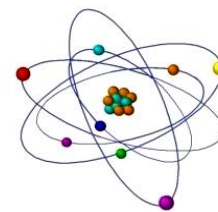


SOME OF THE SIMILARITIES BETWEEN MULTIORGAN DAMAGES CAUSED BY COVID-19 AND HIGH DOSES OF RADIATION

(Brief Review)



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ABSTRACT: *The modern world has a number of challenges. Climate change, rising radiation backgrounds, cancer, cardiovascular diseases, infections threaten the sustainable development of humanity. Today, as never before, it is time for scientists to work together to overcome these challenges. The spread of SARS-COV-2 virus has completely changed the biomedical research agenda. Multi-organ lesions caused by the virus require the analysis of knowledge and experience accumulated in various fields. One of the most serious factors causing multi-organ injuries is radiation. As studies show, pathologies obtained with covid-19 and high-dose radiation are very similar to each other. Determining the advantages of many years of experience and methods of radiation disease management for treatment of similar disorders caused by the SARS-COV-2 virus creates an excellent prospect for rescuing patients with moderate to severe symptoms.*

Inflammation is a major common player in COVID-19 and ARS (Acute Radiation Syndrome) and causes multiple systemic damage. Both cause cytokine storms, the number of pro-inflammatory cytokines increases, and the number of anti-inflammatory cytokines decreases. Both COVID-19 and radiation exposure result in systemic damage of the vascular system, lungs, heart, kidneys, liver, intestines, eyes, and brain. Regardless of the target organ, the management of immunogenic pathway hyperactivity is a major target for overcoming COVID-19 and acute radiation exposure.

The goal of presented review is to underline some of the similarities of multisystem damages caused by Covid-19 infection and ARS. A long-term and diversified study of ARS has identified the main targets of radiation exposure and developed ARS medical management strategies that can be successfully adapted to manage systemic lesions in patients with COVID-19.

Key words: acute radiation disease, covid-19, inflammation, cytokine storm

INTRODUCTION

Acute Radiation Syndrome (ARS), the same radiation sickness develops in people whose large part of the body is exposed to high doses in a short period. The result is damage to the hematopoiesis, gastrointestinal tract, skin, neurovascular systems, and immune dysfunction as part of the damage to the hematopoietic system [1,10,28].

COVID-19 affects virtually every organ. It causes inflammation, endotheliitis, vasoconstriction, hypercoagulation and edema. Lymphocytopenia, elevated D-dimer, elevated fibrin degradation products, and widespread intravascular coagulation have been reported. Regardless of which organ or system is damaged, hyperactivity of the immune system is an acute reaction to withstand to both SARS-CoV-2 and acute radiation exposure [18, 29].

Physiological and pathological processes in different tissues can initiate production of Cytokines by eg. macrophages, mast cells, endothelial cells, and Schwann cells [8, 45]. Under normal conditions, cytokines have a short half-life and act as mediators. A complex communication network gives a healthy immune system the proper signals to respond in a proportionate response against an infectious agent or inflammatory stimulus [38]. A dramatic increase in cytokine levels triggers a cytokine storm, to which the body responds with acute systemic inflammation [39, 46]. The cytokine storm is common effect of SARS-CoV-2 infection and radiation exposure [37]; the result in both cases is the systemic

inflammation that injures numerous tissues and organs [24, 27, 31]. Further, in the review we will discuss some of pathologies resulting from Covid-19 and RAS diseases.

HEMATOPOIETIC DISORDERS

Hematology studies were found to be a valuable tool for assessing the status of COVID-19 patients. Assessment of neutrophils, lymphocytes, and platelets reveals a strong correlation between neutrophil-lymphocyte-platelet (NLP) and progression of COVID-19 disease [22]. Moreover, lymphocyte depletion is associated with COVID-19 severity. In addition, the number of T cells, eosinophils and platelets is significantly reduced in particularly critical and fatal patients [48]. Studies have shown that an increase in the neutrophil-lymphocyte ratio (NLR) is an early warning sign for severe COVID-19 [16, 19]. Lymphopenia and thrombocytopenia are commonly observed in hospitalized COVID-19 patients, and low platelet counts are associated with higher mortality [4, 44]. SARS-CoV-2 is thought to damage both bone marrow cells and platelets via the CD13 receptor, leading to cell growth inhibition and apoptosis. Another cause of thrombocytopenia is platelet activation, aggregation, and thrombus formation at the site of lung injury [9, 33].

As in COVID-19 patients, radiation exposure also causes profound hematologic disorders in humans characterized by granulocytopenia, lymphopenia, and thrombocytopenia [14, 25].

Unlike COVID-19, in addition to other cytopenias, a significant decrease in neutrophils is a hallmark of ARS [6]. The kinetics of lymphocyte decline is directly related to the dose of absorbed radiation from 0.5 to 10 Gy. In addition, a change in the ratio of neutrophils to lymphocytes was used to determine radiation dose exposure [32]. Thrombocytopenia is directly related to radiation dose [14].

VASCULAR DYSFUNCTION

Histological analysis of COVID-19 showed that SARS-CoV-2 infection causes endothelitis throughout the human body, leading to systemic macro- and microcirculatory dysfunction. VEGF-D (vascular endothelial growth factor –D involved in formation of lymphatic vasculature around lung bronchioles) is used as a procoagulant biomarker of COVID-19 progression [23], and angiopoietin-2 (marker of endothelial activation) is a marker of microvascular dysfunction. Disorders such as vascular thickening are also characteristic of COVID-19 disease [20].

Vascular dysfunction due to radiation exposure is also known. The main target of vascular radiation damage is the endothelial cell. The acute phase of the lesion occurs from the moment of irradiation to several weeks and is characterized by endothelial edema, decreased vascular permeability, lymphocyte adhesion and infiltration, and apoptosis [11].

Interestingly, many of the symptoms as well as the underlying pathogenesis in multi-organ damage caused by SARS-CoV-2 are similar to the multifaceted damage caused by exposure to acute ionizing radiation. In a nuclear incident, the entire human body can be damaged by large doses of ionizing radiation, and SARS-CoV-2 can cause multiorgan damage by interacting with cells whose membranes express angiotensin-converting enzyme 2- ACE2 and Type 2 transmembrane serine protease TMPRSS2 [3, 5]. Viruses reach cells as soon as viral spike protein binds to the ACE2. The virus uses endocytosis or fusion with the membrane to enter cells [17]. In both cases, it is necessary to cleave the ACE2-associated Spike protein with specific proteases in order for the Spike fusion domains to act. In endosomes, the spike is cleaved by cathepsin L, and then the viral membrane fuses with the endocytic membrane [21, 43]. On the cell surface, to ensure fusion of the virus and the host cell membrane, the spike digs into other proteases, mainly

TMPRSS2, after fusion, SARS-CoV-2 is transferred to the cytosol and the virus begins a replication cycle [40].

These proteins are expressed to varying degrees in airway and alveolar epithelial cells, pulmonary macrophages and vascular endothelial cells, ileum and large intestinal enterocytes. Systemic inflammation and coagulopathy, intravascular coagulation (DIC) and extracellular neutrophil counts are both signs of COVID-19 and signs of acute radiation damage. Injuries found in both COVID-19 and ARS can cause similar distant side effects in many organ systems [35].

OTHER COMPLICATIONS

Acute respiratory syndrome is the most common complication of COVID-19 and is the most common cause of death, while in irradiated patients it is a late effect, which often progresses to pulmonary fibrosis [7, 12, 15]. Although pulmonary symptoms are most common in COVID-19 patients, GI symptoms are also common [2, 47]. Nausea, vomiting and diarrhea are all common symptoms for both COVID-19 and irradiated patients [30, 36].

Another organ of concern is the heart. Although coagulopathy, seen in both COVID-19 and ARS, may contribute to cardiomyopathy and circulatory failure, direct remodeling of heart tissue is also seen in both disease processes [10, 42]. Cardiac ischemia, inflammation, fibrosis, and wall thickening have been reported in COVID-19 patients [41] and after irradiation, although dose-dependent and post-irradiation time. SARS-CoV-2 infection and radiation both increase myocardial infarction and most likely have long-term effects.

Central nervous system damage has been reported in patients with COVID-19 and ARS. Headache, disorientation, cognitive dysfunction, ataxia, seizures, unconsciousness, as well as other symptoms have been reported in patients receiving high-dose lethal radiation and in adult and juvenile COVID-19 patients [13].

In addition, there is some evidence that radiation exposure can cause long-term psychological problems [26] and given that, there are similarities between radiation and COVID-19-induced

central nervous system inflammation and coagulopathy, SARS-2 may cause long-term neurological and psychological effects [34]. Comparison of systemic damages caused by Covid-19 and acute radiation exposure Fig. 1 and Fig. 2.

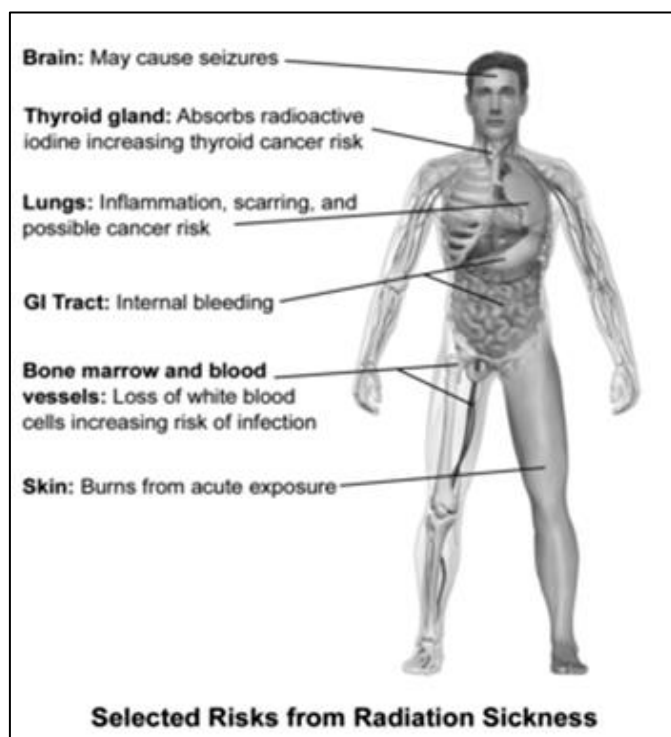


Fig. 1. Organs targeted by radiation: brain, thyroid gland, lungs, GI tract, bone marrow, blood vessels, skin.

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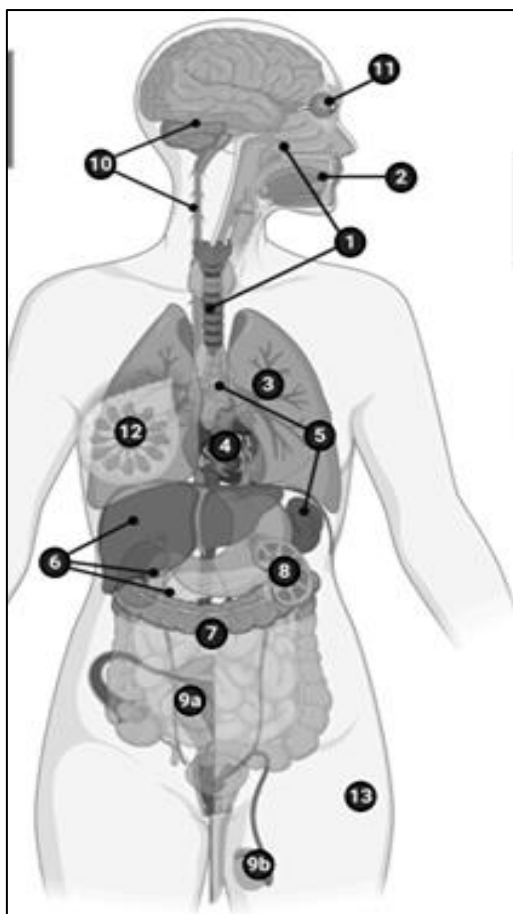


Fig 2. Organs targeted by of SARS-CoV-2: brain, thyroid gland, lungs, cardiovascular system, immune system, bone marrow etc. This figure was created with

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1-Upper airways, Mucus, Nasopharynx, Trachea ciliated epithelial cells; 2-Mouth, Sputum, Oropharynx; 3-Lungs, Bronchoalveolar lavage, Ciliated and secretory epithelial cells, Type I and II pneumocytes, Alveolar macrophages; 4-Cardiovascular system, Heart interstitial fibroblasts, Vessel endothelial cells; 5-Immune system, Blood, Lymph nodes, spleen; 6-Liver, gallbladder, Pancreas; 7-Gastrointestinal tract (GI), Stool, Stomach, Enterocytes; 8-Urinary system, Urine, Kidney tubular epithelial cells, podocytes; 9-9a. Female reproductive tract; 9b. Male reproductive tract, Testicular spermatogenic, Sertoli and Leyding cells; 10-Nervous system, Brain, Cerebrospinal fluid; 11-Eye, Tears, Conjunctiva; 12-Mammary glands, Breast milk; 13-Skin and adipose tissue

CONCLUSION

Presented review underlined some of the similarities of multisystem damages caused by Covid-19 infection and ARS. Mechanisms of immune dysregulation, disease progression, and organ damage during COVID-19 are similar to the biological reactions to high doses of ionizing radiation. A long-term and diversified study of ARS has identified the main targets of radiation exposure and developed ARS medical management strategies that can be successfully adapted to manage systemic lesions in patients with COVID-19. There is extensive experience in radiation biology for treatment of inflammation, pulmonary fibrosis, and vascular damage, and due to the symptomatic similarity between the two diseases (Covid-19 and RAS) the use of same methods for treatment may be appropriate. Moreover, versus, new treatment achievements considered for COVID-19 infections may be used for anti-radiation therapy.

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