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Immune-scoring in head and neck squamous cell carcinoma: A scoping review

Raha Zamani

Tehran University of Medical Sciences

Introduction: Head and neck squamous cell carcinomas (HNSCCs) have an increasing incidence, high recurrence, and an overall unfavorable prognosis despite numerous treatment options. The distinct immune landscape of HNSCC suggests a potential for immune-related biomarkers to aid classification and treatment planning. Areas covered: Immunoscore, a multiplex measure of tumor-infiltrating immune cells, is currently approved in colorectal carcinoma and is under investigation in various other cancer types. Recent studies have tried to implement the immunoscore and other novel immune cell-based scoring systems in HNSCC as predictors of survival. This study provides an overview of tumor-infiltrating immune cells and their prognostic significance, as well as a comparative summary of studies introducing an immunoscore in HNSCC.

Expert opinion: With sufficient insight of the current literature, future studies could lead to the definition and validation of a new immune-based classification system for HNSCC. Such a classification strategy could be the basis for patient selection and, thus, optimize treatment outcomes and reduce unwanted complications. The heterogeneity of HNSCC subtypes, as well as the intratumoral variability of immune infiltrates, should be accounted for in the immunoscore.