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OPINION

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The Molecular Mechanisms of Mesothelial Tumours and its Diagnosis

Ken Dorf*
Department of Histopathology, University of Padova, Padova, Italy

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Description

Mesothelial tumours are a group of rare neoplasms that originate from the mesothelial cells, which are a specialized type of cells lining the serous cavities of the body. These serous cavities include the pleura (lining the lungs), peritoneum (lining the abdominal cavity), and pericardium (lining the heart). Mesothelial tumours can be both benign and malignant, with malignant mesothelioma being the most well-known and associated with asbestos exposure.

Malignant mesothelioma is an aggressive and often fatal cancer that arises from the mesothelial cells. The primary cause of malignant mesothelioma is exposure to asbestos, a mineral once widely used in construction and industrial applications. Inhalation of asbestos fibres can lead to their accumulation in the serous cavities, triggering inflammation and genetic mutations in mesothelial cells, ultimately resulting in the development of mesothelioma.

There are several subtypes of malignant mesothelioma, including epithelioid, sarcomatoid, and biphasic (a combination of epithelioid and sarcomatoid). The epithelioid subtype is the most common and generally associated with a somewhat better prognosis compared to the other subtypes.

Benign mesothelial tumours, on the other hand, are relatively rare and often discovered incidentally during diagnostic procedures or surgeries for other conditions. These benign tumours include adenomatous tumours and multisystem mesotheliomas. While generally non-cancerous, they can cause symptoms depending on their size and location, necessitating medical attention and sometimes surgical removal.

Diagnosing mesothelial tumours typically involves a combination of imaging studies, such as Computed Tomography (CT) scans or Magnetic Resonance Imaging (MRI), and biopsy for histological examination. Immunohistochemical staining of the biopsy samples is often employed to differentiate mesothelial tumours from other types of cancers. Malignant mesothelioma is notorious for its challenging diagnosis due to its nonspecific symptoms and the rarity of the disease.

The prognosis for mesothelial tumours, especially malignant mesothelioma, is often poor. The aggressive nature of the disease and its late-stage diagnosis contribute to limited treatment options and overall survival rates. Treatment approaches may include surgery, chemotherapy, and radiation therapy, but the effectiveness varies, and the disease is often diagnosed at an advanced stage when curative interventions are challenging.

The link between asbestos exposure and mesothelial tumours, particularly malignant mesothelioma, has prompted efforts to reduce asbestos use and improve workplace safety regulations. Despite these measures, cases of asbestos-related mesothelioma continue to be diagnosed due to the long latency period between exposure and disease development.

Research efforts are ongoing to explore novel treatment modalities and improve the understanding of the molecular mechanisms underlying mesothelial tumours. Immunotherapy and targeted therapies are being investigated as potential avenues for more effective and less toxic treatments. Additionally, advancements in early detection methods are crucial for improving outcomes, as early-stage diagnosis allows for more aggressive and potentially curative interventions.

In conclusion, mesothelial tumours encompass a spectrum of neoplasms arising from the mesothelial cells lining the serous cavities. Malignant

Contact: ken Dorf, E-mail: dorf@gmail.com

mesothelioma, associated with asbestos exposure, is a particularly challenging cancer with limited treatment options and a generally poor prognosis. Benign mesothelial tumours are rare but can cause symptoms and may require medical intervention. Ongoing research and efforts to minimize asbestos exposure are essential for improving the diagnosis, treatment, and overall outcomes for individuals affected by mesothelial tumours.