

## Artificial Intelligence in Prostate Cancer Diagnosis

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### Abstract

Prostate cancer (PCa) is a cancer with a broad spectrum of biological behavior and it is a heterogeneous nature. In order to prevent overdiagnosis and overtreatment, and to detect clinically significant PCa, standardized scoring and grading systems are used in imaging and pathological examinations. However, reproducibility and agreement between readers in these diagnostic stages, which require experience, are low. Promising results have been achieved by integrating artificial intelligence (AI)-based applications into the diagnosis and management of PCa. In radiological and pathological imaging, computer-aided diagnostic tools have increased clinical efficiency and achieved diagnostic accuracy comparable to that of experienced healthcare professionals. This review provides an overview of AI applications used in radiological imaging, prostate biopsy, and histopathological examination in the diagnosis of PCa.

### INTRODUCTION

Prostate cancer (PCa), the second most frequently diagnosed cancer in men, and it is definitively diagnosed through histopathological evaluation (1). Prostate sampling is performed via targeted and/or systematic biopsy under transrectal ultrasonography (TRUS) guidance to confirm cancer suspicion, which arises from elevated prostate-specific antigen (PSA) levels or suspicious digital rectal examination findings. With the use of standardized Prostate Imaging Reporting and Data System (PI-RADS) scoring through multiparametric magnetic resonance imaging (MpMRI) of the prostate prior to biopsy, MRI-targeted biopsies (MRI-TB) have been applied, gaining importance in diagnosing clinically significant PCa (csPCa) (2). The Gleason score is determined based on the histological features observed in

tissue samples stained with hematoxylin and eosin (H&E), and grading is performed using the International Society of Urological Pathology (ISUP) grade grouping (3).

PCa has the widest biological behavior spectrum among urological cancers. It is mostly multifocal within the prostate gland, exhibiting a heterogeneous nature and a wide range of prognoses (4). The goal is to enhance diagnostic accuracy and csPCa detection rates while preventing unnecessary treatments and overdiagnosis. However, despite standardized pathological evaluation and supportive radiological imaging, there are some limitations. Interpreting MpMRI requires experience, and inter-radiologist agreement can vary (5). Due to the subjective nature of Gleason scoring and tumor heterogeneity, reproducibility between pathologists is

poor (6). The use of artificial intelligence (AI)-based tools is increasing to improve clinical efficiency and diagnostic performance by reducing variability in interpretations among radiologists and pathologists (7).

Machine learning (ML) is an AI system that can automatically learn in an unsupervised manner or through supervised data labeled by humans by creating mathematical algorithms. Deep learning (DL) is a subset of ML that uses artificial neural networks to mimic the human brain and can independently derive nonlinear relationships and features (8). The ability of AI in diagnostic evaluation has brought its use in image analysis into the practice of pathology and radiology.

In this study, we present a summary of the use of AI in radiological and pathological evaluation for the diagnosis of PCa.

#### **MpMRI Interpretation and Artificial Intelligence**

Prostate MpMRI is recommended by guidelines for the local staging of PCa. Additionally, by combining MRI images and suspicious lesions with ultrasonography (US), fusion biopsy can be performed, contributing to increased diagnostic efficiency (9). AI applications in MpMRI have improved diagnostic performance by reducing the workload of radiologists in prostate segmentation, lesion detection, and characterization (10).

Despite the increased use of MpMRI and improvements in radiologist interpretation accuracy, particularly after standardization with PI-RADS, there are still some limitations. Meta-analyses have found the pooled specificity of MpMRI for PCa detection to be 0.73. It has been reported that 5-30% of cancers go undetected and readers have a 25% error margin (11,12). Another limitation is the low reproducibility of reporting among radiologists. Inter-reader agreement is around 50%, while intra-reader agreement is 60-74% (13). The use of AI in radiology and computer-aided diagnosis (CAD) systems is expected to increase inter-reader agreement and improve PCa detection rates in MpMRI.

Radiomics is a library that enables the high-throughput analysis of quantitative radiological features in medical imaging and forms the foundation for AI use in PCa management (14). In MpMRI, ML preprocesses prostate images and performs segmentation. Lesions are detected and classified in the recorded prostate image. The PI-RADS classification generated through ML analysis, predominantly

based on T2-weighted and diffusion-weighted imaging (DWI) in MpMRI, is verified by an experienced radiologist. This can reduce the need for experienced radiologists and alleviate their workload. Additionally, AI can improve reproducibility between radiologists and be used as an independent reader. However, experienced radiologists are also needed to input verified data for AI training and to validate the results generated by AI. Another challenge that complicates AI learning is data heterogeneity arising from variations in MpMRI acquisition (15).

Clinical studies and meta-analyses have shown that AI can perform on par with radiologists in detecting PCa in MpMRI, particularly with CAD systems. The benefits of using AI in MpMRI extend beyond lesion detection. AI can provide information about tumor characterization and aggressiveness, significantly reducing the time radiologists spend interpreting images. In studies on prostate segmentation, a similarity coefficient of 0.88-0.93 was achieved between manual segmentation and AI-based segmentations (16,17). In a study on AI-based lesion detection in MpMRI, a sensitivity of 78% was found for index lesions with PI-RADS  $\geq 3$ . For less experienced radiologists, detection sensitivity for transitional zone lesions was 66.9%, while this rate increased to 83.8% with CAD. Moreover, with CAD assistance, the MRI reading time for experienced radiologists decreased from 3.5 minutes to 2.7 minutes, and for moderately experienced radiologists, it decreased from 6.3 minutes to 4.4 minutes (18). In a study by Song et al. with 195 patients, AI demonstrated an 87% sensitivity in lesion detection (19). In another study comparing histopathological diagnosis, AI detected the index lesion with 3.4% lower sensitivity and clinically significant lesions with 1.5% lower sensitivity than experienced radiologists (20). In a study with 364 patients, Le et al. found that AI showed 100% sensitivity and 76.9% specificity in distinguishing clinically significant and insignificant cancer (21). In a study by Giannini et al., prostate segmentation and lesion detection were performed in MRI images of 131 patients, divided into training and validation groups, using CAD, and verified with pathology. The CAD system did not classify any aggressive tumors as benign, and the area under the curve (AUC) was found to be 0.96 in the training arm and 0.81 in the validation arm (22). On the other hand, Mehrlivand et al., in a multicenter study involving nine radiologists with varying levels of experience, found that AI did not significantly improve the performance of less experienced radiologists and had no noticeable effect on inter-reader disagreement. However, a significantly higher sensitivity for transitional

zone lesions was detected for AI (23). In a recently conducted large multicenter study, AI demonstrated 94.3% sensitivity in predicting csPCa (24). These studies are promising for personalized disease management in PCa patients using automatic CAD systems.

### **Prostate Biopsy and Artificial Intelligence**

With the incorporation of MpMRI into routine practice for PCa management, fusion MRI-TB is recommended to increase diagnostic accuracy when suspicious lesions are present (25). AI applications used in prostate segmentation and lesion detection in MpMRI can be automatically combined with TRUS images for biopsy, increasing the precision of targeted biopsies and making the process more feasible for radiologists and urologists (26).

For fusion MRI-TB, accurately combining the TRUS image with target lesions and localizing the biopsy needles is of critical importance. In a retrospective study by Mehrtash et al., the needle trajectory was labeled in 71 patients who underwent MRI-TB, and this data was used for AI learning. Validation was conducted on 21 patients who had not been seen by the AI. They achieved accuracy with an acceptable error of 0.98 degree in the needle trajectory (27). Wang et al. in their prospective randomized controlled study compared targeted 6-core biopsy with AI-assisted prostate ultrasound, systematic biopsy under TRUS guidance, and cognitive fusion MRI combined biopsy. In this multicenter study, the detection rate of PCa and csPCA was found to be higher in biopsies performed with AI-assisted prostate ultrasound guidance (28). Anas et al. achieved similar accuracy to offline segmentations by performing real-time prostate segmentation during MRI-TB using AI (29). Real-time prostate segmentation enhances the feasibility of the MRI-TB procedure. AI-assisted biopsy has also been used in nerve-sparing robot-assisted radical prostatectomy for locally advanced PCa. After the prostate is removed, the presence of tumors in the neurovascular bundle is evaluated using a three-dimensional automatic augmented reality system, and selective excisional biopsy is performed. The presence and location of lesions in the neurovascular bundle were correctly identified with 87.5% accuracy. This AI-based application may allow for nerve-sparing surgery in locally advanced disease without compromising oncological outcomes (30).

### **Histopathological Evaluation and Artificial Intelligence**

The gold standard method for diagnosing PCa is histopathological examination, which relies on scoring

biopsy material according to the Gleason grading system. This method categorizes tumors into risk groups and provides information about prognosis. However, there is low inter-reader agreement in histopathological scoring systems for PCa diagnosis, similar to what is observed in MpMRI. Studies indicate that the rate of discordance among pathologists ranges from 30% to 53% (31). Instead of microscopic examination, digital histological images offer the possibility of evaluation through CAD tools in various settings, aiming to reduce workforce demands and increase efficiency (32).

The use of AI in digital pathology is primarily focused on the Gleason grading system. Studies involving AI have evaluated the agreement with pathologists and the sensitivity of the system. Arvanti et al. reported a sensitivity of 70% when classifying tissues as benign and Gleason grades 3-5 in the evaluation of tissue microarrays by AI. Moreover, the agreement between the AI model and pathologist interpretations was also found to be high (kappa, 0.71-0.75) (33). In a study where slide images of prostatectomy material were graded for Gleason scores using a developed DL method on 311 slides, a sensitivity of 70% was identified (34). Subsequently, Karimi et al. achieved 92% accuracy in distinguishing benign tissue from malignant tissue and 90% accuracy in differentiating low and high-risk Gleason grades using their designed DL method. In an evaluation using 5,759 biopsy samples from 1,243 patients, the AI model demonstrated superior performance with a kappa score of 0.854, compared to 15 pathologists (35).

Shao et al. evaluated an AI model that analyzes digital pathology images of 502 patients who underwent radical prostatectomy and did not receive additional treatment, all of whom had long follow-up periods. They compared this AI model to risk classification nomograms for predicting biochemical recurrence. The AI model reclassified 3.9% of patients who were classified as low-risk in conventional nomograms as high-risk, while 21.3% of patients classified as high-risk were reclassified as low-risk. The authors noted that having this information post-radical prostatectomy would lead to different treatment approaches and patient counseling (36). In a recent study, 1,279 slides obtained from prostate biopsies were digitized and validated for use in AI learning. The developed AI model was integrated into routine clinical practice for three years, serving as a second-read system for biopsy material in approximately 9,200 patients. The AI model demonstrated 96.7% specificity and 96.6% sensitivity in detecting PCa, while showing 82.1% specificity and 81.1%

sensitivity in distinguishing low-risk PCa from intermediate-high risk PCa (37). AI-based models used in Gleason grading, which is one of the most important prognostic factors in PCa, assist pathologists by improving diagnostic performance.

## CONCLUSION

AI, that is increasingly being used and gaining importance in the diagnosis and management of PCa, shows promise in reducing the workload and increasing the efficiency of urologists, pathologists, and radiologists. Studies have shown that AI achieves similar success to radiologists in lesion detection during MpMRI interpretation, enhances the applicability of MRI-TB, and improves concordance among pathologists during histopathological examination. It may also help mitigate potential shortcomings of less experienced clinicians. With large-sample, standardized studies conducted through collaboration between healthcare professionals and technology developers, the effectiveness of AI in improved patient outcomes and personalized patient management in PCa should be clearly demonstrated.

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