

1 **Molecular correlates of cerebellar mutism syndrome in medulloblastoma**

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1 **Abstract:**

2 Introduction: Cerebellar Mutism Syndrome (CMS) is a common complication following
3 resection of posterior fossa tumors, most commonly after surgery for medulloblastoma.
4 Medulloblastoma subgroups have historically been treated as a single entity when
5 assessing CMS risk, however, recent studies highlighting their clinical heterogeneity
6 suggest the need for subgroup-specific analysis. Here, we examine a large international
7 multicenter cohort of molecularly characterized medulloblastoma patients to assess
8 predictors of CMS.

9

10 Methods: We assembled a cohort of 270 molecularly characterized medulloblastoma
11 subjects with available neuroimaging from four sites globally including Great Ormond
12 Street Hospital, Christian Medical College and Hospital, Hospital for Sick Children, and
13 Lucile Packard Children's Hospital. Age at diagnosis, gender, tumor volume, and CMS
14 development were assessed in addition to molecular subgroup.

15

16 Results: Overall, 25.9% of patients developed CMS. CMS patients were younger (mean
17 difference -2.73 years \pm 0.8, $P=0.0027$) and had larger tumors (mean difference 16.99
18 $\text{cm}^3 \pm 5.287$, $P<0.0001$) that were more midline ($\text{OR}=20.03$, $P<0.0001$). On multivariable
19 analysis adjusting for age, sex, midline location, and tumor volume, WNT (adjusted
20 $\text{OR}=5.06$, $P=0.027$) and Group 4 (adjusted $\text{OR}=7.42$, $P=0.004$) tumors were found to be
21 independently associated with higher risk of CMS as compared to SHH tumors.

22

1 Conclusions: Herein we show in a large cohort of molecularly characterized
2 medulloblastoma that subgroup is a very strong predictor of CMS development, owing
3 primarily to larger midline tumours presenting in WNT and Group 4 patients. These
4 findings have significant implications for future studies of prevention and early treatment
5 of CMS.

6

7 Keywords: Posterior Fossa Syndrome, Cerebellar Mutism, Medulloblastoma,
8 Postoperative Cerebellar Mutism, Cerebellar Affective Disorder

9

10 Key Points:

- 11 - Molecular subgroup is a powerful predictor of developing cerebellar mutism
12 syndrome after resection for medulloblastoma
- 13 - Tumor volume in WNT and Group 4 tumours is highly predictive of developing
14 cerebellar mutism syndrome consistent with large midline tumors with long pre-
15 diagnostic intervals predisposed to its development.

16

1 **Importance of the Study**

2

3 Medulloblastoma is now clearly recognized as being four distinct molecular subgroups
4 with clear clinical differences. Cerebellar mutism syndrome is a common occurrence after
5 surgery for medulloblastoma, however accurate risk prediction remains a challenge. We
6 show that by incorporating molecular subgroup into risk modeling, we can more
7 accurately predict the occurrence of cerebellar mutism. The observation that larger WNT
8 and Group 4 medulloblastoma further support the hypothesis that debulking of midline
9 large tumours more frequently perturbs proximal cerebellar output tracts. Our study
10 provides further evidence of the clear clinical differences between the four
11 medulloblastoma subgroups, and provides a potential framework for pre-operative
12 prediction of the development of cerebellar mutism. Applying radiogenomic pre-operative
13 prediction of subgroup can potential allow the introduction of new preventative efforts for
14 medulloblastoma patients at highest risk for the development of cerebellar mutism.

15

1 Introduction

2

3 Cerebellar mutism syndrome (CMS), also known as posterior fossa syndrome, is a
4 common condition which develops after surgery for cerebellar tumours in children.¹⁻³
5 CMS is a complex constellation of neurological symptoms but there is a consensus that
6 post-operative pediatric CMS is characterized by delayed onset mutism/reduced speech
7 and emotional lability.¹ Other symptoms can co-occur including hypotonia, oropharyngeal
8 dysfunction/dysphagia and brainstem dysfunction. The mutism is transient but speech
9 and language dysfunction often persist with frequent long-term neurocognitive
10 impairment.⁴⁻⁶ The most common setting it is observed in is after resections for
11 medulloblastoma, and in several series evaluating predictors of long-term neurocognitive
12 sequelae, CMS is a significant predictor of reduced IQ. The etiology of CMS is likely
13 secondary to disruption of cerebellar outflow tracts, and previously it has been suggested
14 that the splay of the superior cerebellar peduncle pre-surgically has a role in the
15 pathogenesis of CMS.^{7,8} Other studies of clinical and neuroanatomical predictors have
16 suggested larger tumour size, left handedness and white matter changes in the cerebello-
17 thalamo-cortical pathways as significant predictors of CMS.⁴ Surgical factors have been
18 shown across several studies to not modify the risk of CMS suggesting that new
19 approaches are needed to potentially identify patients at risk.⁸

20 Over the past decade advances in genomics have revealed significant heterogeneity
21 across medulloblastoma, where it is now clear that medulloblastoma comprises at least
22 four distinct molecular subgroups with highly disparate demographics, genetics, cell of

1 origin and outcomes.⁹⁻¹³ Indeed, the four subgroups, termed WNT, SHH, Group 3 and
2 Group 4 represent distinct disease entities, and can even be distinguished reliably using
3 conventional MRI, based partly on their distinct locations.¹⁴⁻¹⁸ SHH tumours are almost
4 always within the cerebellum, and frequently located laterally in the cerebellar
5 hemispheres, WNT tumours frequently arise out of the lateral recess, and Group 3 and 4
6 occupy the 4th ventricle.^{13,14,19,20} Previously it has been shown that Group 4 have worse
7 neurocognitive outcomes, and it has been suggested that CMS is less common in SHH
8 patients.⁶ However, no comprehensive study has been conducted to evaluate whether
9 subgroup can be used as a predictor of CMS. In order to evaluate the correlation between
10 medulloblastoma subgroup and the development of CMS, we assembled a large cohort
11 of 270 patients, and show a clear subgroup specificity of CMS, with larger Group 4
12 tumours having a clear preponderance to the development of CMS.

13 **Materials and Methods**

14 *Study Cohort:* This international multicenter study was approved by the Institutional
15 Review Board or research ethics board of all participating institutions including: Christian
16 Medical College and Hospital (CMCH; Vellore, Tamil Nadu, India), Great Ormond Street
17 Hospital (GOSH; London, England, United Kingdom), Hospital for Sick Children (HSC;
18 Toronto, Ontario, Canada), and the Lucile Packard Children's Hospital (LPCH; Stanford,
19 California, United States). All medulloblastoma patients at each institution were reviewed
20 from 2000-2018. Patients were screened for inclusion based on the availability of pre-
21 operative magnetic resonance imaging (MRI) allowing for measurement of tumor volume,
22 molecular subgrouping, and the availability of perioperative clinical notes allowing for

1 determination of CMS development. Patient age at diagnosis and gender were
2 additionally gathered on review of patient charts. In total, we assembled a cohort of 270
3 medulloblastoma patients from our four sites as follows: CMCH (n=87), GOSH (n=25),
4 HSC (n=111), and LPCH (n=47). A summary of patient demographics and clinical
5 characteristics by molecular subgroup can be found in **Table 1**.

6

7 *CMS Status:* Patients were identified as having developed CMS based on review of
8 perioperative neuro-oncology and/or neuro-surgery notes stating that the patient had
9 CMS and/or by documented neurologic exams noting mutism and at least one other
10 symptom of CMS. CMS was defined as per the recent Delphi consensus conference.¹

11

12 *Tumor Location and Volume:* Tumor location was classified as either midline or lateral on
13 review of axial T2-weighted MRI. Tumor volume was calculated after measuring largest
14 cranio-caudal, antero-posterior, and transverse diameters. Cranio-caudal diameter was
15 measured on sagittal T1-weighted MRI, antero-posterior diameter and transverse
16 diameter were measured on axial T2-weighted MRI. All patients from LPCH, HSC and
17 GOSH were imaged on a 1.5T or 3T scanner. (LPCH: Signa or Discovery 750, GE
18 Healthcare; HSK: Signa, GE Healthcare; Achieva, Philips Healthcare Best, the
19 Netherlands; Avanto, Siemens, Erlangen, Germany. GOSH: 1.5T Avanto, Siemens,
20 Erlangen, Germany or 3T Prisma, Siemens, Erlangen, Germany).

21

1 *Molecular subgrouping:* Medulloblastoma subgroup determination of HSC, GOSH and
2 LPCH patients was performed as previously described using nanoString limited gene
3 expression profiling and/or Illumina genome wide methylation arrays.²¹⁻²³
4

5 *Statistical Methods:* Statistical analyses were performed using GraphPad Prism (version
6 8.0, GraphPad Software Inc., San Diego, CA) and R Statistical Software (v3.3.3) with an
7 a priori significance level of $P < 0.05$. Categorical variables (midline location, gender, CMS)
8 were compared across subgroups and within subgroups stratified by CMS status using
9 Chi-square test. Continuous variables (age and volume) were compared across
10 subgroups using Kruskal-Wallis test. Mann-Whitney test was used to compare differences
11 in continuous variables (age and volume) stratified by CMS status within subgroups.

12 **Results:**

13 *Patient Characteristics by CMS Status*

14 Overall, we found that 25.9% of our patients developed CMS (**Table 2**). Patients who
15 developed CMS were diagnosed with medulloblastoma at a younger age (mean
16 difference -2.73 years ± 0.8 , $P = 0.0027$). There was no difference in gender between
17 patients who developed CMS and those who did not ($P = .9354$). CMS patients had tumors
18 with greater volumes (mean difference 16.99 cm³ ± 5.287 , $P < 0.0001$) that were more
19 often located midline (OR=20.03, $P < 0.0001$).

20 *Patient Characteristics by Medulloblastoma Subgroup*

1 CMS incidence varies significantly by subgroup ($P=0.0013$) (**Figure 1A**). Group 4 patients
2 had the highest rate of CMS with 39% of patients developing the postoperative
3 complication. Group 3 patients followed closely behind at 33%. SHH patients had the
4 lowest rate of CMS at 7%. WNT patients had an intermediate rate of CMS standing at
5 24% (**Table 1**). Age at diagnosis was found to vary significantly among the different
6 subgroups ($P<0.0001$) with WNT tumors presenting at older age (median=10.87) followed
7 by Group 4 (median=9.00) and Group 3 or 4 (median=9.00), SHH (median=7.00), and
8 Group 3 (median=4.70). Within subgroups, only in WNT ($P=0.41$) and Group 3 or 4
9 ($P=0.034$) tumors did younger age at diagnosis increase risk for CMS (**Figure 1B**). There
10 were no significant differences in gender distribution and tumor volume among the
11 different subgroups. Within subgroups, greater tumor volume increased risk of CMS
12 among WNT ($P=0.034$), Group 3 ($P=0.0099$), and Group 4 ($P=0.00003$) patients (**Figure**
13 **1C**).

14 *Multivariable Analysis of Risk Factors*

15 On multivariable analysis we found that WNT (adjusted odds ratio=5.06, $P=0.027$) and
16 Group 4 (adjusted OR=7.42, $P=0.004$) tumor subgroups independently increase the risk
17 of CMS as compared to SHH subgroup (**Table 3**). Group 3 subgroup reached the
18 threshold of statistical significance (adjusted odds ratio=3.86, $P=0.058$). Tumor volume
19 increased risk of CMS in a linear fashion with tumors between 50 and 100cm³ having an
20 adjusted odds ratio of 3.88 ($P=0.002$) and tumors greater than 100cm³ having an adjusted
21 odds ratio of 6.81 ($P<0.001$) as compared to tumors less than 50cm³. Older age
22 decreased the risk of CMS (adjusted odds ratio 0.89, $P=0.025$). Midline location reached

1 borderline significance with an adjusted odds ratio of 7.01 (P=0.079). Gender did not
2 affect risk of CMS.

3 **Discussion**

4 Herein we show in the largest molecularly characterized medulloblastoma cohort to date
5 that molecular subgroup is a strong predictor of CMS. Our study suggests that many of
6 the previous risk factors identified for CMS, specifically midline location, younger age and
7 increased tumour volume are likely reflections of underlying subgroup. Moreover, by
8 incorporating molecular subgroup we have been able to develop a more robust model of
9 prediction of CMS.

10 Our finding that SHH medulloblastoma are at low risk for the development of CMS is
11 consistent with previous observations that midline tumours are at much higher risk for
12 development of CMS.^{4,7,24} Indeed, we and others have previously shown that almost all
13 SHH medulloblastoma are not in the 4th ventricle rather within the cerebellum itself,
14 pertaining to disparate cell of origins between the four groups. Specifically, SHH arise
15 from the external granule layer, while WNT arise from the lower rhombic lip, Group 3 arise
16 from Nestin+ cells, and Group 4 from the unipolar brush cells.¹³ This is supported by the
17 four cases of CMS in SHH that we observed were arising from the vermis.^{16,19} This is
18 consistent the previous hypotheses that the putative cause of CMS is an increased splay
19 of the superior cerebellar peduncles resulting in post-surgical swelling and disruption of
20 the proximal dentatohalamocortical pathway.⁷ Indeed, our findings of large volume WNT
21 and Group 4 tumours being at highest risk for CMS are consistent with this finding,
22 including our previous observations that WNT and Group 4 have very long pre-diagnostic

1 intervals compared to SHH and Group 3.¹² This suggests that slow growing, large midline
2 tumours are possibly at highest risk for development of CMS.

3 Our multivariable regression model shows that even when accounting for age, volume
4 and midline location, WNT and Group 4 tumours have a significantly increased risk of
5 developing CMS. Previously we have shown that radio-genomics can be applied to
6 predict subgroup pre-operatively, specifically, SHH tumours are almost always cerebellar
7 and Group 4 tumours are 4th ventricular tumours which do not enhance.^{14,16,25} WNT
8 tumours are frequently arising from the lateral recess. Alternatively, previous reports that
9 surgical approach is not a statistically significant predictor of the development of CMS
10 were not subgroup specific, and as such, it is possible that alternate peri-operative
11 strategies may be effective when enriching for the highest risk groups.^{3,8,26,27} The
12 emergence of pharmacological interventions such as zolpidem and bromocriptine maybe
13 possibly play a role pre-operatively or in the immediate post-operative period in the
14 highest risk patients, although these interventions have not shown robust data in properly
15 controlled prospective trials.²⁸⁻³² Indeed, we have recently shown that machine learning
16 can be applied to predict subgroup on pre-operative imaging, suggesting incorporation of
17 clinical variables such as risk of mutism could be done remotely, and consistently allowing
18 for early intervention.²⁵

19 This study has the classical limitations of a retrospectively collected cohort. However,
20 there are unfortunately no robust prospective studies of predictors of CMS development,
21 which has been a major limitation of all previous studies of CMS. Prospective evaluation
22 of the development of CMS by cooperative groups with rigid inclusion criteria are required

1 to advance our understanding of this condition, with pre and post-operative speech
2 language pathology assessments. Our results provide a robust framework for the
3 prediction of the highest risk patients, and suggest that pre-operative or emerging
4 intraoperative methods to determine molecular subgroup can allow for early identification
5 of the highest risk patients.

6 Taken together, this study highlights another significant clinical difference between the
7 four core medulloblastoma subgroups. Our work provides further insights into risk factors
8 for CMS, and support potential mechanisms of its development, specifically perturbation
9 of the cerebellar outflow tracts. These results are in line with our previous work
10 suggesting that long-term outcomes have a subgroup specificity, and suggest that
11 supportive care studies in medulloblastoma should also be conducted in a subgroup
12 specific manner. Future studies of CMS risk in medulloblastoma should incorporate
13 molecular subgroup, opening up a potential new avenue of robust pre-operative
14 prediction.

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1 **Figure Captions:**

2 **Figure 1. A:** Proportion of cases developing CMS by medulloblastoma subgroup.
3 P=0.0013 (Chi-square test). **B:** Age at diagnosis in years stratified by medulloblastoma
4 subgroup and CMS status. Boxes represent median and interquartile range and whiskers
5 represent 10-90% confidence intervals (Mann-Whitney Test). **C:** Tumor volume in cm³
6 stratified by medulloblastoma subgroup and CMS status. Boxes represent median and
7 interquartile range and whiskers represent 10-90% confidence intervals (Mann-Whitney
8 Test).

9