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Radical Cystectomy for Invasive Bladder Cancer: Results of Multi-institutional Pooled Analysis

Atsushi Takahashi[1], Taiji Tsukamoto[1], Ken-ichi Tobisu[2], Nobuo Shinohara[3], Kazunari Sato[4], Yoshihiko Tomita[5,*], Shu-ichi Komatsubara[6], Osamu Nishizawa[7], Tatsuo Igarashi[8], Hiroyuki Fujimoto[9], Hayakazu Nakazawa[10], Hideki Komatsu[11], Yoshiki Sugimura[12], Yoshinari Ono[13], Masao Kuroda[14], Osamu Ogawa[15], Yoshihiko Hirao[16], Tadashi Hayashi[17], Tomoyasu Tsushima[18], Yoshiyuki Kakehi[19], Yoichi Arai[20], Sho-ichi Ueda[21] and Masayuki Nakagawa[22]

Departments of Urology, [1]Sapporo Medical University School of Medicine, [2]Shizuoka Cancer Center Hospital, [3]Hokkaido University Graduate School of Medicine, [4]Akita University School of Medicine, [5]Niigata University Graduate School of Medicine and Dental Sciences, [6]Niigata Cancer Center Hospital, [7]Shinshu University School of Medicine, [8]Chiba University Graduate School of Medicine, [9]National Cancer Center Hospital, [10]Tokyo Women's Medical University School of Medicine, [11]Toranomon Hospital, [12]Mie University Faculty of Medicine, [13]Nagoya University Gradate School of Medicine, [14]Nissei Hospital, [15]Kyoto University Graduate School of Medicine, [16]Nara Medical University, [17]Japan Red Cross Wakayama Medical Center, [18]Okayama University Graduate School of Medicine and Dentistry, [19]Kagawa University Faculty of Medicine, [20]Tohoku University Graduate School of Medicine, [21]Kumamoto University School of Medicine and [22]Kagoshima University School of Medicine, Japan

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Background: We report the outcome of radical cystectomy for patients with invasive bladder cancer, who did not have regional lymph node or distant metastases, at 21 hospitals.
Methods: Retrospective, non-randomized, multi-institutional pooled data were analyzed to evaluate outcomes of patients who received radical cystectomy. Between 1991 and 1995, 518 patients with invasive bladder cancer were treated with radical cystectomy at 21 hospitals. Of these, 250 patients (48.3%) received some type of neoadjuvant and/or adjuvant therapy depending on the treatment policy of each hospital.
Results: The median follow-up period was 4.4 years, ranging from 0.1 to 11.4 years. The 5-year overall survival rate was 58% for all 518 patients. The 5-year overall survival rates for patients with clinical T2N0M0, T3N0M0 and T4N0M0 were 67%, 52% and 38%, respectively. The patients with pT1 or lower stage, pT2, pT3 and pT4 disease without lymph node metastasis had 5-year overall survivals of 81%, 74%, 47% and 38%, respectively. The patients who were node positive had the worst prognosis, with a 30% overall survival rate at 5 years. Neoadjuvant or adjuvant chemotherapy did not provide a significant survival advantage, although adjuvant chemotherapy improved the 5-year overall survival in patients with pathologically proven lymph node metastasis.
Conclusions: The current retrospective study showed that radical cystectomy provided an overall survival equivalent to studies reported previously, but surgery alone had no more potential to prolong survival of patients with invasive cancer. Therefore, a large-scale randomized study on adjuvant treatment as well as development of new strategies will be needed to improve the outcome for patients with invasive bladder cancer.

Key words: multi-institutional pooled analysis – radical cystectomy – invasive bladder cancer

INTRODUCTION

Radical cystectomy has been considered the standard curative treatment for invasive bladder cancer all over the world (1,2). Recent improved surgical techniques in addition to development of perioperative care and anesthesia have reduced morbidity and mortality. Furthermore, advances in orthotopic urinary tract reconstruction have improved the quality of life of

*Present address: Yamagata University School of Medicine

For reprints and all correspondence: Taiji Tsukamoto, Department of Urology, Sapporo Medical University School of Medicine, S-1, W-16, Chuo-Ku, Sapporo 060-8543, Japan. E-mail: taijit@sapmed.ac.jp

patients undergoing radical cystectomy. However, while about half of patients are cured, the remainder still suffer from local recurrence and distant metastasis within 2–3 years. Thus, in an attempt to improve treatment outcome, many investigators have tried combinations of neoadjuvant or adjuvant chemotherapy with surgery (3–5). Unfortunately, the impact of neoadjuvant or adjuvant chemotherapy on survival remains controversial. Recently, the South Western Oncology Group (SWOG) showed an improvement in overall survival with three cycles of neoadjuvant chemotherapy consisting of methotrexate, vinblastine, doxorubicin and cisplatin (MVAC) (6). Furthermore, more recent meta-analysis demonstrated that neoadjuvant chemotherapy provided a significant survival advantage in patients with invasive bladder cancer (7).

In this study, we evaluate outcomes of patients with invasive bladder cancer who underwent radical cystectomy with/without pelvic lymph node dissection in 21 hospitals.

PATIENTS AND METHODS

This study included 518 patients with clinically invasive bladder cancer without regional lymph node or distant metastases (T2–4N0M0). All were treated with radical cystectomy with/without pelvic lymph node dissection at 21 hospitals between 1991 and 1995. Using these data, non-randomized, multi-institutional pooled data were analyzed to evaluate the treatment results of radical cystectomy. Tumors were staged according to the criteria of the 3rd edition of General Rules for Clinical and Pathological Studies on Bladder Cancer of the Japanese Urological Association and Japanese Society of Pathology (8). Urothelial carcinoma was the predominant histological type in all patients. Patients with pure squamous cell carcinoma and adenocarcinoma were excluded from this study. Because the pathology of surgical specimens was not reviewed by central pathologist(s), tumor grade was not included in this analysis.

Almost half of the patients received some type of neoadjuvant and/or adjuvant therapy. The type and dose of the additional therapy depended on each institution's preference.

The overall survival was calculated from the date of operation to death from any cause. The overall survival rate was calculated by the Kaplan–Meier method. The statistical significance of differences was determined by the log-rank test. Spearman's rank correlation test was used to analyze correlations between two factors. A P-value of <0.05 was considered statistically significant. All analyses were performed using StatView 5.0 for Macintosh (SAS Institute, NC, USA).

RESULTS

Patient Characteristics

Patient characteristics are shown in Table 1. More than two-thirds of the patients were male. The mean age at operation was 65.4 years (range, 33–87 years). Half of the patients had a clinical stage of T2N0M0. Pathological examination revealed that patients with pT2 and pT3 accounted for almost 60% of the total, followed by those with pT1 and lower stages and those with pT4. Nearly 90% of patients received lymph node dissection. Lymph node metastasis was histopathologically proven in 86 patients (16.6%), who accounted for 18.4% of those who received node dissection (Table 2). Its incidence was significantly linked with clinical stage ($P < 0.01$ by Spearman's rank correlation test). The incidence clearly increased with progression of the pathological stage from 5.9% in patients with superficial cancer to 32.5% of those with pT4 ($P < 0.01$ by Spearman's rank correlation test).

Table 1. Patient characteristics

Characteristics		No. of patients (%)
Gender	Male	400 (77.2)
	Female	118 (22.8)
Age (years)	33–87 (mean: 65.4)	
Clinical T classification	T2	271 (52.3)
	T3	178 (34.4)
	T4	69 (13.3)
Pathological T classification	≤pT1	119 (23.0)
	pT2	156 (30.2)
	pT3	152 (29.4)
	pT4	90 (17.4)
Lymph node metastasis	pNx	53 (10.2)
	pN0	379 (73.2)
	≥pN1	86 (16.6)
Additional therapy	No	268 (51.7)
	Yes	250 (48.3)
Type of additional therapy	Neoadjuvant	118 (47.2)
	Adjuvant	85 (34.0)
	Neoadjuvant and adjuvant	47 (18.8)

Neoadjuvant and/or adjuvant therapies were performed for 48.3% of 518 patients together with radical cystectomy (Table 3). Of these, 118 patients (47.2%) received some type of therapy in the neoadjuvant setting. These included systemic chemotherapy for 80 patients, intraarterial chemotherapy for 32, radiation for one and combined systemic chemotherapy and local radiation for five. Among the systemic chemotherapies, MVAC, the most popular regimen for urothelial cancer (9), was frequently used. In the adjuvant setting, systemic chemotherapy was administered most frequently. More than half of the patients received MVAC chemotherapy.

Outcome

The follow-up period ranged from 0.1 to 11.4 years with a median of 4.4 years. The 5-year overall survival rate was 58% for all 518 patients (Fig. 1), 67% for patients with clinical T2N0M0, 52% for those with T3N0M0 and 38% for those with T4N0M0 (Fig. 2). According to pathological stage, the 5-year

Table 2. Relationships among clinical stage, pathological stage and lymph node metastasis

Clinical stage	Pathological stage	No. of patients with radical cystectomy	No. of pathologically node positive patients/no. of patients with node dissection (%)
T2	pT0	26	1/24 (4.1)
	≤pT1	54	4/48 (8.3)
	pT2	110	8/101 (7.9)
	pT3	57	20/53 (37.7)
	pT4	23	6/19 (31.5)
	All	270	39/245 (15.9)
T3	pT0	7	0/4 (0)
	≤pT1	23	2/18 (11.1)
	pT2	41	2/36 (5.5)
	pT3	78	15/71 (21.1)
	pT4	29	9/28 (32.1)
	All	178	28/157 (17.8)
T4	pT0	5	0/5 (0)
	≤pT1	4	0/3 (0)
	pT2	5	2/5 (40.0)
	pT3	17	5/16 (31.2)
	pT4	38	12/36 (33.3)
	All	69	19/65 (29.2)
T2–4	≤pT1	119	7/119 (5.9)
	pT2	156	12/142 (8.4)
	pT3	152	40/140 (28.5)
	pT4	90	27/83 (32.5)

$P < 0.01$ (Spearman's rank correlation test).

Table 3. Type of additional therapy

Type		No. of courses (median)	No. of patients
Neoadjuvant			118
Systemic chemotherapy	MVAC*	1–4 (2)	49
	MEC*	1–4 (2)	13
	CDDP-based chemotherapy	1–2 (2)	18
Local therapy	Intraarterial chemotherapy (CDDP-based)	1–2 (1)	32
	Radiation only		1
Systemic and local therapy	Chemotherapy and radiation		5
Adjuvant			85
Systemic chemotherapy	MVAC	1–4 (2)	48
	CISCA*	1–3 (2)	5
	MEC	1–2 (2)	4
	CDDP-based chemotherapy	1–6 (2)	24
	Others		4
Neoadjuvant and adjuvant			47
Intraarterial→systemic			13
Systemic and radiation→systemic			4
Systemic→systemic			30

*MVAC, methotrexate, vincristine, doxorubicin and cisplatin, (21); MEC, methotrexate, epirubicin and cisplatin, (22); CISCA, cisplatin, cyclophosphamide and doxorubicin.

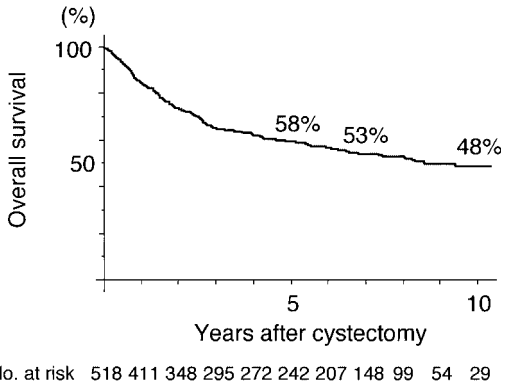

Figure 1. Overall survival rate in all 518 patients.

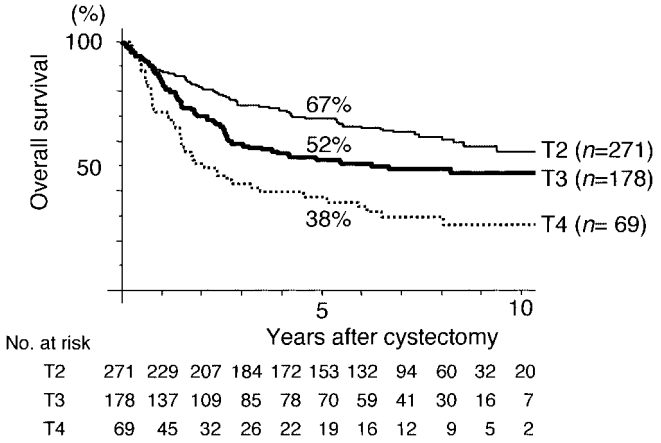

Figure 2. Overall survival rate according to clinical stage. T2 versus T3, $P < 0.01$; T2 versus T4, $P < 0.001$; T3 versus T3, $P < 0.01$ (log-rank test).

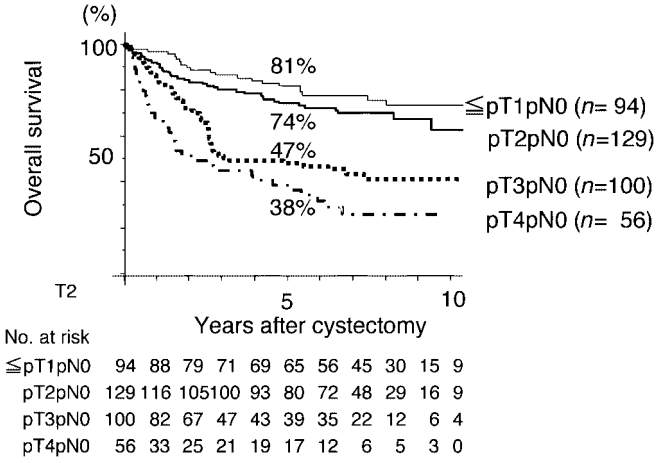

Figure 3. Overall survival rate according to pathological stage. ≤pT1pN0 versus pT3pN0, pT4pN0, $P < 0.001$; pT2pN0 versus pT3pN0, pT4pN0, $P < 0.001$; pT3pN0 versus pT4pN0, $P = 0.02$ (log-rank test).

overall survival rate was significantly higher for patients with pT1 or a lower stage, or pT2 than for those with pT3 or pT4 disease, when those who were pathologically node negative were considered (Fig. 3). Patients who were pathologically proven to be node positive clearly had a lower 5-year overall

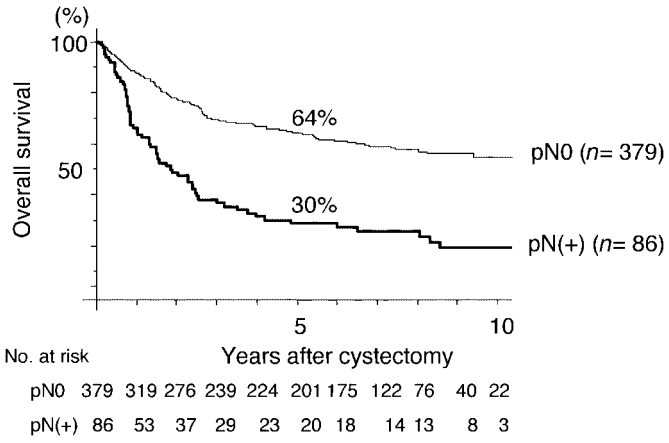

Figure 4. Overall survival rate according to lymph node metastasis. pN0 versus pN(+), $P < 0.001$ (log-rank test).

survival rate (30%) than those who were node negative (Fig. 4, $P < 0.001$ by log-rank test).

Impact of Additional Therapy

When we evaluated whether neoadjuvant chemotherapy could improve survival, there was no significant difference with regard to the 5-year overall survival between patients with and without the therapy (65% versus 56%, $P = 0.13$ by log-rank test) (Fig. 5). Furthermore, neoadjuvant chemotherapy did not influence the overall survival among all clinical stages. Similarly, adjuvant chemotherapy did not improve the prognosis because the 5-year overall survival rates for all patients with and without this therapy were 57% and 56%, respectively. When we investigated the influence of adjuvant chemotherapy on the 5-year overall survival in patients with pT2 or a lower stage without lymph node metastasis, there was no significant difference between patients with and without the therapy. No survival benefit was found for the therapy in patients with pT3 or pT4 without pathologically proven lymph node metastasis. However, the therapy improved the 5-year overall survival in patients with lymph node metastasis, with a significant difference between those with and without it ($P < 0.001$, by log-rank test) (Fig. 6).

DISCUSSION

In this study we evaluated the treatment outcomes of patients with invasive bladder cancer who underwent radical cystectomy with/without pelvic lymph node dissection in 21 hospitals from 1991 to 1995. The study enabled us to analyze the 5-year survival rates of a large volume of patients. The analysis showed that the 5-year overall survival rate for patients with T2N0M0, T3N0M0 and T4N0M0 tumors were 67%, 52% and 38%, respectively. These results are similar to/better than a previous report that the 5-year survival rates were 49% (95% CI: 39–59%) for patients with T2, 25% (95% CI: 10–50%) for those with T3 and 17% (95% CI: 5–45%) for those with T4,

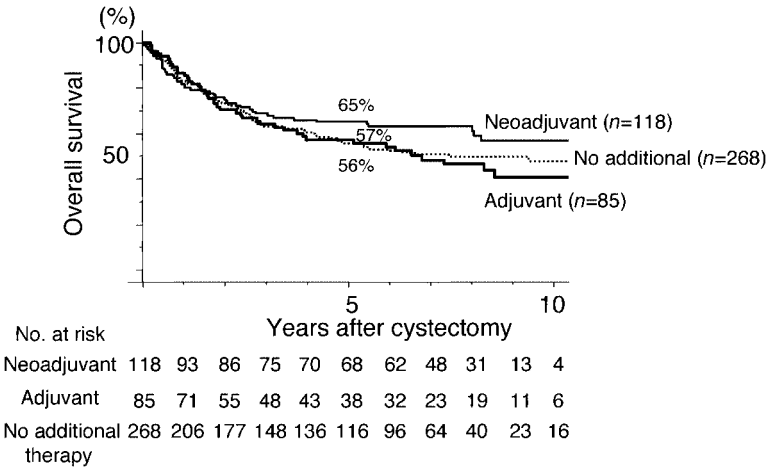

Figure 5. Overall survival rate according to additional therapy. Neoadjuvant versus no additional therapy, $P = 0.13$ (log-rank test); adjuvant versus no additional therapy, $P = 0.72$ (log-rank test).

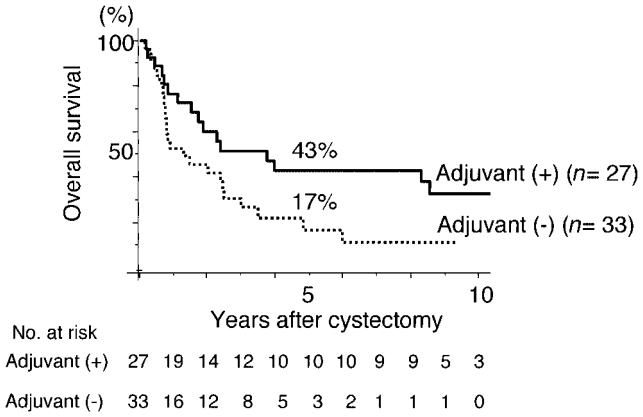

Figure 6. Overall survival rate according to adjuvant therapy in patients with lymph node metastasis. Adjuvant (+) versus adjuvant (–), $P = 0.03$ (log-rank test).

although this report was published 10 years ago (10). Similarly, the analysis according to pathological stage revealed results consistent with those in previous studies showing that the 5-year survival was 76–85% for pT1 or lower stage, 64–84% for pT2pN0, 25–56% for pT3pN0 and 19–44% for pT4pN0 (1,11,12). In Japan, the analysis of 351 patients who underwent radical cystectomy at a single institute showed a similar result (13).

In the present study pathologically proven lymph node metastasis was seen in 18% of patients with lymph node dissection. Some reports indicated that lymph node metastasis was present in 15–34% of patients who underwent radical cystectomy (10,14–16). The variation in the incidence of positive nodes may stem from the heterogeneous profiles of patients, extent of lymph dissection, and the number of lymph nodes removed. Indeed, Leissner et al. (14) reported a correlation between the number of lymph nodes removed (≥16 lymph nodes) and the percentage of patients with positive nodes, especially in locally advanced bladder cancer. Lymph node metastasis is reported to be an independent poor prognostic factor (14–16). Our study supported previous results since the present study also showed that patients with positive nodes had a worse prognosis. Recently, the number of positive lymph nodes, rather than the size, was reported to be associated with death from bladder cancer (15,16). Unfortunately we did not assess the number of lymph nodes in this study. Further study will be necessary to confirm these results. At present it remains controversial whether lymph node dissection has a therapeutic effect or is merely a staging tool. Some investigators advocate extensive bilateral lymphadenectomy as a potentially curative procedure (14,16).

Since the 5-year survival rate with radical cystectomy alone seems to reach a plateau, especially in patients with locally advanced bladder cancer, various trials of additional treatments before and/or after surgery have been carried out (3–5). Unfortunately, it remains undefined whether neoadjuvant or adjuvant chemotherapy with surgery improves the survival (17). However, in the SWOG study, patients with three cycles of neoadjuvant MVAC achieved survival benefit with the median survival of 77 months, as compared with 46 months among patients with surgery alone, although the difference was not significant when it was analyzed by a two-sided stratified log-rank test (6). Furthermore, more recent meta-analysis demonstrated that neoadjuvant cisplatin-based combination chemotherapy provided a survival advantage over a definitive local therapy (7). Our group started a prospective phase III study evaluating the survival benefit of two cycles of MVAC followed by surgery over surgery alone in patients with T2–4N0M0 bladder cancer with the support of the Japanese Clinical Oncology Group.

On the other hand, our retrospective study showed that patients with lymph node metastasis had a survival benefit from adjuvant chemotherapy, although only a small number of patients were included. Some investigators also reported the impact of adjuvant chemotherapy on survival of these patients in retrospective studies (15,16). Furthermore, prospective studies demonstrated a significant survival benefit (18–20). However, these studies were criticized due to their small

numbers of patients, early termination of trials and confusing methodology for analysis. Therefore, the role of adjuvant chemotherapy remains a matter of debate. To evaluate the impact of immediate adjuvant chemotherapy after cystectomy, the European Organization for Research and Treatment of Cancer has launched a large randomized trial that plans to enroll 1344 patients. In the near future its results will tell us whether immediate adjuvant chemotherapy is necessary in high-risk patients.

In summary, our retrospective, multi-institutional analysis showed that radical cystectomy provided an overall survival for patients with clinically invasive bladder cancer similar to that of previous reports. Thus, it is clear that surgery alone will not provide better survival than we have now. Therefore, additional therapy is mandatory to improve the treatment outcome. Further large-scale randomized studies will be needed to clarify the timing and type of additional therapy.

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