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Clinical Features and Survival Analysis of Lupus Nephritis among Patients with Systemic Lupus Erythematosus: A Three-Decade-Long Retrospective Cohort Study

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Abstract: **Background/Objectives:** Lupus nephritis (LN) is one of the most severe organ manifestations of systemic lupus erythematosus (SLE). The aim of our retrospective cohort study was to compare the clinical characteristics, therapy, survival, causes of death, and prognostic factors of LN and non-LN lupus patients. Moreover, we compared a wide spectrum of clinical data of LN patients diagnosed before and since 2005 to determine any changes in disease course and outcomes. **Methods:** We assessed the clinical and laboratory data of 384 SLE patients, out of whom, 127 patients were diagnosed with LN between 1990 and 2020. **Results:** Based on our observations, discoid LE, subacute cutaneous LE, antiphospholipid syndrome, Sjögren's syndrome, and rheumatoid arthritis were more common in non-LN patients, while anemia and anti-RNP positivity were more frequent in LN patients. Development of LN did not affect survival rates, male sex, and presence of APS were negative prognostic parameters in the non-LN group while achieving remission was a positive prognostic factor in both groups. Death caused by sepsis was more prevalent in the LN group. Serositis and neurological manifestations occurred less frequently in LN patients diagnosed after 2005. The use of mycophenolate mofetil became more common, and the cumulative corticosteroid dose decreased. The SLICC Damage Index score also decreased. **Conclusions:** Our study demonstrated that the disease course has changed in recent years, and the main therapeutic goal in both SLE and lupus nephritis should be to achieve remission because this significantly improves long-term prognosis and patient survival.

Keywords: SLE; lupus nephritis; survival; remission; low disease activity



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1. Introduction

Systemic lupus erythematosus (SLE) is a chronic systemic autoimmune disease that affects multiple organs. The disease is characterized by the loss of self-tolerance with the activation of autoreactive T and B cells and the production of pathogenic autoantibodies against self-antigens. One of the most important steps in pathogenesis is the formation of immunocomplexes and their deposition in various tissues and organs. Immunocomplex deposition in kidney glomeruli is associated with lupus nephritis (LN), which is considered one of the most severe organ manifestations [1]. The prevalence of LN among SLE patients is about 35%, but according to literature data, it ranges from 12–69% in different populations. It is more common and more severe in Asian, African, and Hispanic SLE patients [2]. The development of end-stage renal failure is more common in SLE patients with kidney involvement, and the mortality rate is 5–8 times higher than in the average population [3–5]. LN usually appears in the first five years of SLE but may develop later. However, it can also be the first manifestation of SLE [1]. Several workgroups have confirmed that LN is

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