

Correlation analysis of MR/CT on colorectal cancer lymph node metastasis characteristics and prognosis

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Abstract. – OBJECTIVE: Colorectal cancer incidence showed increasing trend with living standard improvement and lifestyle changes. This study investigated the relationship and diagnostic value of colorectal cancer lymph node metastasis and prognosis using magnetic resonance (MR) and computed tomography (CT).

PATIENTS AND METHODS: Siemens Avanto 3.0T MR and GE Light Speed Pro 64 row helical CT were used to scan 318 cases of colorectal cancer patients diagnosed by pathology. The relationship between colorectal cancer lymph node metastasis and prognosis after surgery was analyzed.

RESULTS: The accuracy of MR and CT in judging colorectal cancer lymph node metastasis ratio (LNR) was 92.5% and 75.5%, respectively. MR showed significantly higher accuracy than CT ($p < 0.05$). The coincidence rate of LNR result derived from MR and CT with colorectal cancer histopathological results was 57.6% and 54.7%, respectively. MR and CT sensitivity were 42.6% and 25.0%, while their specificity was 74.1% and 41.3%, respectively. The positive predictive value and negative predictive value of MR and CT were 61.1% and 51.4%, 57.1% and 66.7%, respectively. χ^2 -test showed that MR diagnosis result was consistent with histopathological result ($p < 0.05$). The coincidence rate of MR and CT evaluation on 5-year disease-free survival and overall survival were 56.7% and 43.8%, respectively.

CONCLUSIONS: MR showed a better effect on prognosis than CT and could be treated as the first choice to predict LNR and prognosis. MR demonstrated a good correlation with pathological results and could be used to predict LNR and prognosis.

Key Words:

Colorectal cancer, Magnetic resonance, Computed tomography, Lymph node metastasis, Prognosis.

Introduction

Colorectal cancer is one of the most common digestive system malignant tumors worldwide¹. Its incidence in our country ranks the fourth among all tumors. Surgery is one of the important methods for colorectal cancer treatment². Accurate preoperative pathological staging is important for choosing the best treatment strategy. Lymph node metastasis is a critical index for colorectal cancer pathological staging, treatment choice, and prognosis evaluation^{3,4}. Recent researches⁵⁻⁷ showed that the 5-year survival rate of colorectal cancer patients with lymph node metastasis was 50%-68%, while in the patients with the same condition without lymph node metastasis reached up to 95%. In clinic, metastatic lymph node number has become an important basis for colorectal cancer pathologic staging. Lymph nodes metastatic ratio (LNR) is the ratio of lymph node metastatic number confirmed by pathology after surgery and lymph node metastatic number excised. Scholars⁸⁻¹⁰ have considered LNR as important evidence for predicting colorectal cancer and gastric cancer patients' prognosis. In our country, however, only a few doctors treated LNR as indicator for the prognosis of colorectal cancer patients¹¹. Therefore, this work will investigate the relationship and value of LNR on colorectal cancer postoperative prognosis. Magnetic resonance (MR) and computed tomography (CT) imaging are two most common clinical examination methods¹². This study applied MR and CT scan to explore the correlation of LNR and colorectal cancer postoperative prognosis. We compared and analyzed the diagnostic value of

MR and CT in colorectal cancer by studying 318 cases of patients diagnosed by pathology and laboratory examination.

Patients and Methods

Patients' Selection

318 cases of colorectal cancer patients receiving radical surgery and treatment after MR and CT examination between January 2014 and July 2015 were enrolled in affiliated Hospital of Hubei University of Arts and Science. According to the literature^{13,14}, inclusion criteria were as follows: (1) colorectal cancer patients with defecate habit change, hematochezia, abdomen mass, and acute intestinal obstruction; (2) patients receiving surgical resection without chemotherapy, radiotherapy or other auxiliary treatment before MR and CT examination; (3) tolerate MR and CT examination; (4) no operative taboo; (5) informed consent. There were 114 females and 204 males with average age at 55.6 ± 14.1 (21-69) years old. All patients had complete clinical information and follow-up data. The mean duration of follow-up was 60 ± 1 month, and the follow-up rate was 94.99%. Follow-up data criteria: survival end point died of cancer, and disease-free survival end point was tumor metastasis or recurrence.

Bowel Preparation

Colorectal cancer patients in this study received intestinal cleaning. Low residue diet began at 3 days before MR or CT scan, and laxative was used at one day before MR or CT scan to prevent the impact of food in the lumen. 2 ml glucagon was intramuscular injected and 1600 ml air was anal injected before MR or CT scan¹⁵.

MR Scan

Siemens Avanto 3.0 T superconducting magnetic resonance instrument was used for MR scanning^{16,17}. All patients in this study were parallel scanned and enhanced scanned using phased array coils. Normal fast spin echo condition was as follows: echo time was 80 ms, and echo repeat time was 3600 ms. Scanning field visual field was 46 cm, matrix was 368×128 , layer spacing/thickness = 1 mm/6 mm. Echo train length was 15 cm. Respiratory triggering technique was applied. Fat suppression (S TIR): TR 3 000 ms, TE 100 ms, and echo train length were 24. MR scanning range was based on scanning position, vital signs and auxiliary examination results, starting

from the edge of diaphragm to the end of the edge of the pubic bone. Sagittal, transverse and coronal scan were used. During MR enhancement scan, 0.15 mmol/kg gadolinium-diethylenetetramine pentaacetic acid was intravenous injected. Arterial period scanning time delay was 60 s, while intravenous period scanning time delay was 120 s.

CT Scan

GE Light Speed Pro 64 row helical CT was used for phased array coils parallel scan and enhanced scan^{18,19}. Helical CT parameters were as follows: rotation time was 0.8 s, scanning voltage was 160 kV, scanning current was 200 mA, layer thickness was 1.75 mm, thread pitch was 1.8 mm, reconstruction interval was 1.5 mm. Patients kept supine during CT scan. Patient's position was first scanned to analyze colon aeration status. Continuous helical CT scan was adopted after one-time hold breath. CT scan was from diaphragmatic dome to pelvic floor. During CT enhanced scan, 500 mg/ml nonionic contrast agent iohexol was median cubital vein injected at 5 ml/s. Media sea alcohol as enhancement scanning s, from central elbow is using high-pressure injector for intravenous injection, the rate of 5 ml/s. Arterial period scanning time delay was 60 s, while intravenous period scanning time delay was 120 s.

MR and CT Image Analysis

MR and CT image results were analyzed by three radiology technicians through double-blind method²⁰. MR and CT tumor infiltration depth criteria was as follows: T1 or T2, fat gap out of the intestinal wall of the lesion site was clear, intestinal wall surface was smooth without nodule under enhanced scan; T3, fat gap out of the intestinal wall of the lesion site has spot image with strip-shaped low signal (MR) or high density (CT) image, intestinal wall surface was rough with enlarged node; T4, fat gap disappeared out of the intestinal wall of the lesion site, image boundaries were unclear under enhanced scan. Lymph node metastasis criteria were as follows: lymph node diameter was greater than 3 mm, lymph nodes abnormal signal, abnormal CT enhanced scan images or irregular edge was considered as lymph node metastasis, lymph node number greater than 3²¹.

Statistical Analysis

Fourfold table was applied to collect MR and CT diagnosis accuracy, positive predictive value, negative predictive value, sensitivity, and speci-

Table I. Colorectal cancer pathological lymph node metastasis.

Stage	T1 and T2	T3	T4	N0	N1	N2	Total
Cases	42	51	66	81	45	33	318
Percentage	13.2%	16.0%	20.8%	25.5%	14.2%	10.4%	100%

ficity²². All data were analyzed by SPSS 16.0 software (SPSS Inc., Chicago, IL, USA). χ^2 -test was adopted for MR and CT preoperative staging, postoperative pathology, and prognosis. $p < 0.05$ was considered as statistical significance.

Results

The Pathology Staging Results of Colon Cancer Patient's Lymph Node Metastasis

A total of 318 cases of colorectal cancer patients diagnosed by surgical pathology, including 6 cases of carcinoma, 18 cases of mucous carcinoma, and 294 cases of adenocarcinoma. The staging results were as follows: 42 patients in stage T1 and T2 (13.2%), 51 patients in stage T3 (16.0%), and 66 patients in stage T4 (20.8%); 81 cases with N0 (25.5%), 45 cases with N1 (14.2%), and 33 cases with N2 (10.4%) (Table I). The mean

duration of follow-up was 60 ± 1 month, and the follow-up rate was 94.99%. A total of 1284 lymph nodes were detected after radical resection, and 4.04 lymph nodes in each patient. There were a total of 444 metastatic lymph nodes, and 1.40 metastatic lymph nodes in each patient. The pathological results revealed that both LNR and metastatic lymph node number were correlated with colorectal cancer patient's prognosis. The 5-year overall survival rate was 57.77%.

MR and CT Lymph Node Metastasis Judgment

We analyzed the result of MR (Figure 1) and CT (Figure 2) evaluation on lymph node metastasis. The accuracy of MR and CT in judging colorectal cancer LNR was 92.5% and 75.5%, respectively (Table II and III). MR showed significantly higher accuracy than CT ($p < 0.05$) (Table IV). The coincidence rate of LNR result

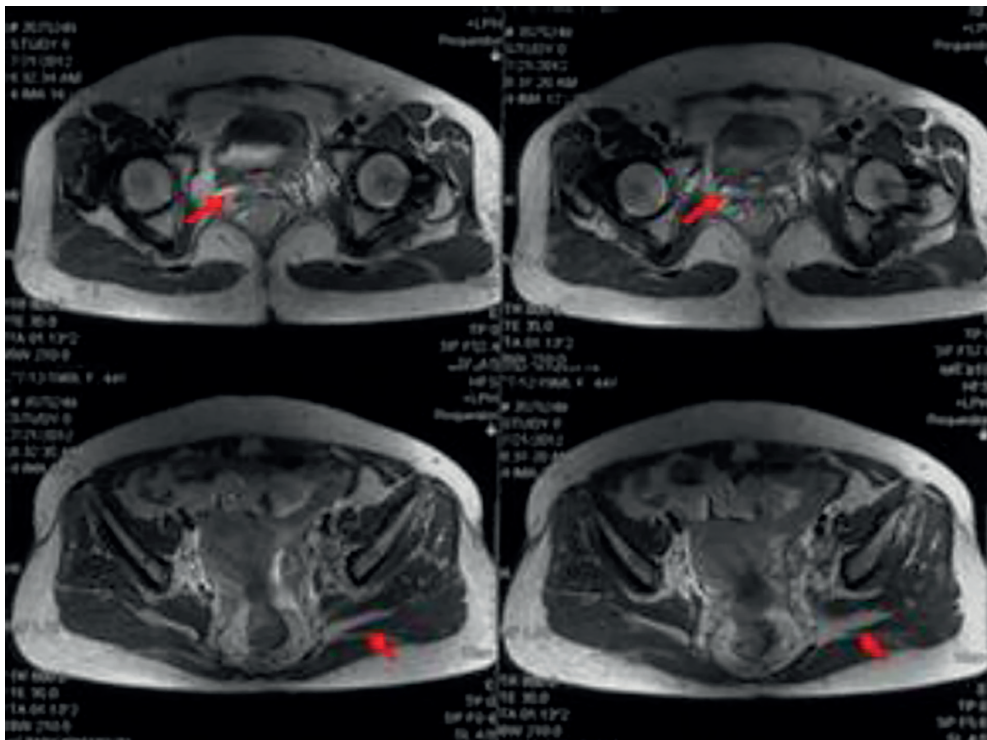


Figure 1. MR detection of colorectal cancer patient lymph node metastasis. Red arrow: metastatic lymph node.

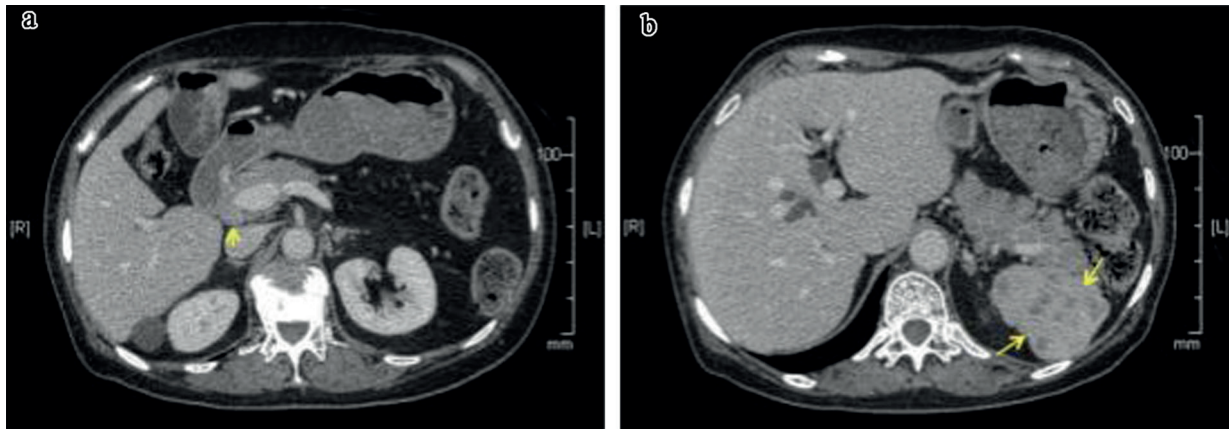


Figure 2. CT detection of colorectal cancer patient lymph node metastasis. Yellow arrow: metastatic lymph node.

Table II. Accuracy of MR scan on lymph node metastasis diagnosis.

Pathological staging	MR staging (cases)			Total	Accuracy (%)
	T1-2	T3	T4		
T1-2	78	6	0	84	92.6
T3	0	96	6	102	94.1
T4	0	12	120	132	90.9
Total	78	154	126	318	92.5

Table III. Accuracy of CT scan on lymph node metastasis diagnosis.

Pathological staging	MR staging (cases)			Total	Accuracy (%)
	T1-2	T3	T4		
T1-2	42	42	0	84	50
T3	6	90	6	102	88.2
T4	0	24	108	132	81.1
Total	48	156	114	318	75.5

derived from MR and CT with colorectal cancer histopathological results was 57.6% and 54.7%, respectively. MR and CT sensitivity were 42.6% and 25.0%, while their specificity was 74.1% and 41.3%, respectively. The positive predictive value and negative predictive value of MR and CT were

61.1% and 51.4%, 57.1% and 66.7%, respectively (Table V).

MR and CT Judgment on Prognosis

χ^2 -test showed that MR diagnosis result was consistent with histopathological result (Kappa

Table IV. MR and CT diagnosis accuracy on LNR.

Examination method	LNR	Accuracy (%)
MR	96/102	94.1
CT	90/102	88.2
χ^2	0.162	0.192
<i>P</i>	0.016	0.028

Table V. MR and CT detection of metastatic lymph node number comparison.

Examination method	Sensitivity (%)	Specificity (%)	Positive predictive value (%)	Negative predictive value (%)	Accuracy (%)
MR	42.6 (66/156)	74.1 (120/158)	61.1 (66/108)	57.1 (120/210)	58.5 (186/318)
CT	25 (38/158)	41.3 (66/162)	51.4 (108/210)	66.7 (72/108)	56.6 (180/318)
χ^2	28.23	23.87	19.38	28.47	18.97
<i>p</i>	0.0028	0.0068	0.018	0.0026	0.0031

= 0.039, 0.496, $p < 0.05$) (Table VI). The coincidence rate of MR and CT evaluation on 5-year disease-free survival and overall survival were 56.7% and 43.8%, respectively.

Discussion

There is an upward trend of colorectal cancer incidence. Colorectal cancer examination, treatment and prognosis are of great importance²³. This study investigated the relationship and diagnostic value of colorectal cancer lymph node metastasis and prognosis using MR and CT. This article has three major innovations: (1) MR and CT diagnosis showed high coincidence rate with colorectal cancer lymph node metastasis and prognosis. MR and CT diagnosis plays an important role and value for LNR and prognosis. (2) MR showed better effect on prognosis than CT and could be treated as the first choice to predict LNR and prognosis. (3) MR demonstrated good correlation with pathological results and could be used to predict LNR and prognosis. A previous study²⁴ also used MR for pathological staging in patients with colorectal cancer and obtained good results. This study investigated MR value on lymph node metastasis detection and prognosis. Similar to previous findings, MR judgment accuracy was high. Our results showed that the coincidence rate of 5-year overall survival rate evaluated by MR with patients prognosis was 56.7%. Previous reports²⁵ revealed that intestinal tract water or air injection can significantly improve the effect of CT angiography, resulting

in the diagnosis accuracy as high as 80%. The accuracy of CT angiography in our work was 74.6%, which was in accordance with previous results²⁵. It may be caused by the intestinal air injection method still needs to be improved. Therefore, the accuracy of this article needs to be further enhanced. Previous studies considered that nodal diameter greater than 1 mm could be judged for lymph node metastasis. However, it is often accompanied by inflammation or tumor necrosis phenomenon, which further led to lymph node enlargement²⁶. Therefore, we considered diameter larger than 3 mm means lymph node metastasis in this study. This is also the reason of low accuracy of MR and CT diagnosis. Also, MR and CT diagnosis based on lymph node density, size and enhance degree lead to higher false negative rate²⁷⁻³⁰.

This article also has three aspects of shortcomings and insufficiency: (1) the limited case number enrolled, larger size is needed in the future research; (2) the accuracy of MR and CT diagnosis of colorectal cancer lymph node metastasis and prognosis of accuracy is still to be further improved. Though MR and CT can effectively judge LNR and prognosis in patients with colorectal cancer, its judgment accuracy is only about 50%, which limits MR and CT application; (3) the false positive rate limits MR and CT diagnosis. This article adopted MR and CT diagnosis to analyze LNR and prognosis in patients with colorectal cancer. The results suggested that MR and CT diagnosis played an important role in LNR and postoperative prognosis. In comparison, MR diagnosis showed good correlation with

Table VI. MR and CT judgment on colorectal cancer patients' prognosis.

Examination method	Metastatic lymph node number	LNR	Coincidence rate (%)
MR	96	94.1	56.7
CT	90	88.2	43.8
χ^2	9.82	28.47	18.97
<i>p</i>	0.043	0.0086	0.017

colon cancer lymph node metastasis and prognosis, indicating that MR can better predict LNR and prognosis in patients with colorectal cancer.

Conclusions

MR and CT diagnosis showed important value for colorectal cancer LNR and prognosis. MR showed a better effect on prognosis than CT and could be treated as the first choice to predict LNR and prognosis. MR demonstrated a good correlation with pathological results and could be used to predict LNR and prognosis.

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Conflict of Interest

The Authors declare that they have no conflict of interests.

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