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The combined hepatocellular carcinoma–intrahepatic cholangiocarcinoma (cHCC–CCA) – a rare primary liver cancer

Abstract: Combined (mixed) hepatocellular carcinoma–intrahepatic cholangiocarcinoma (cHCC–CCA) is a rare primary liver cancer (about 1% of the primary hepatic tumors), and an independent entity sharing features of both hepatocellular carcinoma (HCC) and intrahepatic cholangiocarcinoma (iCCA). The combined tumor is an aggressive disease, with increasing incidence and a poor prognosis. The cells of origin of the iCCA are the cholangiocytes, the peribiliary glands, and the hepatocytes. The hepatic progenitor cells have the potential to differentiate into either hepatocytes or cholangiocytes depending on the damaged cell population in mixed tumors and represent the origin of cHCC-CCA. The cHCC-CCA has a steadily increasing incidence. The etiology of the combined tumor is that of both components. In the context of a better control of viral B and C infections, the increased risk of HCC and incident iCCA should probably be related to the worldwide increase in the prevalence of metabolic disorders (obesity, type II diabetes mellitus) and NAFLD. Primary prevention of obesity and diabetes treatment could be essential for reducing the incidence of liver cancer. The interest in this heterogeneous class of tumors, difficult to be diagnosed and with limited therapeutic options available, has been proved by the numerous publications in recent years, including including the recent Expert European Consensus Statement Cholangiocarcinoma 2020: the next horizon in mechanisms and management. Progress in molecular research, genetic biomarkers identification, diagnosis and staging are essential for the development of efficient treatment of these tumors. It is still unclear whether conventional treatments for HCCs, including surgical resection, liver transplantation, locoregional therapy, or systemic agents, can also be used as treatment for cHCC-CCA. For cHCC-CCA there are still more questions than answers.

Key words: cholangiocellular carcinoma, hepatocellular carcinoma, incidence, diagnosis, staging

Biography: I am Em. professor gastroenterology / internal medicine at University Medicine & Pharmacy, Cluj-Napoca, Romania. PhD thesis Cluj-Napoca 1997. Research topics: gallstones, liver cirrhosis, hepatocellular carcinoma, cholangiocarcinoma. Main contributions: identification of the first genetic polymorphism conferring gallstone risk (Hepatology 2007); member EASL Clinical Practice Guidelines on Prevention, Diagnosis and Treatment of Gallstones (J Hepatol 2016). 2021: „Lifetime Recognition Award" for excellent long-term services to sciences from European Society of Biomedical Research on Alcoholism (ESBRA). I am Founder of Journal of Gastrointestinal and Liver Diseases, Honorary Member of the Romanian Academy of Medical Sciences and Corresponding Member of the Romanian Academy.

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