

双时相¹⁸F-FDG PET/CT及超声在分化型甲状腺癌全切术 后颈部淋巴结转移诊断中的价值

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摘要 目的 探讨双时相¹⁸氟-脱氧葡萄糖(¹⁸F-FDG)PET/CT及超声在分化型甲状腺癌(DTC)全切术后颈部淋巴结转移诊断中的效能。**方法** 回顾性分析83例DTC全切术后患者的¹⁸F-FDG PET/CT及颈部超声检查,检出转移(转移组)或非转移(非转移组)淋巴结共143个,分别计算¹⁸F-FDG PET/CT及超声检查探测DTC颈部转移淋巴结的敏感度、特异性及准确性。通过对比分析超声检查中不同分组颈部转移淋巴结检出率的差异及淋巴结长、短径等因素,探索超声诊断不足的原因;再进一步通过对比分析PET/CT检查转移组与非转移组淋巴结的纵横比、早期及延迟最大标准化摄取值(SUV_{max})、延迟与早期SUV_{max}差值(Δ SUV_{max})等相关因素,研究¹⁸F-FDG PET/CT检查对颈部淋巴结的鉴别诊断效能及其原因。**结果** ¹⁸F-FDG PET/CT在DTC术后颈部淋巴结转移诊断中的敏感度、特异度及准确率分别为91.58% (98/107)、72.22% (26/36)、86.71% (124/143)。而超声在DTC术后颈部淋巴结转移诊断的敏感度、特异度及准确率分别为50.47% (54/107)、97.22% (35/36)、62.24% (89/143)。超声检查在第一组颈部淋巴结假阴性率高于第二组[56.6% (30/53) vs 43.4% (23/53)], $\chi^2 = 20.396$, $P < 0.001$ 。颈部转移淋巴结¹⁸F-FDG PET/CT延迟显像SUV_{max}高于其早期SUV_{max}($Z = -8.147$, $P < 0.001$)。以2.5为SUV_{max}临界值,延迟较早期显像检出更多阳性淋巴结($\chi^2 = 18.127$, $P < 0.001$)。颈部转移淋巴结的纵横比小于非转移组($Z = -4.529$, $P < 0.001$),转移淋巴结早期及延迟SUV_{max}均高于良性淋巴结($Z = -3.689$, $P < 0.001$ 及 $Z = -4.550$, $P < 0.001$), Δ SUV_{max}($Z = -4.189$, $P < 0.001$)显著增大。**结论** 双时相¹⁸F-FDG PET/CT在诊断DTC全切术后颈部淋巴结转移方面优于超声。其中,延迟显像具有更高的肿瘤与本底比值,提高了转移淋巴结可视性。此外,在转移淋巴结与非转移淋巴结的鉴别诊断方面,双时相¹⁸F-FDG PET/CT更具有优势。

关键词 分化型甲状腺癌;颈部淋巴结;超声;PET/CT;¹⁸F-FDG;双时相

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甲状腺癌是全球第九大常见癌症,在青少年和40岁以下的成人中为最常见癌症^[1-2],依据病理类型分为分化型甲状腺癌(differentiated thyroid carcinoma, DTC)、未分化癌及髓样癌,其中DTC占95%。DTC在初次治疗(手术切除)后复发率高达30%,而颈部淋巴结是DTC最常见的转移部位。颈部超声对于判断DTC术后颈部淋巴结转移有一定价值。临床工作中经常发现甲状腺球蛋白(TG)或TG抗体(TG-Ab)呈上升趋势,而超声及¹³¹I治疗后全身显像(Rx-WBS)阴性的DTC患者,则需采用¹⁸氟-脱氧葡萄糖(¹⁸F-fluorodeoxyglucose,¹⁸F-FDG)PET/CT等影像学检查进一步寻找潜在病灶^[3]。Kim et

al^[4]荟萃分析指出¹⁸F-FDG PET/CT诊断DTC转移灶的特异性高,灵敏度低,而文中分析的以常规全身扫描为主。近些年运用PET/CT动态扫描方式或增加延迟显像在多种病变中显现出较高的诊断及鉴别诊断效能^[5-6]。因动态扫描时间长,对于不能长时间平卧的患者,其临床应用受到限制。而延迟显像相对省时,在临床中更实用。关于¹⁸F-FDG PET/CT早期联合延迟显像对DTC患者颈部淋巴结转移诊断是否更具优势尚未见报道,值得进一步研究。

1 材料与方法

1.1 病例资料 回顾分析2021年2月—2024年1月在安徽医科大学第二附属医院83例DTC术后的临床资料。纳入标准:①甲状腺全切术后,病理证实为DTC;②均行¹⁸F-FDG PET/CT扫描及颈部淋巴结超声检查。排除标准:①具有两种及以上恶性肿瘤;②伴随其他炎性疾病;③合并重要脏器功能障碍、肝肾功能不全、心功能不全等。④伴精

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神疾病;⑤ 其他无法完成检查情况。患者平均年龄 22~78 (43.5 ± 12.5) 岁,其中女性 60 (72.29%) 例,男性 23 (27.71%) 例;乳头状癌 82 例,滤泡状癌 1 例。其中 13 例患者未行¹⁸F-FDG PET/CT 延迟显像。所有纳入的患者签署了 PET/CT 检查知情同意书。

1.2 超声检查 采用 ACUSON X300 和 Aplio i800 超声诊断仪,探头型号为 L₁₂₋₅,探头频率为 3~12 MHz。操作过程:依据美国癌症联合委员会(AJCC)颈部淋巴结七分区,依次完成 I~VII 区的检查。对异常淋巴结进行纵切、横切和斜切位等多切面观察淋巴结内部情况。观察并记录淋巴结的部位、大小、形态、边缘、内部回声、彩色血流信号、淋巴门结构及分区等。甲状腺癌淋巴结转移常见部位为颈部 III 区、IV 区、VI 区,但甲状腺上极肿瘤也可以直接转移至 II 区^[7],故将颈部淋巴结分为两组:常见 DTC 淋巴结转移区域定义为第二组(III 区、IV 区、VI 区),非常见 DTC 淋巴结转移区域为第一组(I 区、II 区、V 区、VII 区)。

1.3 ¹⁸F-FDG PET/CT 检查 患者空腹 6 h 以上后测定空腹血糖,要求非糖尿病患者空腹血糖 <8.0 mmol/L,糖尿病患者空腹血糖 <11.1 mmol/L 方可进行检测。注射¹⁸F-FDG 药物由南京安迪科公司提供,放化纯 >95%,按照 1.85~3.70 MBq/kg 剂量经静脉注射,注射后患者安静休息并适量饮水,1 h 后排空小便开始扫描。扫描设备为 PET/CT uMI510(联影医疗),扫描范围从头颅至股骨上段,扫描过程中患者保持平静呼吸。CT 扫描参数:管电压 120 V,管电流 200 mA。螺距 0.9875 mm,旋转时间 0.5 s,层厚 3 mm,间隔 1.5 mm。PET 采集条件:采集 4 个床位,3 min/床位,床位重叠 26%。延迟显像时间距离注射时间为 2 h。扫描范围颈部-上胸部,扫描参数及条件与首次扫相同。图像采集完毕,采用基于 CT 衰减校正方法,自适应滤波函数及 2 次迭代重建方法,对图形进行处理和重建。横断位自动勾画感兴趣三维体积,计算 SUV_{max}。

1.4 ¹³¹I 治疗后全身显像(Rx-WBS) DTC 患者¹³¹I 治疗 2 d 后行 Rx-WBS 及颈部断层融合显像。

1.5 图像分析 超声检查由 2 位超声专业医师联合阅片,依据淋巴结的部位、大小、形态、边缘、内部回声、彩色血流信号、淋巴门结构及分区等做出诊断。¹⁸F-FDG PET/CT 及 Rx-WBS 均由 2 位主治及以上核医学医师独立阅片。¹⁸F-FDG PET/CT 根据病灶代谢特征部位、形态、大小及密度等做出诊断。

Rx-WBS 检查目测颈部淋巴结摄取¹³¹I 为阳性,不摄取¹³¹I 为阴性。

DTC 颈部淋巴结转移确诊依据:① 颈部组织学活检病理证实;②¹³¹I 融合显像发现病灶有明显放射性摄取;③ 转移灶影像学随访确诊依据,2 次及 2 次以上影像确定伴 TG 水平不断升高且影像学无远处转移灶(随访中发现原有病灶增大或出现新发病灶,且超声、CT、MR 明确诊断为转移灶);④ 伴 Tg 水平不断升高,且无可疑假阴性病灶。

DTC 颈部非转移淋巴结的确诊依据:① 组织学病理未发现肿瘤细胞;② 随访超过 6 个月,TG 维持 <0.2 ng/ml(服用甲状腺激素情况下),淋巴结形态结构始终无明显变化;③ 可疑淋巴结在后续影像随访中自行缩小或消失。

1.6 统计学处理 采用 Kolmogorov-Smirnov 法判断定量资料是否满足正态分布,不满足正态分布的定量资料用四分位数间距(IQR)的中位数描述,组间比较采用 Mann-Whitney U 秩和检验,SUV_{max} 前后配对比较采用 Wilcoxon 秩和检验。分类资料采用样本量(%)来描述,组间比较采用卡方检验。所有统计学分析均在 SPSS 23.0 软件中进行,以 P < 0.05 为差异有统计学意义。

2 结果

2.1 ¹⁸F-FDG PET/CT 及超声检查结果比较 83 例 DTC 全切术后患者共检测到 143 个颈部淋巴结,其中转移性淋巴结 107 个,非转移性淋巴结 36 个。PET/CT 诊断 DTC 术后颈部转移淋巴结的敏感度、特异度及准确率分别为 91.58% (98/107)、72.22% (26/36)、86.71% (124/143)。超声在 DTC 术后颈部淋巴结转移诊断敏感度 (54/107, 50.47%) 及准确率 (89/143, 62.24%), 特异度 (35/36, 97.22%) 较高。

2.2 颈部淋巴结超声检查真阳性与假阴性组临床特征对比 超声检查真阳性与假阴性组淋巴结长短径、纵横比均无统计学差异;两组中 Rx-WBS 真阳性及假阴性比例无差别;两组中早期及延迟 SUV_{max} 均无统计学差异。但颈部超声第一组颈部淋巴结假阴性率显著高于第二组 [30/53 (56.6%) vs 23/53 (43.4%)], $\chi^2 = 20.396, P < 0.001$] (表 1)。

2.3 在不同分组中早期及延迟 SUV_{max} 的对比分析

剔除 20 个未行延迟显像淋巴结,其中 PET/CT 假阴性 9 个,真阳性 8 个及真阴性 3 个。超声检查真阳性及假阴性组内对比早期及延迟显像 SUV_{max} 均

差异有统计学意义。DTC 术后淋巴结转移及非转移组组内对比分析早期与延迟显像 SUV_{max} 亦均差异有统计学意义(表 2、3)。但当以 $SUV_{max} = 2.5$ 为临界值, 延迟显像 SUV_{max} 大于 2.5 的病灶数较早期显像明显增多约 23.4%, 差异有统计学意义($\chi^2 = 18.127, P < 0.001$) (表 4)。

2.4 颈部淋巴结 PET/CT 检查转移及非转移组临床特征对比 经筛选后 90 个转移淋巴结与 33 个非转移淋巴结对比分析, 淋巴结转移较非转移淋巴结的纵横比明显减小($Z = -4.529, P < 0.001$), 早期及延

迟 SUV_{max} 均显著增高($Z = -3.689, P < 0.001$ 及 $Z = -4.550, P < 0.001$), 尤其 ΔSUV_{max} ($Z = -4.189, P < 0.001$) 显著增大(表 5)。典型病例见图 1。

3 讨论

DTC 是内分泌系统最常见的恶性肿瘤之一, 其主要治疗手段包括手术切除、放射性 ^{131}I 治疗、TSH 抑制治疗、靶向药物及化疗等。治疗方案的选择很大程度上依赖精准的诊断, 尤其定性定位的影像学检查。颈部超声是 DTC 转移灶定位诊断的常规检

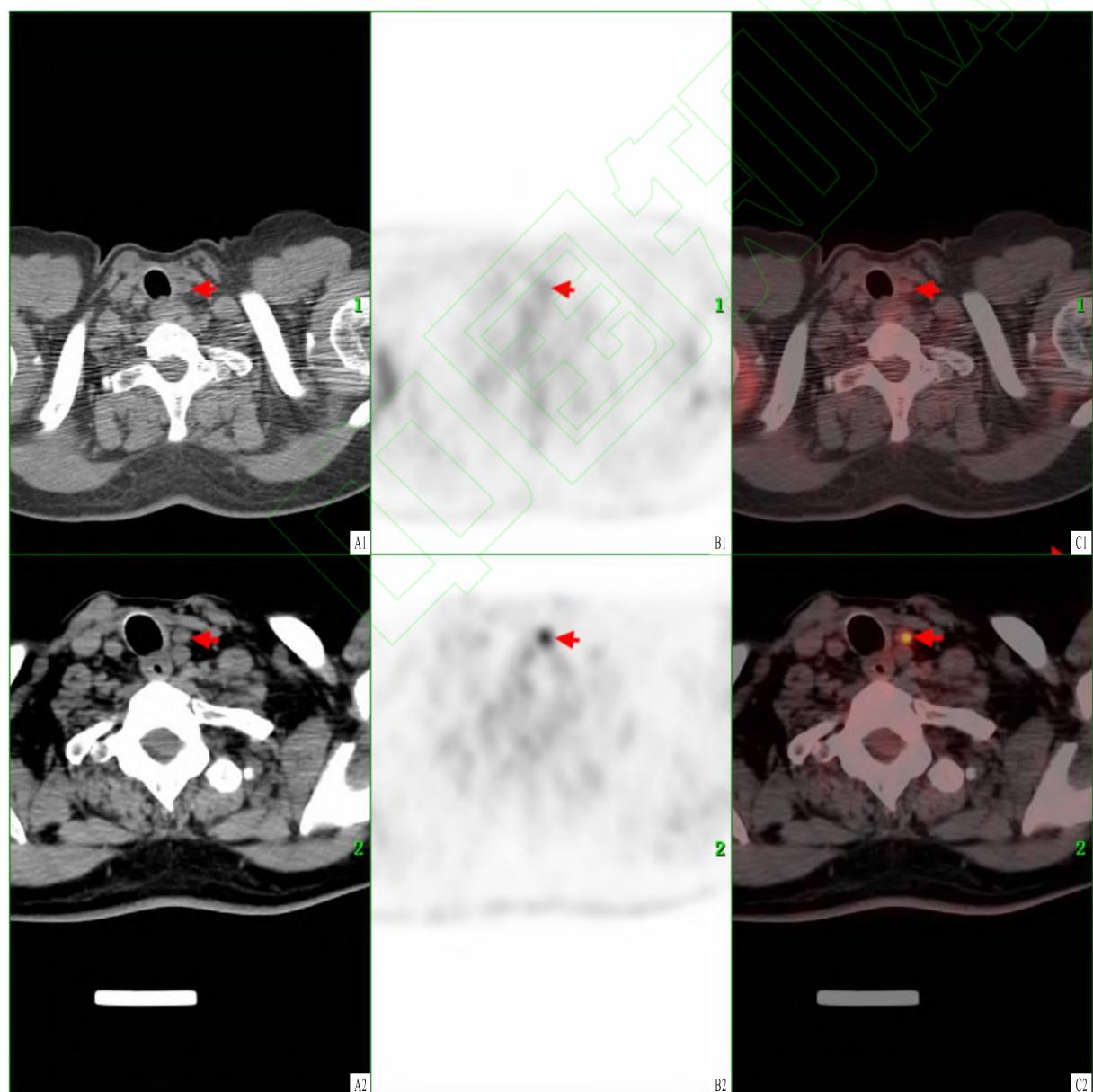


图 1 分化型甲状腺癌术后颈部淋巴结转移 ^{18}F -FDG PET/CT 早期及延迟图像

Fig. 1 Early and delayed ^{18}F -FDG PET/CT imaging of DTC with Metastatic cervical lymph nodes

A1: Early CT imaging; B1: Early PET imaging, $SUV_{max} = 2.0$; C1: Early fusion imaging; A2: Delayed CT imaging; B2: Delayed PET imaging, $SUV_{max} = 4.6$; C2: Delayed fusion imaging.

表1 超声检查真阳性与假阴性组淋巴结长短径、纵横比、分区、Rx-WBS 及双时相 SUV_{max} 比较Tab.1 Comparison of diameter, aspect ratio, location, Rx-WBS, and dual-phase SUV_{max} between true positive and false negative findings on ultrasound examination

Variable	False negative group (n = 53)	True positive group (n = 54)	χ^2/Z value	P value
Rx-WBS			0.867	0.352
True positive (%)	17 (32.1)	22 (40.7)		
False negative (%)	36 (67.9)	32 (59.3)		
Ultrasound examinations			20.396	<0.001
First group (%)	30 (56.6)	8 (14.8)		
Second group (%)	23 (43.4)	46 (85.2)		
Long axis (mm)	6.2 (5.7, 8.7)	7.9 (6.2, 10.5)	-2.478	0.013
Short axis (mm)	5.5 (4.6, 6.5)	6.3 (4.8, 8.1)	-2.101	0.036
Aspect ratio	1.2 (1.1, 1.4)	1.2 (1.1, 1.5)	-0.206	0.837
¹⁸ F-FDG-PET/CT				
Early SUV _{max}	3.1 (2.2, 4.5)	3.8 (2.5, 7.7)	-2.010	0.044
Delayed SUV _{max} *	4.8 (3.2, 6.6)	6.0 (4.4, 9.0)	2.000	0.046

* : The item False negative group (n = 43), True positive group (n = 54).

表2 超声真阳性及假阴性组同组淋巴结早期 SUV_{max} 与延迟 SUV_{max} 的对比分析Tab.2 Comparison of early and delayed SUV_{max} of lymph nodes between true positive and false negative findings on ultrasound examination

Ultrasound examination	¹⁸ F-FDG PET/CT		Z value	P value
	Early SUV _{max}	Delayed SUV _{max}		
False negative group	3.1 (2.2, 4.5)	4.8 (3.2, 6.6)	-6.145	<0.001
True positive group	3.8 (2.5, 7.7)	6.0 (4.4, 9.0)	-5.990	<0.001

表3 DTC 术后淋巴结转移及非转移组内早期与延迟显像 SUV_{max} 比较Tab.3 Comparison of early and delayed SUV_{max} of benign and metastatic lymph nodes

Variable	SUV _{max} [M (P ₂₅ , P ₇₅)]	Z value	P value
Metastatic lymph nodes		-8.147	<0.001
Early imaging	3.4 (2.4, 5.0)		
Delayed imaging	5.8 (3.8, 8.6)		
Benign lymph nodes		-4.705	<0.001
Delayed imaging	2.4 (2.0, 2.8)		
Delayed imaging	3.3 (2.7, 4.7)		

表4 以颈部淋巴结 SUV_{max} = 2.5 为临界值,¹⁸F-FDG PET/CT 早期与延迟显像检出转移淋巴结数量比较

Tab.4 Comparison of the number of metastatic cervical lymph nodes detected by early and delayed

¹⁸F-FDG PET/CT imaging using an SUV_{max} cutoff value of 2.5

¹⁸ F-FDG PET/CT	SUV _{max} ≤ 2.5	SUV _{max} > 2.5	χ^2 value	P value
Early imaging (%)	25 (27.8)	65 (72.2)		
Delayed imaging (%)	4 (4.4)	86 (95.6)	18.127	<0.001

表5 PET/CT 检查转移组及非转移组淋巴结分区、长短径、纵横比、早期 SUV_{max}、延迟 SUV_{max} 及 Δ SUV_{max} 对比分析Tab.5 Comparison of location, diameter, aspect ratio, early SUV_{max}, delayed SUV_{max}, and Δ SUV_{max} in benign and metastatic lymph nodes

Variable	Benign lymph nodes (n = 33)	Metastatic lymph nodes (n = 90)	χ^2/Z value	P value
Cervical lymph node map (Left, %)	16 (48.5)	33 (36.7)	1.407	0.236
Cervical lymph node map (First group, %)	23 (69.7)	31 (34.4)	12.184	<0.001
Long axis (mm)	96.0 (77.0, 113.0)	73.5 (59.0, 92.3)	-3.095	0.002
Short axis (mm)	54.0 (45.0, 70.0)	57.0 (48.0, 73.8)	-0.842	0.400
Aspect ratio	1.7 (1.2, 2.2)	1.2 (1.1, 1.5)	-4.529	<0.001
Delayed SUV _{max}	3.3 (2.7, 4.7)	5.8 (3.8, 8.6)	-4.550	<0.001
Early SUV _{max}	2.4 (2.0, 2.8)	3.4 (2.4, 5.0)	-3.689	<0.001
Δ SUV _{max}	1.1 (0.6, 1.8)	2.2 (1.2, 3.5)	-4.189	0.001

查方法之一,但本研究超声诊断 DTC 术后颈部淋巴结转移敏感度(54/107, 50.47%)及准确率(89/143, 62.24%)均较低。彭民等^[8]研究发现超声在 DTC 复发的准确率为 71.4%,与本研究相仿。既往研究表明^{[18]F-FDG PET/CT 在超声阴性、Rx-WBS 阴性,但 TG 或 TG-Ab 持续阳性或升高 DTC 复发或转移灶的定位、评估病灶分化程度、预测预后、指导¹³¹I 治疗的具有重要价值^[9]。唐潇伟等^[10]研究结果显示^{[18]F-FDG PET/CT 诊断复发转移灶的敏感度和特异度分别为 83.0% 和 37.5%。本文回顾研究分析 83 例 DTC 患者的 143 个病灶,包括碘敏感型和碘难治型 DTC 患者,其中 123 个淋巴结进行了早期及延迟显像。依据淋巴结个数分析淋巴结转移诊断敏感度(91.58%)及准确率(86.71%)均较高。究其原因,一方面,淋巴结的转移在病理上是个动态演进的过程,当病理上的转移尚未形成结构改变时,超声无阳性声像表现,易误诊。非转移淋巴结如炎性或增生淋巴结好发于部 I 区、II 区、V 区,增加干扰因素,本研究超声检查中第一组颈部淋巴结假阴性率显著高于第二组[30/53(56.6%) vs 23/53(43.4%), $\chi^2 = 20.396, P < 0.001$],也证实了这一点。¹⁸F-FDG PET/CT 可以从能量代谢水平发现其代谢变化,较结构影像更加灵敏,因此其在不同分组中诊断效能未有明显差别。另一方面,颈部 I 区、II 区、V 区范围较广,超声检查容易漏诊;对于 II 区、VII 区、咽旁及胸骨上窝,由于解剖结构原因,超声难以探及,亦容易漏诊。而 PET/CT 几乎无禁区,能够全身无死角扫描。因此,¹⁸F-FDG PET 的敏感度及准确率均明显高于超声检查,提示在 DTC 颈部淋巴结转移诊断中具有显著的优势。}}

与既往研究^[7,11]相比,本研究^{[18]F-FDG PET/CT 在诊断淋巴结转移方面的敏感度有所提高,这可能主要归因于进行了延迟显像。本研究中^{[18]F-FDG PET/CT 早期显像 SUV_{max} 3.4 (2.4, 5.0),其中约 27.8% 的淋巴结 SUV_{max} 小于 2.5,这些病灶与本底比值较低(图 1),是易漏诊原因之一。大量研究及临床实践已经证实,随着注射后时间延长,正常细胞内的 6-磷酸葡萄糖酶通过去磷酸化作用可降低细胞内的葡萄糖摄取浓集水平,而肿瘤细胞 FDG 浓度保持相对稳定,甚至有所升高,因此,延迟显像能够增大肿瘤与本底比值,提高了转移淋巴结可视性。Lee et al^[6]发现 PET/CT 2 h 延迟显像在偶发甲状腺病变中预测为甲状腺癌的敏感性为 88.9%,特异性为 66.3%。本研究有类似发现,在注射¹⁸F-FDG 药}}

物 2 h 后行延迟显像,延迟显像 SUV_{max} 5.8 (3.8, 8.6)较早期显像 SUV_{max} 3.4 (2.4, 5.0)明显升高($P < 0.001$),且延迟显像高达 95.6% 转移淋巴结 SUV_{max} > 2.5。当以 SUV_{max} = 2.5 为界时,延迟 SUV_{max} 比早期 SUV_{max} 对诊断 DTC 颈部淋巴结转移的诊断效能明显提高($P < 0.001$)。另外,超声检查真阳性或假阴性组淋巴结组内比较,延迟显像 SUV_{max} 均较早期显像明显高。故延迟显像可以降低 DTC 颈部淋巴结复发及转移灶的漏诊率,提高诊断效能,从而可以帮助医师精准地找到责任病灶,给予积极治疗,有利于提高患者生存率及生活质量。

本研究显示,在 PET/CT 检查中,转移组淋巴结的长径相较于非转移组更小。这可能是因为本研究纳入的病例均为术后患者,较大的转移淋巴结易于被发现,且已通过手术切除。而双时相^{[18]F-FDG PET/CT 敏感度较高,即便较小的转移淋巴结也能被检测出来。与非转移组淋巴结相比,转移组淋巴结的纵横比减小($Z = -4.529, P < 0.001$),即转移淋巴结更趋近于圆形,这也是结构影像学诊断淋巴结转移的一项重要特征^[11]。在本研究中,非转移淋巴结主要为炎性或增生性淋巴结,¹⁸F-FDG PET/CT 检查显示其代谢不同程度增高。然而,与非转移组相比,转移组淋巴结的早期及延迟 SUV_{max} 值均显著增高($Z = -3.689, P < 0.001$ 及 $Z = -4.550, P < 0.001$),且转移组淋巴结 Δ SUV_{max} 较非转移组显著增大($Z = -4.189, P < 0.001$),这一特点有望成为两者鉴别诊断重要参考指标。尽管本研究中所涉及的非转移淋巴结数量较少,这一情况可能会使研究结果出现偏倚,进而削弱本研究结果的说服力,但该研究仍为鉴别诊断转移病灶与非转移病灶提供了新的思路。}

近些年核医学成像设备及新型分子影像探针飞速发展,也给 DTC 颈部转移淋巴结的诊断带来了新的机遇。在 DTC 综合治疗后局部复发和颈部淋巴结转移中,¹⁸F-FDG PET/MR 相较于 PET/CT 诊断灵敏度从 61.0% 提高到了 80.5%^[12]。虽然¹⁸F-成纤维细胞活化蛋白抑制剂(FAPI)在胃肠道以及腹膜肿瘤中展现出了明显优势,但其在怀疑生化复发的 DTC 患者中的诊断效能上与¹⁸F-FDG 相当^[13]。Rizzo et al^[14]对 6 篇有关 PSMA PET/CT 用于甲状腺癌(共 49 例患者)诊断性能的文献进行荟萃分析,发现 PSMA PET/CT 在 TC 中的检查率异质性值介于 25% ~ 100% 之间,总体上低于¹⁸F-FDG PET/CT。

综上所述,在 DTC 全切术后患者颈部淋巴结转

移的诊断中,双时相¹⁸F-FDG PET/CT的敏感度和准确率相较于超声有明显提高。在淋巴结转移诊断方面,延迟显像较早期显像能够增大肿瘤与本底比值,提高了转移淋巴结可视性。此外,双时相¹⁸F-FDG PET/CT在转移与非转移淋巴结的鉴别诊断中更具有优势。

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The value of dual phase ^{18}F -fluorodeoxyglucose PET/CT imaging and ultrasound to diagnose cervical lymph node metastases in differentiated thyroid cancer

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Abstract Objective To assess and to compare the diagnostic performance of cervical ultrasound and ^{18}F -fluorodeoxyglucose (^{18}F -FDG PET/CT) in identifying cervical lymph node metastases in patients with differentiated thyroid cancer (DTC) following total thyroidectomy, focusing on both early and delayed imaging phases. **Methods** A retrospective review was performed on 83 DTC patients with DTC who had undergone total thyroidectomy. A total of 143 cervical lymph nodes, comprising both metastatic and non-metastatic nodes, were evaluated using ^{18}F -FDG PET/CT and ultrasound. Sensitivity, specificity, and overall diagnostic accuracy were calculated for each imaging modality. Differences in lymph node detection rates across cervical regions using ultrasound were analyzed, along with nodal size parameters (long and short axis diameters), to investigate potential limitations of ultrasound in this context. Additionally, PET/CT parameters including axial ratio, early and delayed maximum standardized uptake values (SUV_{\max}), and changes in SUV_{\max} between imaging timepoints (ΔSUV_{\max}) were compared between metastatic and non-metastatic lymph nodes to evaluate the diagnostic value and underlying mechanisms of PET/CT in this clinical setting. **Results** ^{18}F -FDG PET/CT demonstrated a sensitivity of 91.58% (98/107), a specificity of 72.22% (26/36), and an overall diagnostic accuracy of 86.71% (124/143) in identifying cervical lymph node metastases post-total thyroidectomy in DTC patients. In comparison, ultrasound showed a lower sensitivity of 50.47% (54/107), but a higher specificity of 97.22% (35/36), with an overall accuracy of 62.24% (89/143). Notably, ultrasound exhibited a significantly higher false-negative rate in the first cervical lymph node group compared to the second group [56.6% (30/53) vs 43.4% (23/53); $\chi^2 = 20.396$, $P < 0.001$]. In delayed PET/CT imaging, metastatic lymph nodes showed a significantly increased SUV_{\max} compared to early-phase imaging ($Z = -8.147$, $P < 0.001$). Using an SUV_{\max} threshold of 2.5, delayed imaging identified a greater number of positive lymph nodes than early imaging ($\chi^2 = 18.127$, $P < 0.001$). Furthermore, metastatic lymph nodes exhibited a significantly lower axial ratio than non-metastatic nodes ($Z = -4.529$, $P < 0.001$). Both early and delayed SUV_{\max} values were significantly higher in malignant nodes compared to benign ones ($Z = -3.689$, $P < 0.001$ and $Z = -4.550$, $P < 0.001$, respectively). Additionally, ΔSUV_{\max} was markedly elevated in metastatic lymph nodes ($Z = -4.189$, $P < 0.001$). **Conclusion** Dual-phase ^{18}F -FDG PET/CT proves to be superior to ultrasound in diagnosing cervical lymph node metastasis in patients with differentiated thyroid cancer (DTC) following total thyroidectomy. Delayed-phase imaging offers higher tumor-to-background ratio, which enhances the visibility of metastatic lymph nodes. In addition, dual-phase ^{18}F -FDG PET/CT plays greater advantages in the differential diagnosis between metastatic lymph nodes and non-metastatic lymph nodes.

Key words differentiated thyroid cancer; lymph node; ultrasound examinations; PET/CT; ^{18}F -FDG; dual phase

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