cohort, 82 of 361 patients (23%) in the triplet therapy group developed AKI, as compared with 95 of 511 patients (19%) in the pembrolizumab monotherapy group ( $P = 0.16$ ). The distribution of AKI stages 1, 2, and 3 was similar between the groups (Figure 1a). In multivariable analyses, the incidence of AKI was also similar between the groups (adjusted hazard ratio: 1.19 [95% confidence interval: 0.88–1.61];  $P = 0.25$ ; Table 2). Female sex was also a significant predictor of AKI risk (Supplementary Table S2). The timing of AKI did not differ significantly in the triplet group versus the pembrolizumab monotherapy group (median: 81 [interquartile range (IQR): 21–132] days vs. 70 [IQR: 28–126] days;  $P = 0.95$ ; Table 1). AKI was attributed to ICPi therapy in 28% (27 of 95) of cases in the pembrolizumab monotherapy cohort, and in 31% (25 of 82) of cases in the triplet therapy cohort. The breakdown of AKI etiologies is shown in Supplementary Figure S2.

In the ICPi-AKI cohort, the distribution of AKI severity was similar in patients who received triplet therapy versus pembrolizumab monotherapy (Figure 1b). AKI occurred earlier in the triplet therapy group versus the pembrolizumab monotherapy group (median: 105 [IQR: 65–140] days vs. 202 [IQR: 128–315] days;  $P < 0.01$ ; Table 1).

### AKI treatment and kidney recovery

In the MGB cohort, there were no differences in corticosteroid use between triplet versus pembrolizumab monotherapy (Table 1). The rates of kidney recovery were also similar between the groups (84% and 78%;  $P = 0.39$ ; Figure 1c), as was time to kidney recovery (median: 11 [IQR: 2–26] days vs. 10 [IQR: 2–29] days;  $P = 0.65$ ). There was also no difference in corticosteroid use or recovery time for cases of AKI attributed to triplet therapy or pembrolizumab monotherapy (Supplementary Table S3).

In the ICPI-AKI cohort, 28 (44%) were hospitalized at the time of AKI. Corticosteroids were used more frequently in the ICPI-AKI cohort, with similar usage in patients receiving triplet therapy versus pembrolizumab monotherapy (Table 1). The rates of kidney recovery were similar between the groups (48% in both groups;  $P = 0.98$ ; Figure 1d), as was time to kidney recovery (median: 46 [IQR: 22–56] days vs. 39 [IQR: 17–66] days;  $P = 0.98$ ).

### Histopathology

In the ICPI-AKI cohort, 12 of 23 patients (52%) who received triplet therapy and 8 of 63 patients (13%) who received pembrolizumab monotherapy underwent a kidney biopsy. Both groups had a similar proportion of moderate-to-severe acute interstitial nephritis; however, those receiving triplet therapy were more likely to have moderate-to-severe acute tubular necrosis versus those receiving pembrolizumab monotherapy (Supplementary Figures S3 and S4).

## DISCUSSION

In 2 independent “real-world” cohorts consisting of nearly 1000 patients with nonsquamous NSCLC treated with triplet therapy or pembrolizumab monotherapy, we investigated the incidence and severity of AKI, and kidney recovery, along with associated clinical and histopathologic features. We found no significant difference in the incidence of AKI between these 2 treatment regimens. We also found no major differences in AKI severity, treatment, kidney recovery, or histopathologic findings among patients treated with these 2 regimens. Cumulatively, our findings suggest that triplet therapy does not pose a greater risk of kidney injury as compared with pembrolizumab monotherapy.

Clinical features of AKI were largely similar among patients who received triplet therapy versus pembrolizumab monotherapy; however, in the ICPI-AKI cohort, extrarenal immune-related adverse events were more common among patients receiving pembrolizumab monotherapy. This finding may reflect a greater likelihood of acute interstitial nephritis in the pembrolizumab monotherapy group.<sup>2,8</sup>

With regard to kidney recovery, we previously found that 64% of patients with all malignancies who developed ICPI-AKI had kidney recovery.<sup>2</sup> In this study, rates of recovery were lower overall among patients with nonsquamous NSCLC (48%), but were similar between patients receiving triplet therapy versus pembrolizumab monotherapy. Pemetrexed has been associated with acute tubular necrosis and progressive kidney fibrosis,<sup>3,4,9</sup> and despite concerns that the addition of pemetrexed to ICPIs may increase the risk of AKI

severity and decrease the likelihood of kidney recovery, our data are potentially reassuring that this may not be the case.

Although this study includes data from 2 cohorts, it has limitations. First, the MGB cohort included patients with any cause of AKI and thus captured milder stages of AKI, on average, than the multicenter ICPI-AKI cohort. In contrast, the ICPI-AKI cohort included patients with more severe AKI directly attributable to the ICPI, which likely explains the lower rates of kidney recovery and higher rates of corticosteroid use than in the MGB cohort. Second, we did not collect data on long-term kidney outcomes after AKI. Third, oncologists may have opted to treat older and more frail patients with pembrolizumab monotherapy rather than triplet therapy because of concern for toxicities; as a result, rates of AKI may have been lower in the triplet therapy group because of selection bias. However, neither age nor comorbidities have been demonstrated to be risk factors for ICPI-AKI.<sup>2,8</sup> Furthermore, our multivariable model in the MGB cohort did not demonstrate an association between the treatment regimen and risk of AKI, though this may have been limited by lack of statistical power. Finally, as dexamethasone is commonly administered with each cycle of triplet therapy but not with pembrolizumab monotherapy, this could potentially impact the risk of developing ICPI-associated AKI or other immune-related adverse events.

In summary, in 2 cohorts of patients with nonsquamous NSCLC, we found that AKI incidence, severity, and treatment, along with kidney recovery, do not differ between patients receiving triplet therapy versus pembrolizumab monotherapy. Given the nephrotoxic potential of combination therapy, these data are potentially reassuring to both nephrologists and oncologists managing patients on this regimen.

## Supplementary Material

Refer to Web version on PubMed Central for supplementary material.

## DISCLOSURE

SG receives research funding from GE Healthcare and BTG International and is president and founder of the American Society of Onconephrology. KDJ is a consultant for Astex Pharmaceuticals, Natera, GlaxoSmithKline, ChemoCentryx, and Chinook; a paid contributor to [Uptodate.com](http://Uptodate.com); receives honorarium from the International Society of Nephrology and the American Society of Nephrology; and is cofounder and copresident of the American Society of Onconephrology. DSS participates in the speakers' bureau at Genentech. FBC is a consultant for ChemoCentryx and Retrophin. AA is supported by the Division of Internal Medicine Immuno-Oncology Toxicity Award Program of the University of Texas MD Anderson Cancer Center. BS is a senior clinical investigator at the Research Foundation Flanders (F.W.O.) (1842919N) and is supported by Stichting tegen Kanker (grant C/2020/1380). AR is a consultant for Otsuka Pharmaceutical Company and treasurer of the American Society of Onconephrology. SMH is supported by the Mayo Clinic K2R award. KB receives grant support from the Olympia Morata Programme, Foundations Commission of University of Heidelberg, Rheumaliga Baden-Württemberg e.V., Abbvie, and Novartis; and also serves as a consultant for and receives speaker fee/travel reimbursements from Abbvie, BMS, Janssen, MSD, Viartis, Gilead/Galapagos, Janssen, Lilly, Medac, Mundipharma, Novartis, Pfizer, Roche, and Union Chimique Belge. MES has served on a scientific advisory board for Mallinckrodt. MJM has served as a consultant or received honorarium from AstraZeneca, Immunai, Istari Oncology, Nektar Therapeutics, and Bristol Myers Squibb. LC serves as a consultant for and receives honorarium and/or travel reimbursements from Pfizer, Bristol Myers Squibb, and MSD. All other authors declared no competing interests.

## APPENDIX

### ICPi-AKI Consortium collaborators

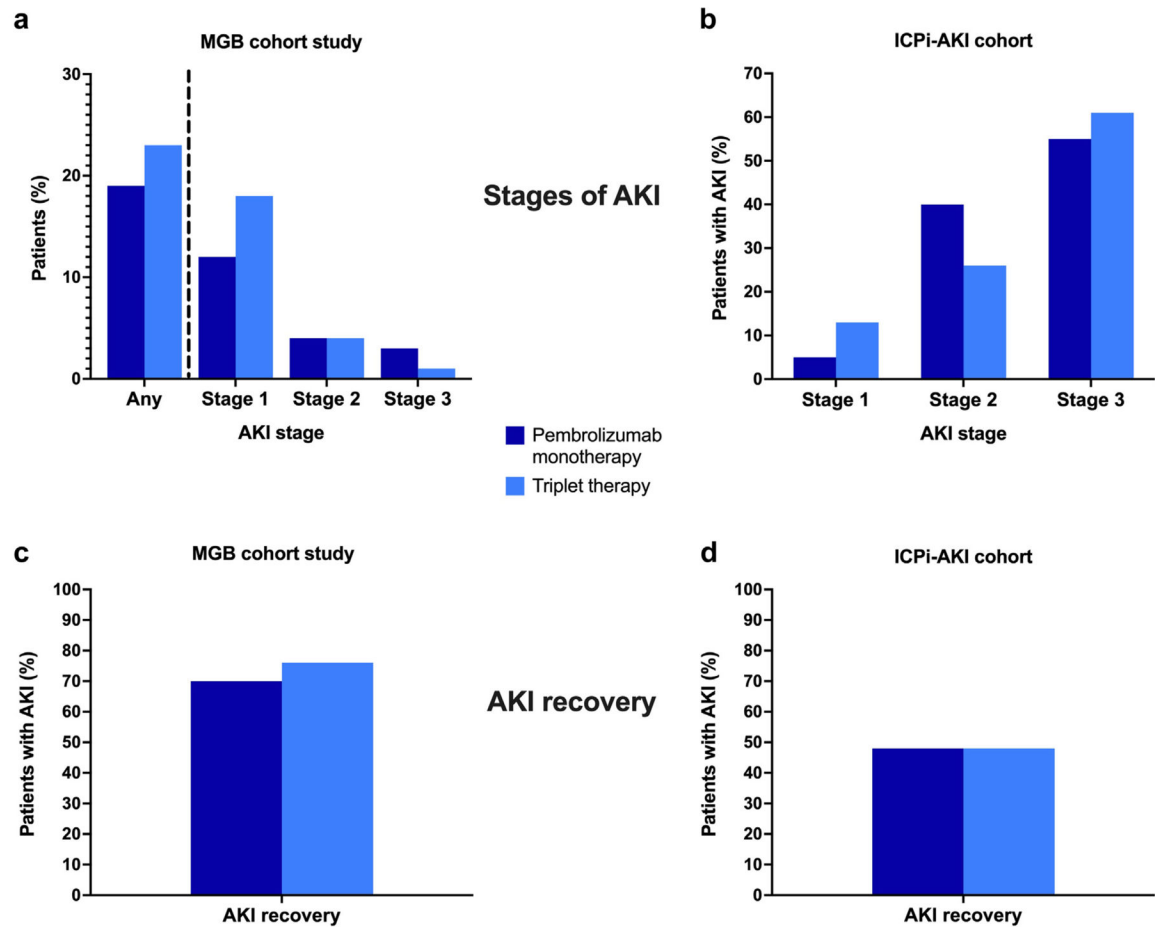
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**Figure 1 |** (a) Massachusetts General Brigham (MGB) cohort study with acute kidney injury (AKI) rates (any AKI incidence and breakdown of stages 1–3); (b) breakdown of the AKI stage in the immune checkpoint inhibitor-associated acute kidney injury (ICPi-AKI) cohort study; (c) AKI recovery rates in the MGB cohort; (d) AKI recovery rates in the ICPi-AKI cohort.

In the ICPi-AKI cohort, there was 1 patient in the triplet therapy group who received kidney replacement therapy (KRT) (4.4%) and was ultimately liberated from KRT, as compared with 2 patients in the pembrolizumab monotherapy group (5.0%) who received KRT, 1 of whom was liberated from KRT. In the MGB cohort, 2 patients received KRT, and neither was liberated from KRT.

Table 1 |

## Baseline characteristics

Variable at baseline	MGB cohort		ICPi-AKI cohort	
	Triplet therapy (n = 361)	Pembrolizumab monotherapy (n = 511)	Triplet therapy (n = 23)	Pembrolizumab monotherapy (n = 40)
Age at ICPi initiation, yr, mean ( $\pm$ SD)	65 ( $\pm$ 10)	70 ( $\pm$ 12)	65 ( $\pm$ 11)	66 ( $\pm$ 9)
Male, n (%)	186 (52)	258 (50)	8 (35)	13 (33)
Race, n (%)				
White	329 (91)	455 (89)	15 (65)	35 (88)
Black	9 (2)	26 (5)	5 (22)	2 (5)
Other/unknown	23 (6)	29 (6)	3 (13)	3 (8)
Comorbidities, n (%)				
Hypertension	218 (60)	292 (57)	12 (52)	16 (40)
Diabetes	77 (21)	109 (21)	1 (4)	3 (8)
CHF	10 (3)	27 (5)	0 (0)	1 (3)
COPD	73 (20)	131 (26)	3 (13)	8 (20)
Chronic liver disease	2 (1)	4 (1)	0 (0)	0 (0)
Baseline eGFR, <sup>a</sup> ml/min per 1.73 m <sup>2</sup>				
Mean ( $\pm$ SD)	87 ( $\pm$ 18)	80 ( $\pm$ 23)	81 ( $\pm$ 25)	84 ( $\pm$ 23)
eGFR categories, n (%)				
90	187 (52)	195 (38)	11 (48)	19 (48)
60–89	141 (39)	215 (42)	7 (30)	16 (40)
45–59	28 (8)	55 (11)	3 (13)	2 (5)
<45	5 (1)	46 (9)	2 (9)	3 (8)
	MGB cohort		ICPi-AKI cohort	
	Triplet therapy, patients with AKI (n = 82)	Pembrolizumab monotherapy, patients with AKI (n = 95)	Triplet therapy (n = 23)	Pembrolizumab monotherapy (n = 40)
Time to AKI, d, median (IQR)	81 (21–132)	70 (28–126)	105 (65–140)	202 (128–315)
Peak SCr, mg/dl, median (IQR)	1.2 (1.0–1.6)	1.38 (1.1–2.1)	3.1 (2.3–3.8)	2.6 (1.9–3.7)
Eosinophils >500/ $\mu$ l, n (%) <sup>b</sup>	2 (2)	20 (21)	1 (4)	7 (18)
Extrarenal irAE, n (%) <sup>b</sup>	12 (15)	22 (23)	4 (17)	17 (43)

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PPI, n (%) <sup>b</sup>	19 (23)	14 (15)	13 (57)	17 (43)
Antibiotics, n (%) <sup>b</sup>	24 (29)	13 (14)	1 (4)	3 (8)
Biopsy done, n (%)	1 (1)	2 (2)	12 (52)	17 (43)
ATIN, n (%) <sup>c</sup>	1 (100)	1 (50)	11 (92)	14 (82)
ICPI held, n (%)	22 (27)	35 (37)	21 (91)	34 (85)
Corticosteroid use, n (%) <sup>d</sup>	9 (11)	9 (10)	22 (96)	37 (93)
Day to recovery, median (IQR)	11 (2–26)	10 (2–29)	46 (22–56)	39 (17–66)

There were 2 patients from the MGB cohort who overlapped with the ICPI-AKI cohort (as MGB was one of the 30 participating sites in the ICPI-AKI cohort). Data on eosinophilia were missing in 1 patient who received triplet therapy in each cohort. All other data are complete.

<sup>a</sup>Baseline eGFR was calculated based on the Chronic Kidney Disease-Epidemiology Collaboration equation.<sup>7</sup>

<sup>b</sup>Eosinophilia was assessed at the time of AKI. Extrarenal irAEs were assessed before (>14 days) or concomitant (within 14 days) with AKI. PPIs and antibiotics were assessed in the 14 days preceding AKI.

<sup>c</sup>ATIN was the dominant lesion on kidney biopsy.

<sup>d</sup>Corticosteroid use was defined as at least 0.5 mg/kg/d in prednisone equivalents within 2 weeks of AKI.

AKI, acute kidney injury; ATIN, acute tubulointerstitial nephritis; CHF, congestive heart failure; COPD, chronic obstructive pulmonary disease; eGFR, estimated glomerular filtration rate; ICPI-AKI, immune checkpoint inhibitor-associated acute kidney injury; IQR, interquartile range; irAE, immune-related adverse event; MGB, Massachusetts General Brigham; PPI, proton pump inhibitor; SCr, serum creatinine.

Fine-Gray model for AKI within 6 months of initiation of triplet therapy or pembrolizumab monotherapy in the MGB cohort

**Table 2 |**

Variable	Univariate analysis				Multivariable model			
	HR	95% CI	P value	aHR	95% CI	P value		
Triplet therapy (vs. monotherapy)	1.25	0.93–1.68	0.14	1.19	0.88–1.61	0.25		
Female	2.17	1.59–2.96	<0.01	2.41	1.76–3.30	<0.01		
Age	0.99	0.98–1.00	0.04	1.00	0.98–1.02	0.83		
Baseline eGFR (per 1 ml/min per 1.73 m <sup>2</sup> )	1.02	1.01–1.02	<0.01	1.02	1.01–1.04	<0.01		
BMI								
20–25 vs. <20	0.95	0.46–1.97	0.84	—	—	—		
25–30 vs. <20	0.79	0.38–1.66	0.64	—	—	—		
30 vs. <20	0.83	0.38–1.79	0.76	—	—	—		
Hypertension	1.15	0.85–1.55	0.37	—	—	—		
Diabetes	0.96	0.66–1.38	0.81	—	—	—		
Coronary artery disease	1.49	1.10–2.02	0.01	1.44	1.03–2.02	0.03		
Cirrhosis	0.74	0.12–4.52	0.75	—	—	—		
ACEI/ARBs	1.39	1.04–1.87	0.03	1.63	1.19–2.22	<0.01		
Diuretics	1.13	0.83–1.53	0.44	—	—	—		
PPIs	1.03	0.77–1.38	0.85	—	—	—		
Charlson comorbidity score	1.04	0.99–1.09	0.15	1.05	0.99–1.11	0.13		

aHR, adjusted hazard ratio; ACEI/ARB, angiotensin converting enzyme inhibitor or angiotensin II receptor blocker; AKI, acute kidney injury; BMI, body mass index; CI, confidence interval; eGFR, estimated glomerular filtration rate; ICPI-AKI, immune checkpoint inhibitor-associated acute kidney injury; MGB, Massachusetts General Brigham; PPI, proton pump inhibitor.

The Fine-Gray model takes into account the competing risk for death. The multivariable model evaluates the risk of AKI in patients treated with triplet versus monotherapy, adjusting for age, sex, baseline eGFR, coronary artery disease, Charlson comorbidity score, and ACEI/ARB use.