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The Role of Sex in Predicting Immunotherapy Response in Advanced Cutaneous Squamous Cell Carcinoma

Nicolas Yeo*

Department of Medicine, University of Wollongong, Wollongong, Australia

Abstract

Cutaneous Squamous Cell Carcinoma (cSCC) is the second most common type of skin cancer and represents a significant health concern worldwide. While most cases of cSCC are treatable with local interventions, some advance to more aggressive and invasive stages that require systemic treatments. Immunotherapy has emerged as a promising approach for advanced cSCC, harnessing the body's immune system to target and eliminate cancer cells. However, individual patient responses to immunotherapy can vary significantly, and research has increasingly focused on identifying predictive factors, including sex, that influence treatment outcomes. Sexual dimorphism, the biological differences between males and females, is a well-established aspect of human physiology. These differences extend to the immune system and can influence responses to immunotherapy. Understanding how sex impacts immunotherapy response in advanced cSCC is crucial for tailoring treatment approaches and improving patient outcomes. This article will delve into the complex interplay between sex and immunotherapy response in advanced cSCC, exploring the biological and clinical aspects of this phenomenon.

Keywords: Squamous cell • Dimorphism • Sex

Introduction

To comprehend the role of sex in immunotherapy response, it is essential to grasp the underlying biological differences in the immune system between males and females. These differences have been well-documented and can significantly affect immune responses to various diseases, including cancer. One key factor contributing to sex-related differences in the immune system is the role of sex hormones. Estrogen, progesterone, and testosterone have varying effects on immune cells. For instance, estrogen can enhance the immune response, promoting the proliferation of certain immune cells, such as T cells. In contrast, testosterone may suppress immune function. These hormonal differences can result in variations in immune responses to diseases and treatments, including immunotherapy. This heightened immune activation may contribute to improved immunotherapy outcomes in some female patients with cSCC. However, it is essential to note that the relationship between immune activation and cancer response can be complex, as an overly aggressive immune response can lead to autoimmune reactions and adverse events [1].

Immunotherapy has revolutionized the treatment landscape for several types of cancer, including advanced cSCC. The most widely used class of immunotherapies for cancer treatment is immune checkpoint inhibitors, such as anti-PD-1 and anti-PD-L1 antibodies. These drugs work by blocking the interaction between these proteins, which often prevent immune cells from recognizing and attacking cancer cells. By inhibiting these checkpoints, immunotherapy enhances the immune system's ability to target and eliminate cancerous cells. Immunotherapy has demonstrated remarkable success in a subset of patients with advanced cSCC. However, not all patients respond equally to these treatments. Predictive biomarkers are essential for identifying individuals who are likely to benefit from immunotherapy, and understanding the role of sex in this context is becoming increasingly important. Research into sex-related differences in immunotherapy response has provided valuable insights into the potential impact of sex on treatment outcomes in advanced cSCC [2].

Literature Review

Several studies have reported differences in response rates to immunotherapy based on sex. In some cancers, including melanoma and lung cancer, female patients have exhibited higher response rates to immune checkpoint inhibitors compared to their male counterparts. While the data specific to cSCC is limited, these findings suggest that sex-related differences in immunotherapy response may extend to this type of cancer as well. Improved response rates in female patients have often translated into better survival outcomes. In some cancer types, females treated with immunotherapy have shown prolonged progression-free survival and overall survival compared to males. These findings suggest that sex may be a valuable prognostic factor in predicting patient outcomes in the context of immunotherapy for advanced cSCC.

The observed sex-related differences in immunotherapy response may be attributed to various underlying mechanisms, including the biological factors discussed earlier. These mechanisms can interact in complex ways to influence the effectiveness of immunotherapy in male and female patients. Sex hormones can directly affect the immune response to immunotherapy. Estrogen, for example, has been shown to enhance the activity of immune cells, making female patients more responsive to immunotherapy. Conversely, the immunosuppressive effects of testosterone may reduce the efficacy of immunotherapy in male patients. These hormonal differences may contribute to the variations in treatment outcomes observed between sexes. The differences in immune cell composition and function between males and females can also play a role in immunotherapy response [3].

Discussion

The heightened immune activation typically observed in females may contribute to their improved response to immunotherapy. This stronger immune activation can lead to more effective cancer cell recognition and elimination. However, it is crucial to strike a delicate balance, as excessive immune

***Address for Correspondence:** Nicolas Yeo, Department of Medicine, University of Wollongong, Wollongong, Australia; E-mail: nicolasyeo@gmail.com*

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activation can also result in autoimmune reactions and severe side effects. Therefore, the optimal level of immune activation for immunotherapy success may vary between male and female patients. The recognition of sex-related differences in immunotherapy response has important clinical implications for the management of advanced cSCC. Understanding these differences can aid in treatment decision-making and potentially improve outcomes for patients. The identification of sex as a potential predictive factor for immunotherapy response suggests that treatment decisions should be personalized based on a patient's sex. While sex is not the sole determinant of response, it can be a valuable consideration in the overall clinical assessment. Physicians can use this information to discuss treatment options with their patients and make more informed decisions.

The discovery of sex-related differences in immunotherapy response highlights the need for further research into biomarkers that can more accurately predict which patients will benefit from these treatments. While sex is a helpful indicator, it is not a comprehensive biomarker on its own. Identifying specific markers that can better predict treatment response will be critical for improving patient care. The sex-related differences in immunotherapy response emphasize the importance of including a diverse patient population in clinical trials. Historically, clinical trials in oncology have been predominantly male-centric, limiting the generalizability of their results to female patients. By ensuring greater representation of both sexes in clinical trials, researchers can generate more comprehensive data on treatment outcomes and better understand the role of sex in immunotherapy response [4-6].

Conclusion

While the impact of sex on immunotherapy response in advanced cSCC is a promising area of research, several challenges and areas for future investigation remain.The biological underpinnings of sex differences in immunotherapy response are complex and multifaceted. Research in this field requires a deeper understanding of how sex hormones, immune cell composition, and immune activation interplay to influence treatment outcomes. Further studies are needed to unravel the precise mechanisms at work. It is crucial to recognize that sex is just one facet of patient heterogeneity. Various other factors, including genetics, age, and overall health status, can also impact immunotherapy response. Research should focus on developing comprehensive predictive models that consider multiple variables to make more accurate treatment decisions.

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Conflict of Interest

There is no conflict of interest by author.

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