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Commentary

Liquid Biopsies in Brain Cancer Diagnosis and Monitoring of Treatment Response

Ranok Soloemon*

Department of Neurology, University Medical Centre Mannheim, Mannheim, Germany

DESCRIPTION

Brain cancer, including malignant gliomas such as Glioblastoma Multiforme (GBM), poses significant challenges for diagnosis and treatment due to the complexity of the central nervous system and the limited accessibility of brain tissue. Traditional diagnostic methods often involve surgical biopsies, which are invasive, carry risks, and may not capture the full genetic and molecular landscape of the tumor. Liquid biopsies, on the other hand, offer a non-invasive and potentially more comprehensive approach to diagnosing brain cancer and monitoring treatment response.

Liquid biopsies, also known as blood-based biopsies or liquid biopsy tests, involve the analysis of various components in bodily fluids, primarily blood, to gather information about a patient's health, including the presence and genetic characteristics of tumors. Liquid biopsies can detect Circulating Tumor Cells (CTCs), circulating tumor DNA (ctDNA), and other tumor-derived molecules in the bloodstream. Liquid biopsies are relatively non-invasive, eliminating the need for surgical procedures to obtain tumor tissue. Liquid biopsies can be performed repeatedly, providing real-time information on tumor dynamics and response to treatment. Liquid biopsies can capture the heterogeneity of tumors, which may be missed in a single tissue biopsy.

Liquid biopsies in diagnosis

Early detection: Liquid biopsies have the potential to detect brain cancer at an earlier stage than traditional methods. Tumor-specific biomarkers present in the blood can be identified, allowing for timely intervention.

Tumor types: Liquid biopsies can help distinguish between different types of brain tumors. For instance, gliomas and brain metastases from other cancers may have distinct genetic profiles that are detectable through liquid biopsy.

Monitoring disease progression: Serial liquid biopsies can track changes in tumor genetic profiles over time, helping clinicians to understand disease progression and customized treatment strategies accordingly.

Guiding treatment selection: Liquid biopsies can identify specific genetic mutations or alterations that may inform treatment choices, such as targeted therapies or immunotherapies.

Applications in monitoring treatment response

Assessing minimal residual disease: Liquid biopsies can detect minimal residual disease, which refers to the presence of residual tumor cells or ctDNA in the blood after treatment. Monitoring can help identify patients at risk of relapse and guide treatment decisions.

Evaluating treatment efficacy: Changes in ctDNA levels or genetic mutations detected in liquid biopsies can provide early indications of treatment response or resistance. This allows for timely adjustments to treatment regimens.

Detecting resistance mechanisms: Liquid biopsies can identify genetic alterations associated with treatment resistance. This information can guide the selection of alternative therapies or clinical trial participation.

Personalizing treatment: Liquid biopsies facilitate the personalization of treatment plans by customizing therapies to the genetic profile of the tumor as it evolves during treatment.

CONCLUSION

Liquid biopsies represent a potential frontier in brain cancer diagnosis and monitoring. As technology continues to advance and our understanding of the genetic and molecular landscape of brain tumors deepens, liquid biopsies have the potential to revolutionize how we detect, diagnose, and manage brain cancer.

Correspondence to: Ranok Soloemon, Department of Neurology, University Medical Centre Mannheim, Mannheim, Germany, E-mail: ranoksolo@gmail.com

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While challenges remain, the non-invasive nature and real-time monitoring capabilities of liquid biopsies offer hope for improving patient outcomes and advancing personalized cancer care in the challenging realm of brain cancer.