

# World Journal of *Gastroenterology*

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## EDITORIAL

- 994 Role of exosomal circular RNAs as microRNA sponges and potential targeting for suppressing hepatocellular carcinoma growth and progression  
*Papadopoulos N, Trifylli EM*
- 999 Role of albumin-bilirubin score in non-malignant liver disease  
*Xu SX, Yang F, Ge N, Guo JT, Sun SY*
- 1005 Early prediction and prevention of infected pancreatic necrosis  
*Lv C, Zhang ZX, Ke L*
- 1011 Impact of microplastics and nanoplastics on liver health: Current understanding and future research directions  
*Chiang CC, Yeh H, Shiu RF, Chin WC, Yen TH*

## GUIDELINES

- 1018 National guidelines for the diagnosis and treatment of hilar cholangiocarcinoma  
*Dar FS, Abbas Z, Ahmed I, Atique M, Aujla UI, Azeemuddin M, Aziz Z, Bhatti ABH, Bangash TA, Butt AS, Butt OT, Dogar AW, Farooqi JI, Hanif F, Haider J, Haider S, Hassan SM, Jabbar AA, Khan AN, Khan MS, Khan MY, Latif A, Luck NH, Malik AK, Rashid K, Rashid S, Salih M, Saeed A, Salamat A, Tayyab GUN, Yusuf A, Zia HH, Naveed A*

## REVIEW

- 1043 Diseases of bile duct in children  
*Eiamkulbutr S, Tubjareon C, Sanpavat A, Phewplung T, Srisan N, Sintusek P*
- 1073 From liver to hormones: The endocrine consequences of cirrhosis  
*Quiroz-Aldave JE, Gamarra-Osorio ER, Durand-Vásquez MDC, Rafael-Robles LDP, Gonzáles-Yovera JG, Quispe-Flores MA, Concepción-Urteaga LA, Román-González A, Paz-Ibarra J, Concepción-Zavaleta MJ*

## MINIREVIEWS

- 1096 Prediction, prevention and management of gastroesophageal reflux after per-oral endoscopic myotomy: An update  
*Nabi Z, Inavolu P, Duvvuru NR*

## ORIGINAL ARTICLE

## Clinical Trials Study

- 1108 Clinical manifestation, lifestyle, and treatment patterns of chronic erosive gastritis: A multicenter real-world study in China  
*Yang YY, Li KM, Xu GF, Wang CD, Xiong H, Wang XZ, Wang CH, Zhang BY, Jiang HX, Sun J, Xu Y, Zhang LJ, Zheng HX, Xing XB, Wang LJ, Zuo XL, Ding SG, Lin R, Chen CX, Wang XW, Li JN*

- 1121** Detachable string magnetically controlled capsule endoscopy for the noninvasive diagnosis of esophageal diseases: A prospective, blind clinical study

*Yang YL, Qin HW, Chen ZY, Fan HN, Yu Y, Da W, Zhu JS, Zhang J*

- 1132** Melanocortin 3,5 receptors immunohistochemical expression in colonic mucosa of inflammatory bowel disease patients: A matter of disease activity?

*Gravina AG, Panarese I, Trotta MC, D'Amico M, Pellegrino R, Ferraraccio F, Galdiero M, Alfano R, Grieco P, Federico A*

### Observational Study

- 1143** Double-nylon purse-string suture in closing postoperative wounds following endoscopic resection of large ( $\geq 3$  cm) gastric submucosal tumors

*Wang SS, Ji MY, Huang X, Li YX, Yu SJ, Zhao Y, Shen L*

- 1154** Recent trends in the epidemiology and clinical outcomes of inflammatory bowel disease in South Korea, 2010-2018

*Kim S, Lee HJ, Lee SW, Park S, Koh SJ, Im JP, Kim BG, Han KD, Kim JS*

### Prospective Study

- 1164** Staging liver fibrosis with various diffusion-weighted magnetic resonance imaging models

*Jiang YL, Li J, Zhang PF, Fan FX, Zou J, Yang P, Wang PF, Wang SY, Zhang J*

- 1177** sTREM-1 as promising prognostic biomarker for acute-on-chronic liver failure and mortality in patients with acute decompensation of cirrhosis

*Yu SM, Li H, Deng GH, Wang XB, Zheng X, Chen JJ, Meng ZJ, Zheng YB, Gao YH, Qian ZP, Liu F, Lu XB, Shi Y, Shang J, Chen RC, Huang Y*

### Basic Study

- 1189** Uridine diphosphate glucuronosyltransferase 1A1 prevents the progression of liver injury

*Jiang JL, Zhou YY, Zhong WW, Luo LY, Liu SY, Xie XY, Mu MY, Jiang ZG, Xue Y, Zhang J, He YH*

### SYSTEMATIC REVIEWS

- 1213** Treatment of *Helicobacter pylori* with potassium competitive acid blockers: A systematic review and meta-analysis

*Kanu JE, Soldera J*

### SCIENTOMETRICS

- 1224** Telomerase-related advances in hepatocellular carcinoma: A bibliometric and visual analysis

*Li HY, Zheng LL, Hu N, Wang ZH, Tao CC, Wang YR, Liu Y, Aizimuaji Z, Wang HW, Zheng RQ, Xiao T, Rong WQ*

### CASE REPORT

- 1237** PRaG 3.0 therapy for human epidermal growth factor receptor 2-positive metastatic pancreatic ductal adenocarcinoma: A case report

*Kong YH, Xu ML, Zhang JJ, Chen GQ, Hong ZH, Zhang H, Dai XX, Ma YF, Zhao XR, Zhang CY, Chen RZ, Xing PF, Zhang LY*

**LETTER TO THE EDITOR**

- 1250** Genetic risk stratification of inflammatory bowel disease-associated venous thromboembolism: An Asian perspective  
*Huang JG*
- 1253** Risk of hepatitis B virus reactivation in oncological patients treated with tyrosine kinase inhibitors: A case report and literature analysis  
*Colapietro F, Pugliese N, Voza A, Aghemo A, De Nicola S*
- 1257** Exploring non-curative endoscopic submucosal dissection: Current treatment optimization and future indication expansion  
*Zhu YN, Yuan XL, Liu W, Zhang YH, Mou Y, Hu B, Ye LS*

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## Exploring non-curative endoscopic submucosal dissection: Current treatment optimization and future indication expansion

Yi-Nong Zhu, Xiang-Lei Yuan, Wei Liu, Yu-Hang Zhang, Yi Mou, Bing Hu, Lian-Song Ye

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### Abstract

The increasing popularity of endoscopic submucosal dissection (ESD) as a treatment for early gastric cancer has highlighted the importance of quality assessment in achieving curative resections. This article emphasizes the significance of evaluating ESD quality, not only for curative cases but also for non-curative ones. Postoperative assessment relies on the endoscopic curability (eCura) classification, but management strategies for eCuraC-1 tumour with a positive horizontal margin are unclear. Current research primarily focuses on comparing additional surgical procedures in high-risk patients, while studies specifically targeting eCuraC-1 patients are limited. Exploring management strategies and follow-up outcomes for such cases could provide valuable insights. Furthermore, the application of molecular imaging using near-infrared fluorescent tracers holds promise for precise tumour diagnosis and navigation, potentially impacting the management of early-stage gastric cancer patients. Advancing research in these areas is essential for improving the overall efficacy of endoscopic techniques and refining treatment indications.

**Key Words:** Early gastric cancer; Endoscopic submucosal dissection; Quality control; Non-curative endoscopic submucosal dissection; Near-infrared fluorescent tracer

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**Core Tip:** The quality control of endoscopic submucosal dissection (ESD) has gained increasing attention, and concurrently, the management of patients with non-curative ESD outcomes is equally crucial. Existing guidelines offer unclear recommendations for the management of patients classified as endoscopic curability C-1 after the procedure, warranting the need for further clinical research to refine treatment strategies for this patient population.

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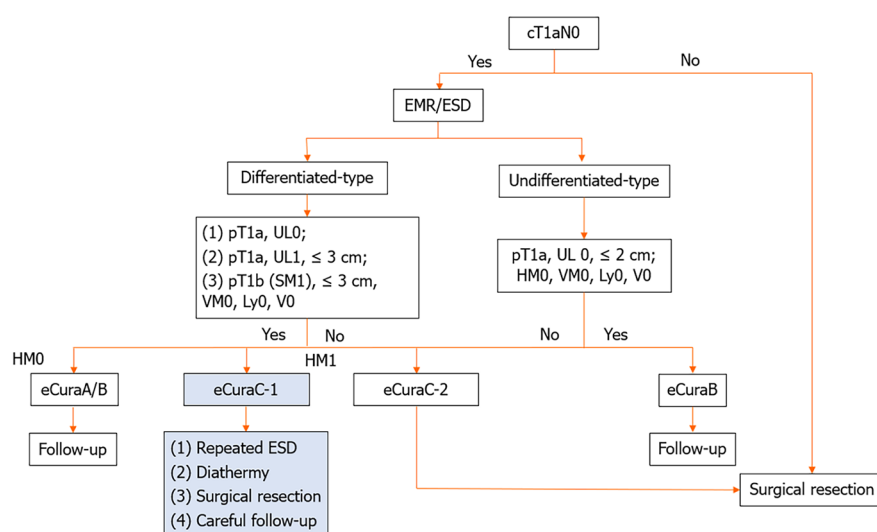
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## TO THE EDITOR

A recent publication by Kim *et al*[1] highlighted the importance of quality assessment in endoscopic submucosal dissection (ESD) for the treatment of early gastric cancer (EGC). With the widespread utilization of endoscopy, endoscopic treatment, specifically ESD, has become increasingly favoured for the management of EGC, especially when the risk of lymph node metastasis is deemed negligible. Acknowledging this prevailing trend, the authors emphasize that with the increasing popularity of endoscopic therapies, the number of physicians performing ESD has been on the rise each year. Consequently, there has been a corresponding increase in the rate of non-curative resections.

Compared to patients undergoing open surgery, patients undergoing ESD undoubtedly experience less surgical trauma and improved quality of life[2]. Considering the epidemiology of gastric cancer, conducting research to enhance the quality of ESD is imperative, and an increasing number of clinical studies are currently focusing on assessing ESD quality. However, it is essential to note that curative ESD is not the sole focal point; the discourse on non-curative ESD is equally significant.

Many studies have focused on the preoperative evaluation of patients. When assessing the risk of non-curative ESD, the size of the tumour and the depth of infiltration are the two most crucial indicators[3] since pathology can be acquired directly through biopsy. However, due to the challenges in evaluating the extent of gastric cancer, especially in assessing infiltration depth, even though endoscopic ultrasound techniques are advanced and several studies have explored predictive models for risk resection[4], difficulties still persist. In regard to postoperative assessment, the commonly utilized classification in Asia for determining the completeness of ESD is the endoscopic curability (eCura) from the Japan Gastroenterological Endoscopy Society, which involves depth of invasion, ulceration, and pathology[5]. In accordance with guidelines[6], the management strategies for eCuraA, eCuraB, and eCuraC-2 are clear and well defined. However, regarding eCuraC-1 tumours, where segmental resection or a positive horizontal margin (HM) serve as the sole noncurative factor, the appropriate approach remains ambiguous. Surgical intervention is not the exclusive choice, and alternative options include repeat ESD, surgery, close observation, and endoscopic coagulation (Figure 1).



**Figure 1** Diagram of the treatment procedure for early gastric cancer. pT1a (M): Intramucosal cancer (histopathological diagnosis); pT1b (SM): Submucosally invasive cancer (histopathological diagnosis). UL: Finding of ulceration (or ulcer scar); UL0: Absence of ulceration or ulcer scar; UL1: Presence of ulceration or ulcer scar. HM: Horizontal margin; HM0: Negative horizontal margin; HM1: Positive horizontal margin. VM: Vertical margin; VM0: Negative vertical margin; VM1: Positive vertical margin. EMR: Endoscopic mucosal resection; ESD: Endoscopic submucosal dissection; eCura: Endoscopic curability.

Current clinical research on noncurative patients predominantly focuses on directly comparing the efficacy of additional surgical procedures in high-risk patients[7]. Several studies have explored the effectiveness of conservative treatments in elderly patients[8], however, none of these studies categorized outcomes based on postoperative pathology of HM. Globally, large-scale clinical studies specifically targeting eCuraC-1 patients are scarce. The management strategies and corresponding follow-up outcomes for eCuraC-1 patients may represent valuable avenues for future research. We believe that the progressive conduct of such studies plays a crucial role in delineating both the absolute and relative indications for endoscopic treatment and contributes significantly to the overall advancement of endoscopic techniques.

In addition, with the advancement of molecular diagnostic technologies, “molecular imaging” has emerged as a new frontier in tumour diagnosis. Near-infrared fluorescent tracers have been employed for tumour navigation in breast cancer, offering real-time and precise information about the tumour for medical professionals[9]. This technology has been successfully deployed in the field of gastrointestinal cancer, specifically in colorectal tumours, through the utilization of fluorescein-conjugated carcinoembryonic antigen targeted imaging[10]. If such precision medicine approaches can be designed to identify gastric cancer, effectively label primary and metastatic lesions, and be applied in the management of early-stage cancer patients, their potential impact is also promising.

## FOOTNOTES

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