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Opinion Article

Kidney Transplantation in Goodpasture Disease: A Risk Worth Taking

Charles Antoine*

Department of Nephrology, University of Brest, MARHEA Reference Center, Brest, France.

DESCRIPTION

Good pasture disease also known as Anti-Glomerular Basement Membrane (anti-GBM) disease is a rare yet formidable autoimmune condition that continues to challenge nephrologists. Often manifesting as rapidly progressive glomerulonephritis and occasionally complicated by pulmonary hemorrhage, it typically leads swiftly to End-Stage Kidney Disease (ESKD). Historically, the grave prognosis of this disease has inspired a deep sense of caution regarding Kidney Transplantation (KT), especially due to the risk of disease recurrence.

For decades, the decision to offer KT to patients with GBM-Associated Glomerulonephritis (GBM-GN) has been clouded by fears of post-transplant relapse and subsequent graft loss. Small-scale reports and anecdotal experiences have warned of recurrence particularly in patients with residual circulating anti-GBM antibodies at the time of transplant. As a result, transplant centers have routinely enforced lengthy waiting periods and been slow to list GBM-GN patients compared to those with other etiologies of kidney failure.

However, recent data from a large multicenter French study may be poised to shift this cautious paradigm. Analyzing outcomes of 100 GBM-GN patients who underwent KT between 2005 and 2023, compared with 200 matched controls, this study presents a compelling argument: transplantation in GBM-GN patients is not only viable it is safe, effective and comparable to KT outcomes in other kidney diseases.

The results of this study are both striking and encouraging. Five-year graft survival was 87% in GBM-GN patients nearly identical to the 88% seen in matched controls. Similarly, patient survival showed no significant difference between groups. Most notably, only a single case of disease relapse was recorded in the GBM-GN cohort, representing a recurrence rate far lower than previously feared.

This finding calls into question the long-held belief that KT in Goodpasture disease is intrinsically high-risk. In fact, the incidence of acute rejection was slightly lower in GBM-GN patients compared to controls though the difference was not statistically significant, it hints at potential underlying immune modulation worth further exploration.

The role of immunologic conditioning

One hypothesis is that GBM-GN patients, having undergone intensive immunosuppression during the acute disease phase, may experience a form of immune "conditioning" that reduces the risk of rejection. Alternatively, these patients may possess unique immunological characteristics post-therapy that affect graft response. While speculative, such theories warrant deeper investigation and may influence future immunosuppression strategies tailored for this subgroup.

Critically, the study also noted that among GBM-GN patients who underwent KT while still testing positive for anti-GBM antibodies, none experienced relapse. This directly challenges the widely held "six-month antibody-negative" waiting rule and suggests that strict adherence to such timeframes may be based more on tradition than data.

Despite these reassuring outcomes, GBM-GN patients in the study faced significantly longer wait times for KT and were less likely to receive a preemptive transplant. This delay prolongs time on dialysis a factor known to diminish long-term outcomes and quality of life. If KT is indeed safe earlier in the disease course, then this delay represents a critical gap in care, driven by outdated perceptions rather than evolving evidence.

Future directions and cautionary notes

While the findings are promising, caution remains essential. The risk of relapse, though minimal, is not zero. Further research is needed to identify predictive markers for recurrence and to refine antibody testing protocols. Additionally, standardization in pre-transplant evaluation particularly regarding antibody titers and biopsy interpretation will be vital to improve consistency in care.

Nevertheless, the broader message is clear: medicine must remain agile. Clinical decisions should evolve alongside emerging data not remain anchored to historic fears. Goodpasture disease is a prime example of a condition where

Correspondence to: Charles Antoine, Department of Nephrology, University of Brest, Brest, France. Email: anto@gmail.com

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long-standing conservatism in transplantation practices must now be recalibrated in light of real-world outcomes.

CONCLUSION

This comprehensive French cohort study delivers a transformative message: kidney transplantation in Goodpasture disease is not only feasible it is safe and effective, with graft and patient survival rates comparable to other causes of ESKD. The traditional fear of recurrence, while still relevant, should no longer paralyze clinical judgment or delay transplant access.

With vigilant monitoring and an evidence-based approach, KT should be considered not merely an option but a preferred pathway for eligible GBM-GN patients. As transplant medicine continues to advance, we must ensure that legacy assumptions do not stand in the way of better outcomes and timely care.