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**Histological and clinical evaluation of marginal donor kidneys before transplantation: Which is best?**

Salvadori M *et al.* Evaluation of donor kidney

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**Abstract**

Organ shortage represents one of the major limitations of kidney transplantation. To increase the donor pool and to answer the ever increasing kidney request, physicians are transplanting marginal kidneys, which are kidneys from older donors, hypertensive or diabetic donors, and non-heart beating donors. These kidneys are known to have frequently a worse outcome in the recipients. To date, a major issue of such kidneys is determining whether to use or to discard them before transplantation. The use of such kidneys creates other relevant question as whether to use them as single or dual transplant and to allocate them fairly according transplant programs. The pre-transplant histological evaluation, the clinical evaluation of the donor, or both the criteria joined has been used, and at different times, each criterion has prevailed over the others. The aim of this review is to examine the advantages and the drawbacks of any criterion and how they have changed with time. To date, any criterion has several limitations, and several authors have argued for the development of new guidelines in the field of the kidney evaluation for transplantation. Several authors argue that the use of omic technologies should improve the organ evaluation, and studies are ongoing to evaluate these technologies either in the donor urine or in the biopsies taken before transplantation.

**Key words:** Kidney evaluation; Pre-transplant biopsies; Kidney donor evaluation; Kidney risk profile index; Omic technologies; Deceased donor score; Donor risk score

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**Core tip:** With the extension of the donor pool to high risk donors, the kidney pre-transplant evaluation became mandatory. Different criteria have been used, each of them with advantages and limitations. The use of pre-transplant kidney biopsies in those kidneys coming from donors with the highest profile index seems to give better results. These could be improved by applying omic technologies either to donor urine or to pre-transplant biopsies. However, the application of omic technologies is time consuming and not applicable everywhere. Several studies on these technologies are ongoing, but their results are yet not known.

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**INTRODUCTION**

Currently, organ shortage represents one of the major limitations of kidney transplantation. To increase the donor pool, many transplant programs accept kidneys from so-called extended criteria donors (ECDs)[1,2]. Kidneys from the ECD pool are known to have worse outcomes in recipients, with a higher rate of delayed graft function (DGF) and primary non function (PNF) and reduced allograft function and survival[3]. The main challenge is to evaluate such kidneys before transplantation either for a better and fair allocation or for discarding the kidney in the case of a very poor evaluation of the offered kidney.

Several factors related to the donors are known to influence the post-transplant outcomes. Figure 1 identifies which donor, procurement, and graft characteristics principally influence the outcomes. They may be divided into clinical and histological factors, factors related to the donor and the offered kidney, and procurement process factors.

Historically, the evaluation of kidneys from ECDs has been made histologically by the so-called zero-time biopsy[4], by clinical evaluation of the donor by different kidney allocation scores, or by a combination of histological and clinical parameters. Additionally, it should be highlighted that the need of a clear evaluation of the “so called” marginal donors became a must with the increased use of such kidneys. With time, experience documented that several kidneys from ECD pool performed well, while other kidneys labeled as standard criteria donors (SCD) did not perform well. Hence, safety is also evaluated for SCD, and the recent kidney donor risk index (KDRI) automatically offers the evaluation for any kidney.

The aim of this review is to describe the aforementioned evaluation criteria of ECD kidneys and to discuss how they have changed with time.

**SELECTION CRITERIA OF THE ARTICLES INCLUDED IN THIS REVIEW AND THEIR DRAWBACKS**

The criteria to evaluate the kidneys have been histological, clinical, and mixed histological-clinical. We have performed a literature search for all the papers concerning these points. The main studies concerning the most important scoring systems are shown in Table 1. With the exception of the two single center studies as Maryland Aggregate Pathology Index (MAPI) and the Irish nomogram, all the studies considered included a large number of patients with the limitation to be retrospective in the attempt to validate the original findings. Clearly, in this review are also included articles documenting the drawbacks of the different scoring systems, and these articles may include a limited number of patients. Similarly, the studies evaluating the omics on the renal biopsies or on donor urine have a limited number of patients.

**HISTOLOGICAL EVALUATION OF DONOR KIDNEYS**

By 1999, Karpinski *et al*[5], considering that kidneys from high risk donors had worse outcomes in the recipient after transplantation, tried to establish which donor or kidney variables were most relevant to these poor outcomes. For high donor risk, they considered donation after cardiac death donors, donors over 55 years of age, donors with a history of hypertension or diabetes, and donors with abnormal kidney anatomy or abnormal renal function[6]. The study found that a low calculated creatinine clearance and donor kidney pathology were the main predictors of worse outcomes

In particular, the donor renal pathology was scored 0-3 in each of four distinct aspects: Glomerulosclerosis, interstitial fibrosis, tubular atrophy, and vascular disease (Table 2). Previous studies have documented the relevance of pre-implantation histological findings on recipient outcomes[7-9]. None of these studies had been concordant, and the work of Karpinski *et al*[5] may be considered a pioneering study for documenting the relevance of the pathology score over the transplant outcomes.

Since Karpinski *et al*[5], several studies have documented the relevance of the pathology score of donor kidneys over the outcomes, while other studies did not find a similar usefulness of the pathology score. One of the most important studies in favor of the pathology score was Remuzzi *et al*[10]. According to this study, the pathology score allows transplant kidneys with a score up to 3 to be used as single kidneys, while kidneys with a score from 4 to 6 are better allocated as dual transplants, and kidneys with a score of 7 or higher should be discarded. Additionally, the study documents the importance of the pre-transplant renal biopsy for donors over 60 years when comparing renal outcomes with and without biopsy (Figure 2).

In a different study, Mancilla *et al*[11] suggested the utility of zero-time biopsy in the case of living donor kidneys, particularly for donors with borderline renal function or with a history of familial renal disorders[12,13]. In a study from Kayler *et al*[14], a correlation of histological findings on pre-implantation biopsy with kidney graft survival was also found but was restricted to vascular lesions, while glomerulosclerosis and low-grade interstitial fibrosis did not have statistical significance.

Based on 371 pre-transplant biopsies and correlating the findings with post-transplant outcomes, Munivenkatappa *et al*[15] developed the MAPI. In the study, glomerulosclerosis, glomerular size, and periglomerular fibrosis in addition to vascular pathology and arteriolar hyalinosis were considered in developing the MAPI score (Table 3). The authors found that the 5-year actuarial graft survival rate was related to the MAPI scoring (Figure 3) and that the MAPI score at the multivariate analysis correlated with the risk of graft failure better than any other clinical parameter (Table 4). This study suddenly received several comments, which brought up several unanswered questions about the relevance of pre-transplant biopsies in predicting post-transplant outcomes. Many of these questions were raised by Nickeleit[16].

One point that has not been clarified is whether wedge specimens or needle biopsies should be used. This issue is well described in another paper[17] that considers wedge biopsies to be safer and superior to core biopsies in finding significant findings.

Another point is whether frozen or paraffinized sections should be used, even if the original MAPI score found paraffinized sections to be more reliable.

Additionally, it should be better defined when zero-time biopsies should be taken: before or after reperfusion. Biopsy time is relevant in detecting the complement activation that is predictive of early antibody mediated rejection[18].

An important point, not well considered by the MAPI score, is how the lesions should be scored and whether the Banff criterion is appropriate[19]. This point is relevant for comparing zero-time biopsies with subsequent post-transplant biopsies. Nickeleit[16]’s conclusions were that much remains to be determined about zero-time biopsies and that consensus guidelines remain to be defined.

Recommendations on these points have been given by two German workshops and described by Pisarski *et al*[20] in 2016. The German recommendations advocate a detailed assessment of the findings and do not agree with the recommendations of the Interpretation Biopsy Banff Working Group[21], whose approach is adopted for a general pathologist, without specific training in the field.

The issue of an expert pathologist was addressed in 2012 in a study of the pre-implantation biopsies in the Organ Procurement Organization (OPOS) that found a lack of concordance among OPOS pathologists[22]. The lack of a correlation between the findings of on-call pathologists and the lack of association between their findings and the transplant outcomes are highlighted by two papers[23,24] that advocate for specific training in renal pathology to optimize the histological evaluation of donor kidneys. It could also be argued that a renal pathologist “per se” could not be expert enough in evaluating such biopsies. Perhaps a specific training would be the best solution.

By 2011, Mueller *et al*[25], reviewing several studies on histopathology-based variables at zero-time biopsies, highlighted the limitations due to sampling errors, confounding clinical variables, and inter-observer variability[26,27] and advocated for a validated approach for the analysis of pathology findings. In particular, they advocated for the use of omic technologies, such as proteomics, transcriptomics, and metabolomics, which could have the potential to improve the significance of the histological findings. Table 5 highlights the principal studies that were conducted until 2011[28,39].

A study from Krol *et al*[40] documented that the apoptosis of tubular epithelial cells in pre-implantation biopsies is related to DGF. These findings were confirmed by another study[41] that found a relationship between high *BAX*/*BCL2* expression in pre-implantation biopsies and DGF, confirming that apoptosis-related gene expression levels are predictors of DGF.

A recent study[42] confirmed that zero-time biopsies in ECDs showed a significant increase in the transcripts of *MCP-1*, *RANTES*, *TGF beta*, and *IL 10,* documenting a higher gene expression of inflammatory cytokines in ECDs that could predict the post-transplant outcome.

In recent years, several studies, often retrospective, and several reviews and meta-analyses did not confirm the utility of zero-time biopsy in allocating or discarding ECD kidneys. Wang *et al*[43] reviewed 47 studies published between 1994 and 2014, where each study included pre-transplant biopsies from at least 50 donors and compared the histological findings with post-transplant outcomes. Overall, 15 scoring systems were proposed by the studies, but none were able to correlate with post-transplant outcomes.

Naesens[44] reviewed the problems and the utility of zero-time biopsy and highlighted that the major problems were the wedge *versus* core needle biopsy[45,46]; frozen *versus* paraffin-embedded tissue[47,48]; pathologist’s experience[23,24]; different composite histological scoring such as the Pirani score[49], Chronic Allograft Damage Index[50], and Donor Score[23]; and the lack of utilizing hard clinical end-points in evaluating graft and recipient outcomes. The author concluded that zero-time biopsies are not useful for assigning or discarding kidneys or improving dual kidney transplantation programs. The author recognizes that the molecular phenotype in pre-transplant biopsies could be useful in donor selection and in peri-transplant management even if the time required could make such a procedure difficult[51-54].

Two recent Italian studies on the utility of pre-implantation biopsy in allocating ECD kidneys[4,55] concluded that histological evaluation was not superior to donor clinical evaluation in allocating ECD kidneys either as a single kidney or as a dual kidney transplant. The authors concluded that, according to their experience, the histological score poorly evaluates the donor kidney quality. Accordingly, the use of histological criteria to assign as single or dual kidneys does not seem to offer advantages over the evaluation made on clinical basis.

A Banff Pre-implantation Biopsy Working Group has been established to develop guidelines for the interpretation of pre-implantation renal biopsies[56]. The last working group meeting stated that histological parameters are poorly correlated with post-transplant outcomes and that there remain significant limitations in understanding the role of pre-implantation biopsies.

Recently, Carpenter *et al*[57] from Columbia University examined their experience and compared procurement biopsies with reperfusion paraffin-embedded biopsies and with post-transplant biopsies. All the findings were then correlated with allograft failures and patient deaths. No agreement was found between frozen procurement biopsies and paraffin-embedded biopsies, and frozen procurement biopsies were poorly correlated with post-transplant biopsies and the hard end-point considered.

**COMBINED CLINICAL AND HISTOLOGICAL EVALUATION OF DONOR KIDNEYS**

A different approach to evaluating ECD kidneys has been to combine histological findings with clinical donor-related parameters. The latter were identified in a study by Port *et al*[58]. In 2001, Verran *et al*[59] found that the combination of abnormal biopsy findings with donor age and donor cardiovascular disease and hypertension was associated with poor outcomes.

In an Italian study[60], donor kidneys were associated with good results according to donor renal function [estimated glomerular filtration rate (eGFR) under or over 50 mL/min] and the previously mentioned Karpinski score.

The largest study that evaluated the predictive value of clinical and histological findings was conducted by Anglicheau *et al*[61]. The authors, evaluating 313 kidney transplants from donors aged > 50 years, developed the so-called Anglicheau score. The best predictive parameters were a history of hypertension in the donor, serum creatinine levels under or over 1.5 mg/dL, and glomerulosclerosis less than or over 10%. These parameters in the multivariate analysis significantly correlated with renal function at 1 year post-transplantation. A different study[62] recognized the utility of zero-time biopsy, but, as none of the histological variables and scores provided a good prediction of post-transplant outcomes, the histological findings needed to be integrated with all the known donor-related clinical parameters. Finally, a very recent Spanish study[63] highlighted the utility of evaluating the pre-transplant donor biopsies in the donor with the highest kidney donor profile index (KDPI) that is based on several deceased donor variables.

**CLINICAL EVALUATION OF DONOR KIDNEYS**

In an attempt to improve the evaluation of donor kidneys, principally in the United States where the donor kidney evaluation is strictly connected with its discard or allocation to different recipients according to national programs, several clinical donor quality scoring systems have been performed.

The first one was the characterization and definition of ECDs. According to the report of the Kidney Working Group[1], kidneys belonging to the ECD were kidneys with a relative risk of graft failure of 1.7 with respect to standard kidneys. These kidneys are characterized by a donor age older than 59 years with two of the following characteristics: Cerebrovascular accident as cause of death, history of hypertension, or creatinine over 1.5 mg/dL[2].

Nyberg *et al*[64] evaluated 241 consecutive cadaveric renal transplants and gave a score based on recognized clinical factors responsible for DGF. These factors were age, cause of death, history of hypertension, diabetes mellitus, creatinine clearance, and presence in the donor of renal artery stenosis. A scoring system was developed from these seven donor variables, allowing stratification of cadaver kidneys into four classes (grades A, B, C, D). Univariate and multivariate analyses were performed, and a significant decline in early renal function was observed with an increase in the score. Additionally, the multivariate analysis had a better prognostic value with respect to each single variable considered in the univariate analysis.

Later, Nyberg *et al*[65], in an attempt to validate his scoring system, applied the analysis to a wider population, including 34324 transplant patients from the United Network for Organ Sharing (UNOS) registry in the period between 1994 and 1999. This study allowed us to evaluate the feasibility of the score on a larger follow-up and to recognize five clinical variables as predictive of a poorer outcome [age, cause of death, history of hypertension, creatinine clearance, and human leukocyte antigen (HLA) mismatch]. This score was called the Deceased Donor Score or Nyberg score and was able to predict renal function at 12 mo and graft survival at 6 years (Figure 4). Another study by the same author[66] confirmed these data for kidneys receiving machine reperfusion.

To improve further clinical factors able to evaluate kidney status and to predict outcomes after transplantation, Schold *et al*[67] studied different clinical variables that were applied to transplants included in the National Scientific Transplant Registry from 1996 to 2002. The variables were age, race, history of hypertension, diabetes mellitus, cause of death, cold ischemia time, HLA mismatch, immunological status, and cytomegalovirus status. This was called the Donor Risk Score and allowed for the calculation of the multivariate estimates for graft loss by donor grade (Figure 5). A further study[68] compared the different clinical risk scores and documented that the Donor Risk Score was better associated with subsequent allograft function.

**ECD-KDRI-KDPI**

As already mentioned, by 2002, in an attempt to improve the utilization of marginal deceased donor kidneys, the concept of ECD *versus* SCD was introduced[1,2]. With time this dichotomy (SCD/ECD) demonstrated several drawbacks. Indeed, the experience documented that several kidneys labeled as ECD performed well, while other kidneys labeled as SCD did not perform well[69]. To improve these limitations, other different scoring systems have been attempted. The donor score of Nyberg and the donor risk score of Schold have been described. Additionally, Irish *et al*[70] applied a nomogram aimed at predicting the risk of DGF based on 16 donor and recipient risk factors. Moore *et al*[68] documented that Schold’s donor risk score is the scoring system that best predicts graft outcomes, but the need still remains for a simple and validated system that applies to the entire donor population viewed as a continuum and not in a dichotomous fashion.

In 2009, Rao *et al*[71] analyzed 69440 deceased donor adult transplants registered in the Scientific Registry of Transplant Recipients (SRTR) and proposed a new continuous KDRI for deceased donor kidneys combining donor and transplant variables. Rao’s KDRI included 14 donor and transplant factors, each associated with shorter graft survival. Table 6 shows the mentioned risk factors.

The KDRI is a continuous spectrum for any kind of donor (ECD and SCD) and allows for dividing the donor population into quintiles based on their KDRI. By the end of 2014, the KDRI was implemented by the OPTN[72]. Indeed, as some transplant factors are not known at the time of transplant, the donor-only KDRI based on 10 donor factors has been implemented.

All the mentioned donor scoring systems are shown in Table 1[73]. Woodside *et al*[74] examined the SRTR data from 2002 to 2010, and applying the KDRI, they found that kidneys belonging to the same KDRI quintile had similar outcomes independent of their belonging to ECD or SCD. However, ECD kidneys had a higher discard rate.

The use of the KDRI was further validated by several studies. Jun *et al*[75] examined the use of the KDRI in donors with acute kidney injury (AKI) and found a good correlation between KDRI quintiles and graft outcomes.

A different study[76] documented that the KDRI was a good prognostic tool for graft outcomes in deceased donor kidney transplantation with a short cold ischemia time. In this study, the KDRI correlated with renal function at 1 year, and a high KDRI was associated with a high risk of graft failure.

Recently, a Spanish study validated the usefulness of the KDRI in a European population[77]. The study evaluated 144 renal transplants. All kidneys transplanted were evaluated by the KDRI and biopsied. The aims of the study were to verify the concordance between the KDRI and the histological findings and to validate the prognostic value of the KDRI for transplant outcomes. The study concluded that there was a poor concordance between the KDRI and histological score and that the KDRI had a good prognostic value. Strictly connected with the KDRI is the KDPI. The KDPI represents the relative risk of graft failure in the case of a particular deceased donor compared to a reference donor. The KDPI was introduced in 2014 in the United States[78] and is derived by ranking the KDRI on a scale of 0-100% with reference to a donor cohort in the OPTN. It is useful and is represented by a number that helps in deciding the allocation of a specific organ[79]. The KDRI and KDPI are strictly related.

These scoring systems have advantages over the ECD system because they represent a continuum, are based on 10 donor factors, and represent a measure of donor quality.

Limitations of the KDRI and KDPI are represented by the fact that they do not include all of the donors’ factors that could impact the graft outcome. Additionally, the KDPI is a measure of the donor and is not specific for each kidney taken individually.

The KDPI is useful for introducing the concept of so-called longevity matching. The concept consists of allocating kidneys with a higher KDPI to patients on dialysis with a lower life expectancy. A retrospective study[80] documented those patients older than 50 years or with a long waiting list time who were transplanted with kidneys with a high KDPI had a better survival than similar patients remaining on dialysis. This is particularly evident for patients older than 70 years[81]. Notwithstanding, a German study[82], reporting the experience of transplanting kidneys with a high KDPI, observed that poor kidney quality, even when matching donors and recipients, is the main factor responsible for poor outcomes. Several studies have evaluated the utility of the KDPI even outside of the United States.

In a retrospective study, Lehner *et al*[83] evaluated the utility of the KDPI in almost 1000 European kidney transplants. The study found rather good outcomes in the case of donors with a very high KDPI. A Spanish study[84] evaluated the KDPI score on 389 transplants. The study documented that only the KDPI correlated with the risk of graft failure. This study also documented the utility of the KDPI measure in a cohort of European patients.

To improve further the KDPI, a retrospective study[85] was conducted in the United States. The study evaluated the KDPI in adult transplant recipients in the OPTN/UNOS database from 2000 to 2015. This study, while validating the usefulness of the KDPI, found that terminal serum creatinine of the donor (one of the components of the KDPI) is not a useful variable.

Another European study[86] analyzed 1305 kidney transplants. The study retrospectively applied the KDPI in 889 deceased donors and the living donor kidney profile index (LKDPI) in 416 living donors using the LKDPI realized by an American study for living donation[87]. The European study was able to validate both the KDPI and LDKPI.

A major concern is what to do with donor kidneys with very a high KDPI (> 80%). In the United States, the discard rate of these kidneys is approximately 50%. However, the allocation of kidneys with a KDPI higher than 80% in patients older than 60 years results in lower patient mortality compared to patients who remain on the waiting list[88]. Indeed, several kidneys with a KDPI higher than 80% are viable. A recent study[89] evaluated the 1-year eGFR and graft failure for kidneys transplanted with a KDPI higher than 80%. The discard of such kidneys had been decided with the help of a pre-Tx kidney biopsy, renal resistance, and kidney injury biomarker levels. The 1-year eGFR was low but satisfying. The authors request the use of new biological tools for a proper evaluation of these kidneys.

An Italian multicenter study tried to reduce the discard rate of kidneys with a KDPI higher than 80% using pre-transplant kidney biopsy for these kidneys[90]. The discard rate was reduced from 50% to 15%-37% according to the KDPI. The 1-year eGFR was lower for these marginal kidneys, but the graft survival was similar to that of standard kidneys. The study highlighted the utility of pre-transplant biopsy for kidneys with a very high KDPI.

Finally, a recently raised relevant question is whether the KDPI may be universally applied in allocating marginal kidneys or whether it is UNOS specific. A recent study from Ruggenenti *et al*[91] documented the allocation and good graft survival of 37 renal transplants with donors with a KDPI between 96% and 100% after a pre-transplant biopsy. These kidneys should have been discarded according to the UNOS criteria[92]. Similar findings have come from a previous study by Ekser *et al*[93]. The 5-year graft survival was 91%, and the mean KDPI was 97%. More than 80% of these kidneys should have been discarded according to the UNOS[94].

The question of UNOS specificity of the KDPI was examined in a recent study by Ruggenenti *et al*[95]. According to the authors, the difference in ethnicity may only partially explain the different results and the different discard rates of UNOS and several European studies[96]. The authors highlight the usefulness of pre-transplant biopsy for kidneys of donors with a very high KDPI.

In conclusion, the KDRI/KDPI represents an easy scoring system that could facilitate the decision to discard organs or allocate them in the best way. According to several studies, the KDPI may also be applicable to European patients, even though this point remains debatable.

Based on the KDPI, UNOS is implementing new allocation systems such as “longevity matching”. Each candidate willing to participate in the “longevity matching” will receive an “estimated post-transplant survival score” and will receive a graft according to the matching KDPI/estimated post-transplant survival score. The allocation of kidneys with the highest KDPI is debated. Often, these kidneys are discarded[97], but the use of pre-transplant biopsy may allow allocation of many of these kidneys, thus reducing the discard rate[98].

**MACHINE PERFUSION AND PERFUSATE BIOMARKERS**

Hypothermic machine perfusion is increasingly used in deceased donor kidney transplantation, but the question still remains, how efficient are MP in assessing the quality of an organ?

One study evaluating the reasons for discarding 12536 ECD kidneys found that 15% of perfused kidneys were discarded partly based on high renovascular resistance (RR)[99]. In a prospective study by Jochmans *et al*[100], RR values of 302 MP kidneys were evaluated. The study conclusions were that RR as a standalone quality assessment tool cannot be used to predict the graft outcomes.

More recently, Parikh *et al*[101] in a prospective observational cohort study examined the association between pump parameters and graft outcomes. They found an association between 1 h perfusate flow and DGF, but with a border line value.

In conclusion, according to the currently available data, there is a weak correlation between perfusion parameters and graft outcomes, and additional studies are needed.

**FUTURE PERSPECTIVES AND EMERGING TECHNOLOGIES**

All the scoring systems, either histological or clinical, need to be improved with the help of new tools. Indeed, several cited studies advocate for the newest approach in the evaluation of donor kidneys. Nickeleit[16] stated that new consensus guidelines remain to be defined on zero-time biopsies. Mueller *et al*[25], highlighting the confounding variables, advocate for the use of omic technologies in the evaluation of kidney biopsies. This point is also highlighted by the Banff Pre-Implantation Biopsy Working Group[56]. The usefulness of biomarkers in the evaluation of donor kidneys has also been highlighted by another recent study[90].

There are a number of emerging technologies to examine an organ at the molecular level, ranging from proteomics to metabolomics to transcription studies.

The most important study on proteomics is a study by Reese *et al*[102] who examined the association between four different biomarkers and post-transplant renal function. All the urine injury biomarkers strongly associated with donor AKI but were of limited value in predicting DGF or early graft function. By using transcription analysis, Scian *et al*[103] validated a set of three genes (*CCL5, CXCR4*, and *ITGB2*) that was up regulated in kidneys with a low eGFR post-transplantation. O’Connell *et al*[104] by transcription analysis found a set of 13 genes (Table 7) associated with allograft loss at 2 or 3 years after transplantation. By metabolomics studies, Guy *et al*[105] found in the perfusate of the hypothermic machine significantly lower levels of gluconate, glucose, inosine, and leucine in kidneys with DGF. Finally, a novel technique able to recondition the kidney and to restore normal function prior to transplantation is the *ex vivo* normothermic perfusion. Phase I studies in ECD documented its safety and feasibility in clinical practice[106].

Some studies are ongoing, but their results are currently unknown. One important study aims to evaluate the relevance of molecular biomarkers of aging in the blood of donors. This study (Senesce Test) has been completed, but no results are available yet (NCT02335333)[107]. Another National Institutes of Health study coordinated by Yale University is testing biomarkers characteristic of renal injury in the urine of the donor and in the perfusion media (NCT01848249)[108]. The PREDICTION study aims to evaluate the improvement in viability of marginal kidneys treated by pulsatile perfusion[109].

**CONCLUSION**

The increase in the demand of kidneys for transplantation may only be satisfied with the increase in the use of marginal donors as kidneys from aged donors or with the use of donation after cardiac death donors. Such kidneys need to be carefully evaluated either to be discarded or for a fair allocation. The histological evaluation has several drawbacks, depending on the time of the biopsy (pre or post reperfusion), the type of biopsy (wedge *vs* core biopsy), and the pathologist involved in the evaluation (pathologist on-call or trained pathologist in this field). Additionally, the difficulty of obtaining adequate histological analysis from preimplantation biopsies and the risk/benefit considerations to prolong cold ischemia time waiting for chronic histological abnormalities that often show poor correlation with clinical outcomes represents the most relevant drawback. All these drawbacks led to giving more importance to the clinical evaluation of the donor. The KDRI/KDPI is an easily applicable scoring system, but this system also has its drawbacks, especially in the evaluation of donors with the highest KDPI.

In the United States, the use of KDPI has led to a very high discard rate of the marginal donor kidneys, while other studies have documented that several of these kidneys might be usefully transplanted. Overall, it is not easy to establish how many centers have adopted the different scoring system as many of them are retrospective studies. The elaboration of the Port scoring of standard criteria donors *versus* expanded criteria donors has been done comparing retrospectively 24756 SCD *versus* 4312 ECD from almost all the UNOS centers.

The MAPI has been done in a single center considering 371 transplants. The Nyberg deceased donor score was made in three steps. In a first step, 241 transplants were enrolled in two centers. Then in an attempt to give more strength to the scoring system, this was evaluated retrospectively on 34324 UNOS kidney transplants and in a third phase on 48952 UNOS kidney transplants. The Donor risk score of Schold was evaluated retrospectively on 45850 data from SRTR. The DGF nomogram of Irish was evaluated in a single center in the United Kingdom on 217 prospective transplant patients. Finally, the KDRI of Rao was retrospectively evaluated on 69440 patients from SRTR. Subsequently, the scoring was evaluated prospectively in different countries.

A hope for the future may come from the use of biomarkers. However, to date, the use of urine biomarkers offers discordant results and does not provide sufficient power to be used in the kidney evaluation. According to recent studies, the use of preimplantation biopsy has major utility in the evaluation of kidneys with a very high KDPI. A very recent study from Moeckli *et al*[110] helps in clarifying what is new in the current and emerging techniques of kidney evaluation. In particular, the study concerns the use of omics and states that the most promising is transcriptome profile, also according to the previously cited studies. While waiting for the advent of omics it seems that the best strategy in evaluating kidneys for transplantation is the clinical one. In the case of a very high KDRI, pre-transplant biopsy may be useful in allocating or discarding kidneys

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**Table 1 Descriptive table of selected clinical scoring system**

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Score** | **Authors** | **Variables included in risk score** | **Score grades** | **Outcome** |
| Expanded criteria donor | Port *et al*[58], 2002 | Donor age | SCD | Relative risk of graft failure compared to SCD RR > 1.7 |
| Cerebrovascular accident as cause of death | ECD |
| Serum creatinine > 1.5 mg/dL |
| History of hypertension |
| Deceased donor score | Nyberg *et al*[65], 2003 | Age |  | 5-year graft survival |
| History of hypertension | A (0-9 points) | Grade A 82% |
| Creatinine clearance | B (10-19 points) | Grade B 79% |
| HLA mismatch | C (20-29 points) | Grade C 72% |
| Cause of death | D (30-39 points) | Grade D 65% |
| Donor risk score (DRS) | Schold *et al*[67], 2005 | Donor risk factors |  | 5-year graft survival |
| Race | I | Grade I 76.7% |
| Age | II | Grade II 73.6% |
| History of hypertension | III | Grade III 66.3% |
| History of diabetes | IV | Grade IV54.8% |
| Cause of death | V | Grade V 47.6% |
| History of hypertension |  |  |
| History of diabetes |  |  |
| Cause of death |  |  |
| HLA-Dr mismatch |  |  |
| CMV mismatch |  |  |
| Cold ischemia time |  |  |
| DGF nomogram | Irish *et al*[70], 2003 | Donor risk factors | Continuous point score | Delayed graft function |
| Age |  |  |
| Serum creatinine |  |  |
| History of hypertension |  |  |
| Cause of death |  |  |
| Donor after cardiac death |  |  |
| Recipient risk factors |  |  |
| Peak PRA |  |  |
| Race |  |  |
| Gender |  |  |
| History of diabetes mellitus |  |  |
| Previous transplant |  |  |
| Pretransplant dialysis |  |  |
| Pretransplant transfusions |  |  |
| Combined transplantation |  |  |
| HLA mismatch |  |  |
| Cold ischemia time |  |  |
| KDRI | Rao *et al*[71], 2009 | Donor risk factors | KDRI quintile | 5-year graft survival |
| Age | 0.45-0.79 |  82% |
| Race | 0.80-0.96 | 79% |
| Height | 0.97-1.15 | NA |
| Weight | 1.16-1.45 | NA |
| History of hypertension | > 1.45 | 63% |
| History of diabetes |  |  |
| Cause of death |  |  |
| Serum creatinine |  |  |
| Hepatitis C |  |  |
| Donation after cardiac death |  |  |
| HLA-B mismatch |  |  |
| HLA-DR mismatch |  |  |
| Cold ischemia time |  |  |
| Double or *en bloc* transplant |  |  |
| Donor-only KDRI  | OPTN[72], 2014 | Donor risk factors |  | 5-year graft survival |
| Age | < 0.6 | 80% |
| Race | 0.61-0.79 | 78% |
| Height | 0.80-0.99 | 74% |
| Weight | 1.00-1.19 | 66% |
| History of hypertension | 1.20-1.59 | 59% |
| History of diabetes | 1.60-1.99 | 52% |
| Cause of death | > 1.99 | 44% |
| Serum creatinine |  |  |
| Hepatitis C |  |  |
| Donation after cardiac death |  |  |

ECD: Expanded criteria donor; RR: Renovascular resistance; KDRI: Kidney donor risk index; OPTN: The Organ Procurement and Transplantation Network; SCD: Standard criteria donor; CMV: Cytomegalovirus.

**Table 2 Histological score according Karpinski**

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Histological score** |  |
| Glomerular score | 0 = no globally sclerosed glomeruli |
| 1 = < 20% global glomerulosclerosis |
| 2 = 20%-50% global glomerulosclerosis |
| 3 = > 50% global glomerulosclerosis |
| Tubular score |  0 = absent |
|  1 = < 20% of tubules affected |
|  2 = 20%-50% of tubules affected |
|  3 = > 50% of tubules affected |
| Interstitial score |  0 = absent |
|  1 = < 20% of cortical parenchyma replaced by fibrous connective tissue |
| 2 = 20%-50% of cortical parenchyma replaced by fibrous connective tissue |
|  3 = > 50% of cortical parenchyma replaced by fibrous connective tissue |
| Vascular score |  0 = absent |
| 1 = increased wall thickness but to a degree that is less than the diameter of the lumen |
|  2 = wall thickness that is equal or slightly greater than the diameter of the lumen |
|  3 = wall thickness that far exceeds the diameter of the lumen, with extreme narrowing |

**Table 3 Maryland Aggregate Pathology Index scoring system for pre-transplant kidney biopsies**

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | **HR (95%CI)** | ***P* value** | **MAPI points** |
| **Absent** | **Present** |
| Arteriolar hyalinosis | 3.93 (2.02-7.64) | < 0.0001 | 0 | 4 |
| PGF (any) | 4.09 (1.65-10.14) | 0.002 | 0 | 3 |
| Scar (any) | 2.58 (1.24-5.38) | 0.01 | 0 | 3 |
| GS > 15% | 1.87 (1.17-2.99) | 0.009 | 0 | 2 |
| WLR interlobular arteries > 0.5 | 2.05 (1.21-3.47) | 0.008 | 0 | 2 |

MAPI: Maryland Aggregate Pathology Index; WLR: Wall to lumen ratio; CI: Confidence interval.

**Table 4 Cox Multivariate analysis showing association of Maryland Aggregate Pathology Index score and clinical parameters to risk of graft failure**

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
|  | **HR (95%CI)** | ***P* value** |
| MAPI | 1.21 (1.05-1.40) | 0.008 |
| Donor age | 1.03 (1.00-1.07) | 0.096 |
| Cold ischemia in h | 3.66 (0.77-17.40) | 0.102 |
| Donor history of hypertension | 1.62 (0.67-3.97) | 0.287 |
| Donor terminal creatinine > 1.5 mg/dL | 1.34 (0.43-4.18) | 0.611 |
| CVA as cause of donor death | 0.98 (0.35-2.73) | 0.973 |

CVA: Cerebrovascular accident; MAPI: Maryland Aggregate Pathology Index.

**Table 5 Studies on molecular markers measured in 0-h biopsies (up to 2011)**

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Reference** | **Pats** | **f/u** | **Findings/timing of biopsy-technology** |
| Hoffmann *et al*[28], 2002 | 24 | 1 h | IRI injury ass w increased adhesion, chemotaxis, apoptosis, monocyte recruitment/activation transcripts. Post-reperfusion/RT-PCR |
| Hauser *et al*[29], 2004 | 36 | 1 | Increased Communication, apoptosis, inflammation |
| Kainz*et al*[30], 2004 | 10 | 1 | DD kidneys distinctly different transcripts in the TI but not in the G compartment compared to LD. End of CIT/microarrays |
| Avihingsanon *et al*[31], 2005 | 75 | 6 | 15 selected genes associated with outcomes, included DGF, REJ, and 6 mo function. Post-reperfusion/RT-PCR |
| Kainz*et al*[32], 2007 | 31 | 12 | Increased immunity, signal transduction, oxidative stress response associated with lower 1-year function |
| Park *et al*[33], 2007 | 15 | 12 | Increased inflammation and immune response at 1-year in uncomplicated grafts |
| Mas *et al*[34], 2008 | 33 | 3 | Increased immunity, inflammation and apoptosis genes associated with DGF. End of CIT/microarrays |
| Mueller *et al*[35], 2008 | 87 | 12 | Increased acute phase, complement, chemokines and reduced metabolism, transporters in DD *vs* LD, transcriptome identifies risk for DGF better than clinical ± histological markers. Post-reperfusion/ microarrays |
| Perco *et al*[36], 2009 | 82 | 12 | Increased immunity/defense, communication, apoptosis in damaged kidneys, CADI score + clinic explained 14%, 3 biomarkers 28% of 1-year creatinine variability. End of CIT/ microarrays |
| Naesens *et al*[37], 2009 | 28 | 36 | Complement genes differ between LD and DD and are associated with early and late function. End of CIT and post-transplant/ microarrays |
| Bodonyi-Kovacs *et al*[38], 2010 | 75 | 48 | Pre-selected genes associated with 2-year graft function. Post-reperfusion/ RT-PCR |
| Cravedi *et al*[39], 2010 | 49 | 12 | LD *vs* DD differ by inflammation, donor age and ITGB2 prognostic for 1-year function. Post-reperfusion/RT-PCR |

f/u: Follow up in mo; IRI: Ischemia-reperfusion injury; DD: Deceased donor; LD: Living donor; IGF: Immediate graft function; DGF: Delayed graft function; REJ: Rejection; CIT: Cold ischemia time; TI: Tubulointerstitial; G: Glomerular.

**Table 6 Donor and transplant factors and corresponding hazard ratios for graft failure**

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | **Hazard ratio** | **95%CI** | ***P* value** |
| **Donor parameter** |
| Age | 1.013 | 1.011-1.015 | < 0.0001 |
| Afro American race | 1.20 | 1.13-1.27 | < 0.0001 |
| Serum creatinine | 1.25 | 1.17-1.23 | < 0.0001 |
| Hypertensive | 1.13 | 1.08-1.19 | < 0.0001 |
| Diabetic | 1.14 | 1.04-1.24 | 0.0040 |
| Cause of death | 1.09 | 1.04-1.14 | 0.0002 |
| Height | 0.96 | 0.94-0.97 | < 0.0001 |
| Weight | 0.98 | 0.97-0.99 | 0.0003 |
| Donation after cardiac death | 1.14 | 1.02-1.28 | 0.0246 |
| HCV positive | 1.27 | 1.13-1.43 | < 0.0001 |
| **Transplant parameter** |
| HLA-DR mismatch | 0.88 | 0.84-0.92 | < 0.0001 |
| Cold ischemia time | 1.005 | 1.003-1.008 | < 0.0001 |
| En bloc transplant | 0.70 | 0.57-0.84 | 0.0002 |
| Double kidney transplant | 0.86 | 0.75-1.00 | 0.0494 |

HLA: Human leukocyte antigen; HCV: Hepatitis C virus; RT-PCR: Reverse transcription polymerase chain reaction.

**Table 7 Genes included in the study**

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **ID** | **Symbol** | **Gene description** | **CADI-12 correlation** | ***P* value** |
| 3954887 | *CHCHD 10* | Coiled-coil-helix-coiled-coil-helix domain containing 10 | 0.404 | 2.85 × 10-5 |
| 4019160 | *KLHL 13* | Kelch-like family member 13 (*Drosophila*) | 0.369 | 1.49 × 10-4 |
| 3326826 | *FJX1* | Four jointed box 1 (*Drosophila*) | 0.367 | 1.60 × 10-4 |
| 3120343 | *MET* | Met proto-oncogene (hepatocyte growth factor receptor) | 0.352 | 3.01 × 10-4 |
| 2864449 | *SERUNC5* | Seine incorporator 5 | 0.318 | 0.0012 |
| 2567583 | *RNF149* | Ring finger protein 149 | 0.280 | 0.0046 |
| 2879105 | *SPRY4* | Sprout homolog 4 (*Drosophila*) | 0.270 | 0.0062 |
| 3776504 | *TG1F1* | TGFB-induced factor homeobox 1 | 0.244 | 0.0140 |
| 2898441 | *KAAG1* | Kidney associated antigen 1 | 0.240 | 0.0154 |
| 3361971 | *ST5* | Suppression of tumorigenity 5 | 0.232 | 0.0197 |
| 2459352  | *WNT9A* | Wingless-type MMTV integration site family member 9A | 0.212 | 0.0332 |
| 3021696 | *ASB15* | Ankrin repeat and SOCS box-containing 15 | -0.263 | 0.0079 |
| 3193339 | *RXRA* | Retinoid X receptor alpha | -0.300 | 0.0023 |

CADI-12: Chronic allograft damage index at 12 mo.

**Procurement process**

1 Donation after cardiac death

2 Cold ischemia time

3 Warm ischemia time

4 Machine perfusion

**Donor characteristics**

1 Age

2 Renal disease

3 Cause of death

4 Renal function

5 Cadaveric or living donation

**Outcome/Grafts survival**

**Graft characteristics**

1 Degree of sclerosis (due to hypertension, diabetes mellitus, aging)

2 Size of kidneys (single/double kidney transplantation)

3 Other diseases

**Figure 1 Main donor, procurement, and graft related factors influencing post-transplant outcomes.**



**Figure 2 Thirty six-mo graft survival for donors over 60 years according pre-transplant biopsy.**



**Figure 3 Five-year graft survival for the study population according low, intermediate and high MAPI score ranges.** MAPI: Maryland Aggregate Pathology Index.



**Figure 4 Grade of deceased donor kidney score significantly influenced graft survival at 6 years after transplantation.**



**Figure 5 Multivariate estimates for graft loss by donor grade (hazard ratio expressed as mean +/- confidence interval.**