The Role of Artificial Intelligence in Cancer Biology

Integration of Artificial Intelligence with PI3K/Akt/mTOR Signalling Pathway in Cancer Biology

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***Abstract*—The phosphatidylinositol 3-kinase (PI3K)/Akt/mammalian target of rapamycin (mTOR) signalling pathway plays a central role in cancer initiation and progression. This pathway regulates essential cellular processes such as cell growth, proliferation, survival, metabolism, angiogenesis, and immune evasion. Aberrant activation of the PI3K/Akt/mTOR pathway leads to uncontrolled cell division, enhanced invasion and metastasis, metabolic reprogramming of cancer cells, and resistance to both chemotherapy and immunotherapy, making it a critical target in oncology research.**

Overactivation of this pathway is primarily driven by genetic mutations and post-translational modifications. Common molecular alterations include activating mutations in the PIK3CA gene, loss or inactivation of the tumour suppressor PTEN, amplification or hyperactivation of receptor tyrosine kinases such as EGFR and HER2, and gain-of-function mutations in AKT1, AKT2, and AKT3. These changes collectively promote persistent downstream signalling, enabling tumour cells to evade apoptosis and sustain malignant behaviour. For example, PIK3CA mutations observed in triple-negative breast cancer significantly reduce programmed cell death and contribute to resistance against standard chemotherapeutic agents.

In addition to genetic factors, microRNAs (miRNAs) act as crucial epigenetic regulators of the PI3K/Akt/mTOR pathway by modulating gene expression at the post-transcriptional level. Advances in multiomics approaches, including genomics, transcriptomics, and proteomics, combined with histopathological analysis, have enhanced the understanding of pathway dysregulation. Integrating federated and equitable data-sharing models may further support precision oncology strategies aimed at mitigating cancer progression and improving therapeutic outcomes.

***Index Terms*—Multiomics, equitable, mitigating, federated, histopathological analysis, oncology.**

I. INTRODUCTION

Cancer remains a major global health challenge, with nearly 20 million new cases and 9.7 million deaths reported worldwide in 2022, and projections estimating approximately 35 million new cases annually by 2050 (Sung et al., 2021; Bray et al., 2018). Despite advances in early detection and therapeutic strategies, significant disparities persist between high-income and low- and middle-income countries, and cancer incidence is increasing among women and younger adults (Arnold et al., 2020; Islami et al., 2019). These trends highlight the urgent need for innovative, scalable approaches to improve cancer prevention, diagnosis, and treatment.

In parallel, artificial intelligence (AI) has rapidly emerged as a transformative technology in cancer biology and oncology. Recent review studies describe how machine learning and deep learning methods have progressed from experimental tools to clinically relevant applications in cancer screening, medical imaging, genomics, and precision oncology (Topol et al., 2019; Esteva et al., 2019; Kourou et al., 2015). By integrating and analysing large-scale clinical, imaging, and multi-omics datasets, AI enables improved diagnostic accuracy, identification of molecular signatures, prediction of therapeutic response, and individualized treatment strategies (Libbrecht and Noble, 2015; Chen et al., 2021). Moreover, AI-driven approaches are increasingly accelerating anticancer drug discovery and development by enhancing target identification and optimizing drug design (Zhavoronkov et al., 2019). While challenges related to data quality, interpretability, bias, and ethical implementation remain, AI represents a powerful framework for advancing cancer biology and improving patient outcomes.

Blood Cancer:

Blood cancers, including leukemia, lymphoma, and multiple myeloma, continue to represent a major global health challenge. In the United States, hematological malignancies are projected to account for approximately 9% of all new cancer cases and cancer-related deaths in 2025, with leukemia alone expected to result in nearly 67,000 new cases and more than 23,000 deaths (Siegel et al. 2024; Shallis et al. 2019). Globally, blood cancers accounted for approximately 6.6% of all cancer cases in 2022, affecting millions of individuals due to their biological complexity, heterogeneity, and challenges associated with early detection (Sung et al. 2024; Teras et al. 2016).

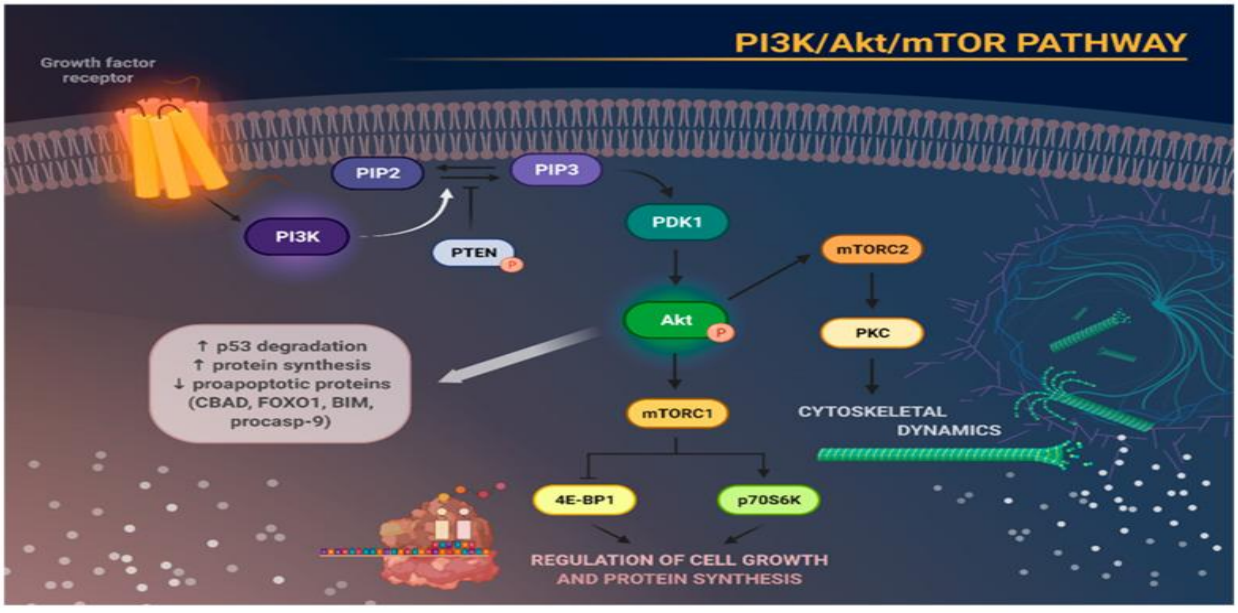
Advances in targeted therapies, immunotherapies, and precision medicine have significantly improved patient outcomes, particularly in lymphoid malignancies. Notably, mortality from non-Hodgkin lymphoma has declined by approximately 47% since the late 1990s, reflecting progress in treatment strategies such as monoclonal antibodies and targeted agents (Smith et al. 2018; Campo et al. 2018). Despite these advances, blood cancers continue to impose a substantial clinical and socioeconomic burden worldwide, underscoring the need for improved diagnostic approaches, risk stratification, and personalized therapeutic strategies.

Blood Cancer Pathways:

Blood cancers such as leukemia, lymphoma, and multiple myeloma arise from abnormal hematopoietic cells driven by dysregulation of intracellular signalling pathways that normally control cell growth, survival, and differentiation (Shlush and Mitchell 2015; Koury and Sweetenham 2020). Key oncogenic pathways implicated in hematological malignancies include Wnt/β-catenin, PI3K/AKT/mTOR, Notch, Hedgehog, and transforming growth factor-β (TGF-β) signalling, all of which play essential roles in hematopoietic stem cell maintenance and lineage commitment (Clevers and Nusse 2012; Martelli et al. 2018). Aberrant activation of these pathways promotes uncontrolled proliferation, enhanced

survival of leukemic stem cells, immune evasion, and resistance to chemotherapy and targeted therapies (Polak and Buitenhuis 2012; Hoxhaj and Manning 2020). Critical signalling components involved include receptor tyrosine kinases, PI3K, AKT, β-catenin, Dishevelled (Dsh), and tumor suppressors such as PTEN, whose mutation or loss leads to constitutive pathway activation and sustained oncogenic signalling (Liu et al. 2009; Gutierrez and Look 2007). Persistent dysregulation of these pathways is a major driver of disease progression, relapse, and therapeutic resistance in hematological malignancies (Lane et al. 2020).

Pi3k pathways:



PI3K/Akt/mTOR signaling pathway in blood malignancies integrated with AI-driven therapeutic discovery. Aberrant activation of PI3K, Akt, and mTOR promotes proliferation, survival, metabolice programming, and drug resistance. Artificial intelligence–based approaches enable pathway modeling, biomarker identification, and prediction of therapeutic response to targeted inhibitors.

The phosphatidylinositol 3-kinase (PI3K)/AKT/mTOR signalling pathway plays a central role in the pathogenesis of hematological malignancies, including leukemia, lymphoma, and multiple myeloma. In normal hematopoiesis, this pathway regulates cell growth, metabolism, survival, and differentiation in response to cytokines and growth factors.

Aberrant activation of PI3K/AKT/mTOR signalling in blood cancers occurs through mutations in receptor tyrosine kinases, PI3K catalytic subunits, or loss of the tumor suppressor PTEN, leading to constitutive downstream signalling (Polak and Buitenhuis 2012; Martelli et al. 2018).

Sustained activation of AKT promotes leukemic cell survival by inhibiting pro-apoptotic factors and activating mTOR complexes, which drive protein synthesis, metabolic reprogramming, and uncontrolled proliferation. In hematological malignancies, this pathway also supports the maintenance of leukemic stem cells and contributes to resistance against chemotherapy and targeted therapies (Hoxhaj and Manning 2020). Given its frequent dysregulation and critical role in disease progression, the PI3K/AKT/mTOR pathway has emerged as a major therapeutic target in blood cancers, with several inhibitors currently under clinical investigation (Liu et al. 2009; Martelli et al. 2018).

II. THE PI3K/AKT/MTOR SIGNALING PATHWAY

Phosphatidylinositol 3-kinases (PI3Ks) are lipid kinases that phosphorylate inositol phospholipids at the plasma membrane and regulate key cellular processes including growth, survival, and metabolism (Vanhaesebroeck et al. 2012; Fruman et al. 2017). Human cells contain three major classes of PI3Ks. Class I PI3Ks are heterodimers composed of catalytic and regulatory subunits, with Class IA activated by receptor tyrosine kinases (RTKs) and Class IB by G protein–coupled receptors (GPCRs) (Vanhaesebroeck et al. 2010). The catalytic subunits p110α, p110β, and p110δ are encoded by PIK3CA, PIK3CB, and PIK3CD, respectively, while p110γ (Class IB) is encoded by PIK3CG; these associate with regulatory subunits encoded by PIK3R1, PIK3R2, PIK3R3, PIK3R5, and PIK3R6 (Thorpe et al. 2015).

Class II PI3Ks consist of a single catalytic subunit and include three isoforms—PI3K-C2α, PI3K-C2β, and PI3K-C2γ—encoded by PIK3C2A, PIK3C2B, and PIK3C2G, respectively (Jean and Kiger 2014). Class III PI3K comprises a single enzyme, Vps34, encoded by PIK3C3, which plays a central role in vesicular trafficking and autophagy regulation (Backer 2016).

The PI3K/Akt/mTOR Signalling Pathway

The PI3K/Akt/mTOR Signalling Pathway Class	Subunits	Isoforms	Encoding Gene
IA	Catalytic subunits + regulating subunit isoform	p110α, p110β, p110δ	PIK3CA, PIK3CB, PI3KCD
IB	-	p110γ	PIK3CG
II	Only the catalytic subunit	PI3K-C2α, PI3K-C2β, PI3K-C2γ	PIK3C2A, PIK3C2B, PIK3C2G
III	Vps34	-	PIK3C3

Table 1. The table presents the fundamental classes of the phosphatidylinositol-3 kinase (PI3K), along with their subclasses and isoforms. The table also includes genes encoding a given PI3K class.

PI3K phosphorylates phosphatidylinositol 4,5-bisphosphate (PIP2) to generate phosphatidylinositol 3,4,5-trisphosphate (PIP3), which acts as a second messenger to recruit PDK1 and Akt to the plasma membrane, leading to Akt activation (Manning and Toker 2017; Hoxhaj and Manning 2020). Full Akt activity requires phosphorylation at Thr308 by PDK1 and Ser473 by mTORC2. Tumor suppressors, including PTEN and INPP4B, negatively regulate this pathway by dephosphorylating PIP3 back to PIP2 (Li et al. 2018). Akt, also known as protein kinase B (PKB), has three isoforms—Akt1, Akt2, and Akt3—with similar structure and overlapping but sometimes isoform-specific functions in cell survival, growth, and metabolism (Manning and Toker 2017).

Activated Akt promotes protein synthesis, inhibits pro-apoptotic proteins such as BAD, FoxO1, BIM, and caspase-9, and induces p53 degradation via MDM2, thereby enhancing cell survival and proliferation (Manning and Toker 2017; Hoxhaj and Manning 2020). Akt also activates the mechanistic target of rapamycin (mTOR), which exists in two functionally distinct complexes: mTORC1, which is rapamycin-sensitive and regulates protein synthesis and metabolism, and mTORC2, which is growth factor–dependent, rapamycin-insensitive, and modulates cytoskeletal organization through phosphorylation of PKC isoforms (Liu and Sabatini 2020; Saxton and Sabatini 2017). mTORC2 also phosphorylates Akt at Ser473, completing a positive feedback loop that sustains Akt activity and downstream oncogenic signaling (Oh and Jacinto 2011).

III. THE ROLE OF PI3K/AKT/MTOR PATHWAY IN CANCER CELLS

The PI3K/Akt/mTOR signalling pathway is central to multiple hallmarks of cancer, including sustained proliferation, evasion of growth suppression, enhanced invasion and metastasis, metabolic reprogramming, and resistance to chemotherapy and immunotherapy (Manning and Toker 2017; Hoxhaj and Manning 2020). Aberrant activation of this pathway often results from genetic alterations, such as PIK3CA mutations, which are frequently observed in triple-negative breast cancer and are associated with reduced apoptosis, increased chemoresistance, and poor clinical outcomes (Li et al. 2018; Samuels and Waldman 2010). Targeting components of the PI3K/Akt/mTOR axis has therefore become a promising therapeutic strategy in various malignancies, with numerous inhibitors undergoing clinical evaluation (Thorpe et al. 2015).

3.1. Glucose Metabolism

Akt promotes glucose uptake in cells by activating glucose transporters GLUT1 and GLUT4, largely through inhibition of TXNIP, and enhances glycolysis by stimulating key enzymes such as hexokinase 2 (HK2) and 6-phosphofructo-2-kinase/fructose-2,6-bisphosphatase 2 (PFKFB2) (Manning and Toker 2017; Hoxhaj and Manning 2020). Downstream transcription factors, including FOXO, HIF1, and Myc, further drive glucose uptake and glycolytic flux by upregulating GLUT1 and glycolytic enzymes (Vander Heiden et al. 2009; DeBerardinis and Chandel 2016). While these processes are critical for normal cellular physiology, they are frequently overactivated in cancer cells, contributing to the Warburg effect and supporting tumor growth and survival (Ward and Thompson 2012).

3.2. Lipid Synthesis

The PI3K/Akt/mTOR pathway enhances anabolic processes, including lipid biosynthesis, to support cancer cell growth and proliferation (Hoxhaj and Manning 2020; Li et al. 2019). Akt promotes de novo lipid synthesis by activating ATP citrate lyase (ACLY), which generates acetyl-CoA, the key precursor for fatty acid and sterol production (Shao and Espenshade 2012). Through mTORC1 signalling, downstream transcription factors such as SREBP1 are also activated, upregulating enzymes required for fatty acid and cholesterol synthesis. Overactivation of this pathway in cancer cells contributes to increased membrane biogenesis, energy storage, and tumor progression (Li et al. 2019; Hoxhaj and Manning 2020).

3.3. Nucleotide Synthesis

Rapidly dividing cancer cells require abundant nucleotides to support DNA and RNA synthesis. To fulfil this demand, glucose metabolism is redirected into the pentose phosphate pathway (PPP), which produces ribose-5-phosphate for nucleotide biosynthesis (Patra and Hay 2014; Hoxhaj and Manning 2020). Akt enhances the non-oxidative arm of the PPP by activating transketolase (TKT), while mTORC1 promotes SREBP-mediated upregulation of

glucose-6-phosphate dehydrogenase (G6PD), the rate-limiting enzyme of the oxidative PPP (Duvel et al. 2010; Li et al. 2019).

Overactivation of these pathways ensures a continuous supply of nucleotides, supporting rapid proliferation and tumor progression.

IV. APPLICATION OF PI3K/AKT/MTOR PATHWAY INHIBITORS IN BLOOD MALIGNANCIES

Targeting the PI3K/Akt/mTOR signaling pathway has emerged as a therapeutic strategy in hematological malignancies. Inhibitors of this pathway include isoform-specific PI3K inhibitors, pan-PI3K inhibitors, Akt inhibitors, mTOR inhibitors, and dual PI3K/mTOR inhibitors (Lannutti et al. 2011; Patel et al. 2021). Idelalisib and Duvelisib are FDA-approved PI3K inhibitors for chronic lymphocytic leukemia (CLL). PI3K inhibitors are categorized based on specificity: isoform-specific, pan-PI3K, and dual PI3K/mTOR. Among pan-PI3K inhibitors, only Copanlisib has FDA approval, whereas Buparlisib and ZSTK474 remain investigational (Flinn et al. 2015; Patel et al. 2021).

Idelalisib, a PI3K-δ inhibitor, improves progression-free survival (PFS) and overall response rate (ORR) when combined with Rituximab but demonstrates higher toxicity and lower efficacy compared with Acalabrutinib in relapsed or refractory CLL (Furman et al. 2014). Duvelisib, a dual PI3K-δ/γ inhibitor, shows efficacy both as monotherapy and in combination regimens, representing a valuable option for relapsed/refractory disease (Flinn et al. 2018). The development of these inhibitors highlights the clinical importance of targeting the PI3K/Akt/mTOR axis in blood cancers.

4.2. mTOR Inhibitors

mTOR inhibitors are important therapeutic agents in immunosuppression and oncology and are classified into three generations (Liu and Sabatini 2020; Porta et al. 2014).

- First-generation inhibitors (rapalogs), including Rapamycin (Sirolimus) and Everolimus, selectively inhibit mTORC1 by binding to the FKBP12-rapamycin-binding (FRB) domain.

- Second-generation inhibitors (TOR-Ki) are ATP-competitive compounds that block both mTORC1 and mTORC2, providing broader inhibition of the pathway.

- Third-generation inhibitors (RapaLinks) are bi-steric molecules combining rapamycin and TOR-Ki mechanisms, designed to overcome resistance and improve efficacy (Rodrik-Outmezguine et al. 2016).

Everolimus is widely used for transplant rejection prophylaxis and in solid tumors, but its efficacy in hematological malignancies is mixed. It failed to improve overall survival in acute myeloid leukemia (AML) but demonstrated promising remission rates in relapsed pediatric acute lymphoblastic leukemia (ALL) when combined with multi-agent chemotherapy, though larger studies are required to confirm these findings (Gratwohl et al. 2015; Tasian et al. 2018).

4.3. Dual PI3K/mTOR Inhibitors

Dual PI3K/mTOR inhibitors are designed to simultaneously inhibit both PI3K and mTOR, achieving full suppression of the PI3K/Akt/mTOR pathway and potentially overcoming resistance mechanisms associated with single-target inhibitors (Chiarini et al. 2015; Maira et al. 2008). Gedatolisib (PKI-587) has demonstrated strong preclinical activity, significantly reducing acute lymphoblastic leukemia (ALL) burden, inhibiting T-cell ALL (T-ALL) growth, and prolonging survival in sorafenib-resistant acute myeloid leukemia (AML) models (Chiarini et al. 2015; Burris et al. 2011). These findings highlight the therapeutic potential of dual PI3K/mTOR inhibition in hematological malignancies, particularly in refractory or resistant disease settings.

4.4. Akt Inhibitors

	Buparlisib	PI3K inhibitor	CT Phase I	14	Safe, well tolerated, modest efficacy in advanced AML and ALL [72].
			CT Phase II	12	Safe, well tolerated, promising results in relapse or refractory CLL—6/12 achieved PR with a median duration of response of 15.5 months [71].
	Umbralisib	PI3K inhibitor	CT Phase I	22	Safe, well tolerated, promising results in CLL—8/22 achieved CR and 14/22 achieved PR [116].
			CT Phase I/IB	44	Safe, well tolerated, promising results in relapsed or refractory CLL. The ORR was 90% [75].
			CT Phase II	51	Safe, well tolerated, promising results in CLL. The ORR was 44%—19/48 PR and 2/48 CR [74].

Table 2. The current drug developmental stages of the specific inhibitors of the phosphoinositide 3-kinase/Akt/mammalian target of rapamycin (PI3K/Akt/mTOR) signalling pathway in preclinical and clinical studies.

Understanding AI's Role in Cancer Diagnostics

Cancer is a heterogeneous and complex disease in which early detection significantly improves patient outcomes. Traditional diagnostic methods, including imaging and biopsy, are often time-consuming, expertise-dependent, and prone to delays (Esteva et al. 2019; Topol 2019). Artificial intelligence (AI), employing machine learning and deep learning algorithms, can analyse medical images, pathology slides, genomic data, and clinical records to enhance diagnostic accuracy and efficiency (Litjens et al. 2017; He et al. 2021). By identifying subtle patterns beyond human perception, AI serves as a supportive tool for clinicians, enabling faster, more precise, and reproducible diagnostic decisions across multiple cancer types (Jiang et al. 2017).

AI in the Field of Medicine

The integration of artificial intelligence (AI) in medicine is transforming cancer care by enabling more accurate, personalized, and efficient healthcare (Topol 2019; He et al. 2021). AI refers to machines performing tasks that traditionally require human intelligence, such as pattern recognition, learning, and decision-making. Key AI techniques in medicine include machine learning (ML) and deep learning (DL), with DL employing neural networks, particularly convolutional neural networks (CNNs), for image and data analysis. Other widely used

methods include support vector machines, decision trees, and clustering algorithms such as K-means, which enable classification, prediction, and pattern discovery in large-scale clinical and genomic datasets (Litjenset al. 2017; Jiang et al. 2017).

AI-Powered Precision Medicine: Advancing Personalized Treatment

Precision medicine customizes treatment according to individual genetic, molecular, and clinical characteristics, aiming to maximize efficacy, minimize toxicity, and improve clinical outcomes (Collins and Varmus 2015; Ashley 2016). Artificial intelligence (AI) enhances precision medicine by rapidly analyzing large-scale genomic and molecular datasets, supporting tumor profiling, and guiding targeted therapies (Shen et al. 2020; Kourou et al. 2015). AI-driven algorithms can integrate multi-omics data with clinical records to predict patient responses, identify actionable mutations, and optimize therapeutic strategies, enabling truly personalized oncology care (Chaudhary et al. 2018).

V. CONCLUSION

Artificial intelligence (AI) has emerged as a transformative tool in cancer biology, enabling the integration and analysis of complex biological and clinical datasets with unprecedented accuracy (Topol 2019; Esteva et al. 2019). AI-driven approaches have enhanced cancer diagnosis, biomarker discovery, prognosis prediction, and drug development, facilitating precision oncology (Litjens et al. 2017; Shen et al. 2020). By combining multi-omics data with medical imaging, AI provides deeper insights into tumor heterogeneity, molecular mechanisms, and therapy resistance (Jiang et al. 2017). Despite challenges related to data quality, interpretability, and ethical considerations, ongoing methodological advancements and interdisciplinary collaboration are accelerating the responsible application of AI in cancer research. Overall, AI holds substantial potential to improve patient outcomes and advance personalized medicine in oncology (He et al. 2021).

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