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Association of chronic obstructive pulmonary disease and lung cancer on computer tomograms (literature review)

Relevance. *Chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD) and lung cancer (LC) are an acute problem of modern medicine. COPD often accompanies LC. Computed tomography (CT) is a "gold standard" for lung examination. This paper provides an analysis of CT results at LC accompanied with COPD.*

Materials and methods. *The literature included sources from PubMed database for the period of 2000-2018 by keywords "COPD, lung cancer, CT". The literature review covers 65 literature sources meeting the selection criteria.*

Results. *The degree of airflow obstruction in COPD refers both to emphysema and to the thickening of the airway wall on CT sections. Emphysema visually identified on CT scans during screening for lung cancer was found to be a risk factor for lung cancer regardless of the degree of obstruction. A computerized analysis of emphysema severity of and airway diameter can help in determining the LC risk level.*

Conclusion. *Many researchers believe COPD to be a predictor of LC. Therefore, patients diagnosed with COPD shall periodically undergo CT to ensure early detection of LC.*

Keywords: *chronic obstructive pulmonary disease, lung cancer, computed tomography (CT).*

Relevance. Chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD) and lung cancer (LC) are an acute problem of modern medicine. Thus, in 2013 mortality rates from respiratory diseases in the Republic of Kazakhstan (RK) amounted to 67,23‰ and increased by 10‰ (17.4%) compared to 2012 [1]. LC is leading in the structure of cancer morbidity in the RK. Computed tomography (CT) is a "gold standard" for lung examination [2]. COPD often accompanies LC. This paper provides an analysis of CT results with combined LC and COPD.

Materials and methods. The literature review was based on the data of scientific research for 2000-2018 available in PubMed by keywords "COPD, lung cancer, CT". A total of 257 literary sources were found; 197 of the sources were not related to the topic of the review; practical cases, critical letters and commentary letters, as well as scientific studies without results of CT were excluded.

This literature review includes 60 literature sources meeting the selection criteria meaning that the selected studies are original scientific articles containing an analysis of CT results associated with LC and COPD.

Results. COPD is a disease characterized by a restriction of air flow through the airways caused by a combination of abnormal inflammatory reactions in the small bronchi and lung parenchyma [3-5]. Over the past two decades, prevalence of COPD is higher in women than in men. At the same time, influence of the gender factor on COPD course has not yet been clearly explained [6]. COPD affects more than 200 million people worldwide and is expected to be the third leading cause of death in 2020 [7]. Cigarette smoking is the main cause of both COPD and LC [5]. The risk of LC development in patients with COPD is two to five times higher than in smokers without COPD [5, 8]. This observation suggests that chronic lung damage underlying smoking susceptibility is characteristic for both COPD and LC [5, 9]. Chronic in-

flammation in response to cigarette smoke is defined as a common etiologic factor, as it can lead to LC and to thickening of the airway wall and emphysema that often occur in COPD [10-12]. 85% of LC cases occur in smokers. In addition, smoking increases the risk of respiratory diseases including COPD and cardiovascular disease [13].

LC is the most common cause of cancer mortality [14]. LC is often diagnosed at a late stage already with distant metastases (in 40% of patients) and with a locally advanced process (30-35% of patients) [14]. LC is the main cause of death and hospitalization of patients with COPD. The degree of airway obstruction is a predictor of LC. There is a significant correlation between severity of emphysema and detectability of LC [15-17]. Several meta-analyses also revealed a strong correlation between the degree of airway obstruction and LC presence. The risk of LC is associated with other clinical implications of COPD, such as acute inflammation of the respiratory tract that also require careful study [17-19].

The degree of airflow obstruction in COPD refers both to emphysema and to the thickening of the airway wall on CT scans [10, 32-34]. Emphysema visually identified on CT scans during screening for LC was found to be a risk factor for LC regardless of the degree of airway patency [8, 10, 35]. Computed tomography (CT) is one of the main methods of instrumental diagnosis of pulmonary pathology [20, 21]. The quantification of emphysema with CT allows learning more about its prevalence and causes in patients with COPD [22-24]. In addition, CT allows to identify the risk factors associated with the emphysema development rate, evaluate the response to pharmacological therapy [22, 24, 25]. Clinical studies show that low-dose CT can be clinically acceptable and an appropriate diagnostic method for screening for LC [22, 26-30]. The introduction of multi-slice computed tomography allows obtaining very thin, submillimetre CT images [31].

A computerized analysis of emphysema severity and airway diameter can help determining the LC risk level among smokers who underwent CT in screening or diagnosis [10]. One of possible approaches to assess tumour aggressiveness is to determine the extensional time of doubling based on lung tumour measurements from CT images [31, 36, 37].

COPD is associated with a worsening of overall survival in non-small cell LC. Kinsey C. et al. suggested that emphysema in LC can lead to tumour growth and a lower overall survival [38].

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COPD is associated with a worse overall LC prognosis at an early stage [38, 39]. Emphysema of the lungs leads to tissue destruction, directly leading to airflow obstruction and COPD. These tissue changes can potentially affect growth or other characteristics of lung tumours in this area [38, 40]. Recently, it has been demonstrated that alveolar hypoxia promotes the lung tumour growth during experiment on mice [38, 41]. Emphysema is associated with a marked ventilation/perfusion mismatch and leads to worsening of alveolar hypoxia [38, 42].

Since emphysema is considered to be the main component of COPD and not a separate disease, the influence of emphysema on LC development has not attracted much attention of scientists. However, several studies have reported that the visual identification of emphysema stud-

ies and severity of the emphysema course on CT scans estimated by quantification method are associated with an increased risk of LC [35, 43, 44]. A recent study on a large population within the National Lung Screening in the USA showed a correlation between quantitative CT measurements of emphysema and the LC development risk [43, 45]. In addition to detection of potentially malignant lung formations, the detection of emphysema also increases because CT allows visualizing areas of lung lesions [43, 46]. Because of the common pathogenetic process of the two diseases and the heterogeneous distribution of emphysema in the lungs, the local, more pronounced pulmonary tissue lesions caused by emphysema were found to indicate the location of cancer in the lungs [43, 47, 48].

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Lim J. et al. suggested that LC localization might be associated with severity of emphysema clinical course in COPD, that is, central LC tends to occur in patients with minimal emphysema, whereas peripheral LC occurs in persons with pronounced emphysema. The researchers also evaluated the relationship between cancer localization (peripheral and central) and demographic and clinical characteristics including smoking and spirometry results to determine the factors for the central location of LC in patients with COPD and without it. Recently, new phenotypes of COPD have been recognized based on the severity of emphysema course. Thus, the lighter severity of emphysema and the reduced forced expiratory volume proved to be independent predictors of the central location of LC in COPD. Therefore, it might be necessary to consider additional screening tools along with high-resolution CT scans to detect central LC in patients with COPD with severe emphysema and predominant airway disease [49]. Gierada D. et al. established a relationship between LC and CT quantitative measurement of emphysema which showed that in the upper pulmonary fields it was most pronounced [45]. Bae K. et al hold the same opinion. According to their data, more pronounced emphysema was visualized in the upper parts of the lungs, as well as higher incidence of cancer was also observed in the upper parts of the lungs [43]. Kinsey C. et al. found that patients with a tumour arising on a background of more pronounced emphysema had a worse prognosis for overall survival than patients with a tumour arising on a background of less pronounced emphysema.

The National Lung Screening in the US showed that low-dose CT reduced LC mortality by 20% in comparison to chest radiography. The authors proposed to evaluate emphysema based on low-dose CT used in the screening for LC [50, 51]. Zurawska J.H. et al. suggested that spirometry and emphysema measurements based on CT data could be used to stratify the risk of LC for smokers, and that future screening for LC based on CT might involve a stratification risk to limit the cost of screening [52].

Based on lung screening studies in Pittsburgh, the authors identified radiation symptoms of emphysema on CT that had prognostic significance for LC, regardless of the severity of airway obstruction. Evaluation of COPD-LC screening has confirmed the emphysema presence as an independent variable for the risk of LC development [17, 35, 53, 54].

While cigarette smoking was a major risk factor for LC, other factors such as a family history of LC, preliminary diagnosis of a malignant tumour, occupational exposure of asbestos and a previous pulmonary disease such as COPD, might have also increased the risk of LC development [45, 55, 56]. CT of male smokers showed that carcinoma and COPD were often combine, with more often diagnosed squamous cell LC (51.7%). When COPD and LC were combined, the most frequent histological type of tumour in men was squamous cell cancer (60.7%), in women – adenocarcinoma (69.0%). The authors proposed mandatory periodic CT for early diagnosis of LC in patients with COPD [57]. Chubachi S. et al. offered two independent factors predicting LC in patients with COPD: the presence of emphysema or interstitial lung lesions or their combination on CT. According to their data, LC often developed on unchanged (places without emphysema) areas of the lung or in interstitial lung changes [58]. The study of biological pathways that put the grounds for the increased susceptibility to LC in patients with COPD would be important for screening, prevention, diagnosis and treatment of those two destructive pulmonary diseases [7].

Modern knowledge about the predictive value of quantitative CT measurements of emphysema and wall thickness in LC is limited. According to the authors, thickness of the airway wall is not an independent prognostic factor for LC onset, whereas emphysema is a reliable independent predictor of its occurrence [59].

Shin B. et al. have revealed that peripheral cancer was more often represented by adenocarcinoma. According to CT, adenocarcinoma more often developed around the periphery of pulmonary fields in the lungs without emphysema presence (58%), while squamous cell carcinoma often developed with underlying emphysema (61%) [60]. The researchers agree that LC is more often in patients with COPD than without this disease. Patients with COPD need screening for early detection of LC [61, 62].

Conclusion. Thus, many researchers believe COPD to be a predictor of LC. Therefore, scientists include patients with COPD in a risk group for LC development and recommend them to undergo periodically CT for LC identification at an early stage of its development.

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