



Molecular Biomarkers: Biological Indicators for Disease Characterization and Therapeutic Assessment

Elena Martinez *

Department of Molecular Medicine, University of Barcelona, Barcelona, Spain

DESCRIPTION

Molecular biomarkers are measurable biological characteristics that provide information about normal physiological processes, disease-related changes, treatment responses, or possible health risks. They may include Deoxyribonucleic Acid (DNA) alterations, Ribonucleic Acid (RNA) molecules, proteins, metabolites, epigenetic patterns, hormones, or other molecular substances. Because these markers reflect specific biological activities, they can provide information beyond conventional clinical observations. Molecular biomarkers are increasingly relevant to disease diagnosis, patient classification, treatment selection, monitoring and pharmaceutical development. The human body contains numerous molecular processes that change during disease development. Genetic mutations may alter cellular functions, abnormal proteins may accumulate, RNA expression may change and metabolic pathways may become disturbed. These molecular changes can sometimes be detected in blood, urine, saliva, tissue, cerebrospinal fluid, or other biological samples. Identifying measurable indicators associated with these changes can support clinical decision-making.

Genetic biomarkers are one important category of molecular biomarkers. DNA sequence variations can influence disease susceptibility, drug metabolism, immune responses and cellular behavior. Single-nucleotide variants, insertions, deletions, copy-number changes and other genomic alterations can be detected using molecular testing. In oncology, specific mutations can provide information about tumor classification and treatment options. Genetic markers can also indicate whether an individual may have an increased likelihood of developing particular conditions. RNA-based biomarkers provide information about gene activity. Messenger RNA levels can increase or decrease according to cellular conditions, while non-coding RNAs can participate in gene regulation and signaling. MicroRNAs are particularly relevant because they can influence the expression of multiple genes and may remain detectable in biological fluids. Changes in RNA profiles have been

investigated as potential indicators of cancer, cardiovascular disorders, neurological conditions and inflammatory diseases.

Proteins are another major source of molecular biomarkers. Proteins perform many biological functions, including enzymatic reactions, cellular communication, transport, immune defense and structural support. Disease processes can alter protein abundance, structure, localization, or modification. Protein biomarkers can therefore provide information about tissue damage, inflammation, tumor activity, or treatment effects. Blood-based protein measurements are especially useful because blood collection is comparatively accessible in clinical settings. Post-translational modifications can provide additional molecular information. Proteins may undergo phosphorylation, acetylation, glycosylation, ubiquitination and other chemical modifications after synthesis. These changes can influence protein activity and cellular signaling. A disease or medicine may alter the modification status of particular proteins without greatly changing their total abundance. Measuring modified proteins can therefore provide information about pathway activity.

Metabolites are small molecules generated during cellular metabolism. Glucose, amino acids, lipids, organic acids and other metabolites can change in response to disease, nutrition, medication, or physiological stress. Metabolic biomarkers can provide information about altered biochemical pathways. For example, changes in lipid-related metabolites may be associated with cardiovascular conditions, while abnormal glucose-related markers can provide information relevant to metabolic disorders. Cancer is one of the most important areas for molecular biomarker application. Tumors can contain genetic and molecular characteristics that differ from surrounding normal tissue. Biomarker analysis can assist in identifying molecular subtypes, estimating disease characteristics, selecting suitable therapies and monitoring treatment response. Markers involving Epidermal Growth Factor Receptor (EGFR), Human Epidermal Growth Factor Receptor 2 (HER2), B-Raf Proto-Oncogene, Serine/Threonine Kinase (BRAF), Anaplastic

Correspondence to: Elena Martinez, Department of Molecular Medicine, University of Barcelona, Barcelona, Spain, E-mail: elena.martinez@molbio.es

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Lymphoma Kinase (ALK) and other molecular targets have important clinical applications in selected cancers.

Molecular biomarkers can also assist in detecting treatment response. A biomarker may increase or decrease after a medicine produces a biological effect. Monitoring these changes can provide information about whether a treatment is influencing its intended pathway. In some situations, molecular changes may occur before measurable clinical improvement becomes apparent, allowing biomarkers to serve as early indicators of therapeutic activity. Biomarkers can also provide information about adverse drug reactions. Certain molecular patterns may indicate organ stress, immune activation, or cellular injury following medication exposure. Genetic markers can identify individuals who have an increased risk of specific reactions to selected medicines. Protein and metabolite measurements can provide additional information about changes occurring during treatment.

The discovery and evaluation of molecular biomarkers require reliable analytical methods. DNA sequencing, polymerase chain reaction, microarrays, mass spectrometry, chromatography, immunoassays and next-generation sequencing are among the technologies used for biomarker analysis. Each method provides different types of molecular information. The choice depends on the biomarker, sample type, required sensitivity and intended clinical application. Liquid biopsy has expanded interest in minimally invasive biomarker detection. Blood samples can contain circulating tumor DNA, cell-free DNA, RNA, extracellular vesicles and proteins released from tissues. Analysis of these components may provide molecular information without requiring an invasive tissue procedure. Liquid biopsy approaches are being explored for cancer detection, treatment monitoring and identification of molecular changes over time.