Ovarian cancer: An update on imaging in the era of radiomics

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Abstract

Tumor heterogeneity in ovarian cancer has been reported at the histological and genetic levels and are associated with adverse clinical outcomes. Tumor evaluation using standard computed tomography or magnetic resonance imaging techniques does not account for the intra- or inter-tumoral heterogeneity in advanced ovarian cancer with peritoneal carcinomatosis. As such, computational approaches in assessing tumor heterogeneity have been proposed using radiomics and radiogenomics in order to analyze the whole tumor heterogeneity as opposed to single biopsy sampling. As part of radiomics, texture analysis, which includes the extraction of multiple data from images has been proposed recently to evaluate advanced ovarian tumor heterogeneity. In this short review, we explain the basics of radiomics, how to perform texture analysis, and its applications to ovarian cancer imaging.

Index terms: Ovarian cancer; Radiomics; Texture analysis; Genomics; Advanced imaging

Introduction

Traditionally, radiologists subjectively evaluate clinical images based on their training and experience to provide a diagnosis or an assessment of a clinical state (e.g. treatment response evaluation). This approach introduces a high degree of variability in image interpretation. Tools for more automated imaging analyses have been tested, not only to reduce this variability, but to provide more objective clinically relevant information [1]. Furthermore, the role of computed tomography (CT) or that of magnetic resonance imaging (MRI) in cancer evaluation, especially in ovarian cancer is evolving. In the near future, a simple description of the tumor and its extent may not be sufficient when challenged regarding which molecularly-targeted drug to give or about early response to treatment and best timing for surgery [2, 3].

Radiomics has been introduced as an emergent tool for postprocessing CT or MR images and developing new quantification metrics linking qualitative and/or qualitative imaging data to clinical endpoints [4-10]. This may allow development of new biomarkers for diagnosis, prognosis and response evaluation [11, 12]. The term radiogenomics links imaging features with genomic data for the same purpose [13-17]. Initially, radiomics referred mainly to the extraction of multiple qualitative parameters assessed subjectively by a radiologist such as the presence of

tumor enhancement or tumor size [18]. In kidney cancer, for example, it was shown that mutations of VHL in clear cell type cancer were significantly associated with well-defined tumor margins, nodular tumor enhancement, and gross appearance of intra-tumoral vascularity at CT [18]. Recently, radiomics has embraced a more automated pathway with texture analysis (TA). TA is a form of radiomics which includes the extraction, analysis, and interpretation of quantitative features from medical images, leading to an exponential amount of data that can be correlated with tumor diagnosis, genomics and/or prognosis [19-31]. TA is of particular interest for the evaluation of tumor heterogeneity and has already demonstrated considerable potential in neuroradiology for lesion characterization [5, 32-34]. In renal cancer, TA has shown that features such as entropy and standard deviation were associated with histologic subtype and nuclear grade [35, 36]. Besides its correlation with histopathology, TA may also serve as a prognostic biomarker. In rectal cancer, T2-derived texture metrics extracted from the whole tumor volume have been shown to outperform the combination of T2- and diffusion-weighted images to assess complete response to therapy [37]. Ovarian cancer is a genomically diverse disease and such genomic and tumour microenvironment heterogeneity has been recently disease linked to platinum resistance [2]. Genomic evaluations performed by The Cancer Genome Atlas research group has shown large number of molecular alterations which may open new avenues to more targeted molecular based treatment [38-42]. The widespread disease associated with OC makes the evaluation of heterogeneity challenging both by single biopsy sampling and by traditional imaging tools. Therefore TA could be a potentially useful biomarker that allows assessment and quantification of tumor spatial heterogeneity and as such, better target the appropriate treatment in line with the tumor radiogenomic profile [3].

The purpose of this review is to describe how to perform TA, and discuss its current and potential applications in ovarian cancer imaging.

TA in ovarian cancer

Epidemiology

Ovarian cancer is the seventh diagnosed cancer among women in the world and epithelial type is the most predominant one [43, 44]. Ovarian cancer is subsequently divided into five major histopathology subtypes that differ in origin, pathogenesis, molecular alterations, risk factors,

and prognosis [45]. High-grade serous ovarian cancer (HGSOC), the focus of this review, is the most common histological subtype (representing 90% of ovarian cancers) with the least favorable prognosis [45]. Adjuvant or neoadjuvant treatment with platinum-based chemotherapy has response rates of 70–80 % but most patients have relapse and develop chemotherapy-resistant disease [46]. The five-year survival rate is less than 35% for patients with advanced ovarian cancer [46, 47]. As such, only marginal improvement in overall survival has been achieved over the past decades despite major medical advances. Recent data have shown that ovarian cancers have substantial molecular heterogeneity at presentation, which may explain drug resistance [2, 38-41, 48] Indeed, The Cancer Genome Atlas (TCGA) Research Network has performed copy number analysis, expression and methylation arrays, and exome sequencing of more than 18 500 genes in 489 cases of HGSOC [49, 50]. Nearly all tumors harbored a mutation in the p53 gene (TP53) as well as a large number of gene copy number alterations, which could explain this wide heterogeneity [50]. From this work, it was also found that *BRCA1/2* genes play a role in HGSOC, irrespective of germline status[51].

Additional work evaluating ovarian cancer heterogeneity at the genomic level has been done. Studies have shown that wide inter-tumoral heterogeneity exists at the genomic level between primary ovarian cancer and peritoneal implants [52-58]. Supporting these findings, a preliminary analysis of a small cohort of patients who underwent MRI examination has revealed that ovarian tumors and metastatic peritoneal implants are already phenotypically heterogeneous at the time of diagnosis [59]. In this study, including 22 patients, Sala et al. found significant differences in baseline apparent diffusion coefficient (ADC) values among primary ovarian cancer, omental cake and peritoneal deposits indicating for the first time that diffusivity profiles may be tumor-site dependent and suggesting the biologic heterogeneity of the disease for the first time on imaging[59].

Radiomics and radiogenomics:

Moving forward to the era of radiomics, radiogenomics analysis has been evaluated on ovarian cancer to correlate CT tumor phenotype with gene pattern and survival.

Qualitative analysis

Based on TCGA research network data, microarray-based transcriptomic profiles have been integrated as a prognostic algorithm for HGSOC known as classification of ovarian cancer (CLOVAR) [50]. Four prognostically relevant CLOVAR subtypes of HGSOC have been identified and labeled as: differentiated, immunoreactive, mesenchymal, and proliferative [60, 61]. Patients with mesenchymal subtype have a higher rate of platinum resistance (63%) compared with patients with other subtypes (23%), as well as shorter median survival (23 months for mesenchymal tumors vs. 46 months for other subtypes). Vargas et al. investigated the relationships between CT features and CLOVAR subtypes of HGSOC [62]. This study included 46 women with HGSOC, whose tumors were subjected to molecular analysis performed by TCGA [62]. Two readers independently evaluated multiple CT qualitative features of the primary ovarian tumor and sites of peritoneal carcinomatosis spread including location, shape, pattern of spread and implants size [62]. They found that CLOVAR mesenchymal subtype was significantly associated with higher risk of peritoneal involvement and the presence of mesenteric infiltration. In addition, they found that patients with HGSOC in whom mesenteric infiltration was identified on CT images had shorter progression-free survival and overall survival [62]. These results may explain the reported poorer prognosis of patients with the CLOVAR mesenchymal subtype of HGSOC [61]. More recently, those later results have been tentatively validated in a cohort of 92 patients with HGSOC with transcriptomic CLOVAR profiles [63]. Eight radiologists from the Cancer Genome Atlas Ovarian Cancer Imaging Research Group independently recorded multiples qualitative CT features. Similar associations were found between the extent of peritoneal involvement, time to progression, and CLOVAR subtypes. The presence of mesenteric infiltration as a poor prognostic factor in HGSOC was not validated in this study. One possible explanation is the poor interobserver agreement in the assessment of this feature (α = 0.23) [63]. Indeed, this study highlight as well the low interobserver reproducibility of some imaging features and the limits of subjective evaluation which in turn advocates for the potential benefits of automated or semiautomated analysis [63].

Concomitantly to CLOVAR analysis, radiogenomics evaluation has been performed in the context of BRCA gene alterations. BRCA 1 and BRCA 2 play both a major role in DNA repair [64-67]. Several studies have suggested that patients with BRCA-mutant HGSOC have improved survival compared to those with BRCA wild-type HGSOC [68-78]. More favorable

prognosis of BRCA-mutant HGSOC has been linked to a greater sensitivity to platinum chemotherapy in primary and recurrent disease, as well as to unique tumor biology that confers survival advantage regardless of chemotherapy sensitivity [68, 71, 73-78]. In a study including 108 patients, Nougaret et al. evaluated multiples qualitative CTs phenotypic tumor features that could explain the different behavior of these mutations [79]. These authors found that certain CT features of HGSOC differ based on the *BRCA* mutation status. Nodular peritoneal carcinomatosis implants pattern and presence of peritoneal disease in gastrohepatic ligament were associated with *BRCA*-mutant HGSOC at multiple regression analysis [79]. On the opposite, infiltrative peritoneal disease pattern, presence of mesenteric involvement, and supradiaphragmatic lymphadenopathy were associated *BRCA*-wildtype HGSOC. Those results are in line with histopathologic data that found peritoneal deposits with rounded or "pushing" contours associated with BRCA-mutant HGSOC, whereas BRCA wild-type HGSOC show infiltrative peritoneal implants [80-82]. It can be hypothesized that nodular type disease found in BRCA mutant HGSOC might achieve higher rate of complete cytoreductive surgery compared to infiltrative ill-defined disease found in BRCA wild-type HGSOC and this might explain the higher overall survival. However, statistical significance was not reached in Nougaret et al. study and larger cohort studies will be needed.

Quantitative analysis

As previously discussed, the subjective assessment of qualitative features may be limited by a poor interobserver reproductivity. In the study of Vargas et al., the interobserver agreement (between 8 readers) for the shape of the peritoneal disease (diffuse, no peritoneal disease, nodular, peritoneal enhancement only, predominantly diffuse, predominantly nodular) was only 0.353 [63]. As such, TA may decrease the variability of visual interpretation and may be of interest in the evaluation of ovarian cancer. In a study including 38 patients, Vargas et al. developed 12 quantitative metrics to capture spatial inter-site imaging heterogeneity in HGSOC [83]. The authors found that of the 12 inter-site texture heterogeneity metrics evaluated, those capturing the differences in texture similarities across sites were associated with shorter overall survival (inter-site similarity entropy, similarity level cluster shade, and inter-site similarity level cluster prominence; $P \leq 0.05$) and incomplete surgical resection (similarity level cluster shade, inter-site similarity level cluster prominence and inter-site cluster variance) [83]. On the

opposite, the total number of disease sites and overall tumor volume was associated with overall survival. Those results suggest that TA may provide added value in the evaluation of patients with HGSOC, beyond the traditional evaluation of the sole peritoneal disease extent. They are in line with genetic data that have shown different mutational landscapes between primary ovarian lesions and peritoneal implants [60, 61]. Rizzo et al. evaluated whether CT radiomics features alone or combined with clinical data were associated with residual tumor at surgery in 101 patients with HGSOC and where able to predict the risk of disease progression within 12 months [84]. TA was performed on the primary ovarian tumor only. The authors found that radiomic features related to mass size, randomness and homogeneity were associated with residual tumor. Compactness1 below the median (in link with mass size), GrayLevelCooccurenceMatrix25/0-1InformationMeasureCorr2 below the median (representing the degree of randomness within the mass) and GrayLevelCooccurenceMatrix25/-333-1InverseVariance above the median (representing mass homogeneity) were associated with a higher risk of residual tumor after surgery [84]. The authors found as well that the risk of progression at 12 months was associated with three radiomic features. At multivariate analysis, F2 shape/ Max3DDiameter (in link with tumor size) was the single feature significantly associated with progression at 12 months. Adding this radiomic feature to a clinically based model significantly increased prediction of progression at 12 months by 14% (AUC = 0.73 for clinical model vs. 0.87 for clinical radiomic model) [84]. Based on these studies, it has been hypothesized that TA may serve as a new biomarker for patient selection for effective new therapies in the coming years, as well as anticipation of treatment resistant lesions (Figure 1).

How to perform TA?

To date, TA is not available for standard practice and usually requires in house developed software, although commercially available options are emerging. In this following chapter, we will briefly review the required steps to perform TA.

A post processing software is needed, either a commercially available tool or an in-house design, most of which are CT or MRI vendor neutral. As a post processing method, TA can be performed retrospectively and be briefly described in seven main steps below [85, 86].

Image acquisition

Image acquisition can be performed on the multiple modalities, e.g MRI, CT or PET scanner.

Image filtration

Images can be further filtered in order to reduce the noise, which an important issue with CT. Most of the heterogeneity on the CT images are due to photon noise, masking actual tissue heterogeneity [87]. The use of filters is therefore useful to reduce photon noise and improve tumor heterogeneity measurement [88]. These filters consist in methods of discretization that could be absolute or relative and the optimal number of level of grey for CT studies has been established by a recent consensus [89]. Of note, no consensus exists for MR imaging to date.

Image segmentation

For further analysis, tumor segmentation is a critical step. Region of interest (ROI) or volume of interest (VOI) are used to define the region in which features are calculated. This can be done manually, semi-automatically or automatically by dedicated software. Semi automatically methods are better than manually methods to optimize reproducibility of the different parameters extracted [90]The choice of the ROI or VOI is critical as it influences the quantification of the subsequent features [91]. Care to avoid contamination of the ROI/VOI by adjacent structures is mandatory.

Image interpolation:

TA requires interpolation to isotropic voxel spacing to be rotationally invariant, and to allow comparison between image data from different samples and cohorts. Voxel interpolation affects image feature values as many image features are sensitive to changes in voxel size. Maintaining consistent isotropic voxel spacing across different measurements and devices is therefore important for reproducibility. Different interpolation algorithms have been proposed to perform image interpolation[92].

Image re-segmentation

Image re-segmentation is an optional step that may be performed to remove voxels from the intensity mask that fall outside of a specified range. An example is the exclusion of voxels with Hounsfield units indicating air and bone tissue in the tumour ROI within CT images, or low activity areas on positron emission tomography/CT images.

Feature extraction

Various methods can be employed such as structural, model-based, statistical or frequency methods [93]. The statistical method is the most used for TA [85]. Radiomics features extracted by statistical methods during the sixth step, are divided into several order statistics that differ in the description of the gray level distribution in the image:

Shape parameters related to the description of 2D or 3D shape of the lesion.

First-order statistics (or intensity histogram) is related to the frequency distribution of the pixel intensity inside the ROI. The intensity-based statistical features describe how grey levels within the ROI are distributed. It includes common statistics what can be extracted from the histogram such as: mean, standard deviation, variance (measure the histogram width deviation around the mean), skewness (measure the asymmetry of the histogram around the mean). First-order histogram analysis does not account for the location of the pixels and lacks any reference to the spatial interrelationship between gray values (Figure 2).

Second-order statistics (or texture based features) characterize spatial relationships between pixels and are measured primarily from matrices such as co-occurrence matrices (e. g., gray level co-occurrence matrix [GLCM]) [92]. Those matrices evaluate the particular relationship between a pixel with a certain gray level with another pixel of another gray level, and this in the whole ROI and for all the pixels [85]. GLCM calculation is explained in Figure 3. Texture features computed from the GLCM consist of: energy (a measure of the amount of grey level variation within a given region), entropy (measurement of randomness or disorder in the distribution of signal intensities, variation), homogeneity (the uniformity in the distribution of co-occurrent intensity pairs), and contrast (a measure of variation in the distribution of co-occurrent intensity pairs).

Higher-order statistics examine location and relationships between three or more pixels and evaluate features such as contrast, coarseness, and busyness. Higher-order features have the advantage of evaluating voxels in their local context, taking the relationship with neighboring voxels into account.

Analysis

Finally, between 50 and 5000 features are extracted. This large number needs to be reduced by feature qualification to select only the features that are informative, reproducible on other similar studies and not redundant [92]. Many methods exist and may be classified into three categories: *i*), filtration methods for selecting parameters according to their strengthen and repeatability occurring during the different segmentation performed for example and according their non redundancy; *ii*) transformation methods for combining several parameters obtained in new ones including the analysis in main component or in descriptive component; *iii*) classification methods which may be supervised (proballistic tree or support vector machine SVM for examples) or unsupervised (K-means clustering for example).

There are multiple methods of selection and classification. Indeed, Pamar et al. have studied 14 selection methods and 12 methods of classification applied on 440 parameters extracted from on a series of 464 CT examinations performed for lung cancers [94]. Complex multivariate statistical analysis was required to select the most accurate classification based on its AUC [92].

Challenges and limitations of TA

TA is still an emergent tool and its implementation in daily busy routine practice will requires optimization and standardization of each step [95]. For now, multiple platforms either commercially available or in-house applications have been used but their reproducibility need to be tested [91]. TA process from type of segmentation to the different features extracted vary widely across different platforms and studies, making the comparison and reproducibility of their results difficult [91]. Recently, an international panel of researchers have published a white paper regarding definitions and recommendations for methods used in radiomics studies [89].

Currently, no uniform measurement or reporting standards exist. Some authors have

proposed a practice standardization to establish which texture features are most helpful, general thresholds for what constitutes a heterogeneous lesion, and guidelines for imaging parameters for given texture features and thresholds to overcome this wide variability between studies [92].

Another major challenge is the huge amount of data produced by TA. The investigation of various features from a single dataset may increase the risk of type I error and as such lead to false results. A meta-analysis of multiple PET TA studies demonstrated that after applying a statistical correction, significant results were no longer found in many of the studies evaluated [96]. Use of statistical corrections, such as Holm-Bonferroni sequential correction, or validation datasets may be helpful for confirming the veracity of identified associations [96].

Finally, and particularly for ovarian cancer, large volume disease means time consuming manual segmentation. For now, automated software to segment the whole tumor burden are not available and as such disease areas need to be manually segmented which preclude routine evaluation. Manual segmentation requires delineation of tumor per slice; particularly time consuming in large and irregularly shaped tumors and challenging in case of infiltrative disease. A preliminary study, using an automated segmentation approach in rectal cancer has shown promising results [97]. Future work will focus on the development of complete automated post processing methods enabling the extraction of maximal information from the images with the added challenge to demonstrate a clinical benefit in the assessment of tumor response.

Conclusion

Subjective extraction of multiple qualitative parameters has shown a link between phenotypic CT features and gene pattern in ovarian cancer with the limitation of relatively poor interobserver agreement. Quantitative analysis using TA is challenging but has shown promising results regarding tumor heterogeneity on CT and patient outcome. Although many issues need to be addressed before implementation in clinical practice, TA will allow radiologists to obtain additional and more robust imaging data from studies that are already being performed and which could be combined with qualitative features. In the era of artificial intelligence these types of features could be incorporated into decision-support or computer-aided diagnosis tools to predict tumor aggressiveness and response to therapy.

Conflict of interest

The authors have no conflicts of interest to disclose

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FIGURE LEGENDS

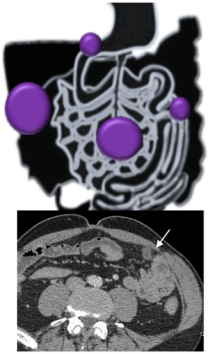
Figure 1. Drawing summarizing advances in research in ovarian cancer radiomics.

Figure 2. First-order statistical-based CT texture parameters. Plot of the pixel histogram, where the x-axis represents gray-level values and the y-axis represents the frequency of occurrence. First-order parameters include the mean of the histogram (vertical red line), standard deviation ang 95 of the histogram (horizontal blue line). When the distribution has a larger tail to the left, the skew is negative (and the skew is positive when the tail is larger to the right). The term kurtosis designates how pointy or smooth the curve is compared to a normal distribution (right). Kurtosis describes the peakedness of the pixel histogram. A pointier or more peaked histogram is seen with positive and progressively higher kurtosis values (right).

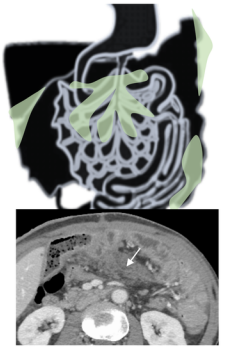
Figure 3. Second-order statistical-based texture parameters. (a) and (b) show diagrams of two different gray-scale images. Each of the square contains the same number of different shade-of-grey "pixels," so the first-order texture features and pixel histograms are nearly identical for these two images. However, second-order texture features that take into account pixel location and relationship to adjacent pixels, such as gray-level co-occurrence matrix are different between these two images. The grey- scales of the image can be represented by discrete values (c). The gray-level co-occurrence matrix measures the frequency with which each type of pixel occurs in the horizontal, vertical, and oblique planes adjacent to all other pixels (d). The number of co-occurrences of pixel pairs for a given search window are counted and a grey level co-occurrence matrix is established.

Subjective Radiomics Analysis: Qualitative DATA

Phenotypic association between CT features and Gene alterations



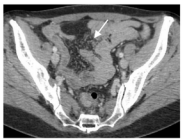
BRCA +
Nodular pattern and lower risk of mesenteric involvement



BRCA -
Infiltrative pattern and higher risk of mesenteric involvement

Nougaret et al, Radiology 2017

CLOVAR
Mesenchymal subtype
Diffuse peritoneal disease and mesenteric tethering



Vargas et al, Radiology 2015

Objective Radiomics Analysis: Quantitative DATA with Texture analysis

Inter-Site (Spatial) Tumour Texture Heterogeneity May Predict Outcome Irrespective of CLOVAR Gene Signature

Inter-tumoral Heterogeneity evaluation using texture analysis and an inter-site similarity matrix

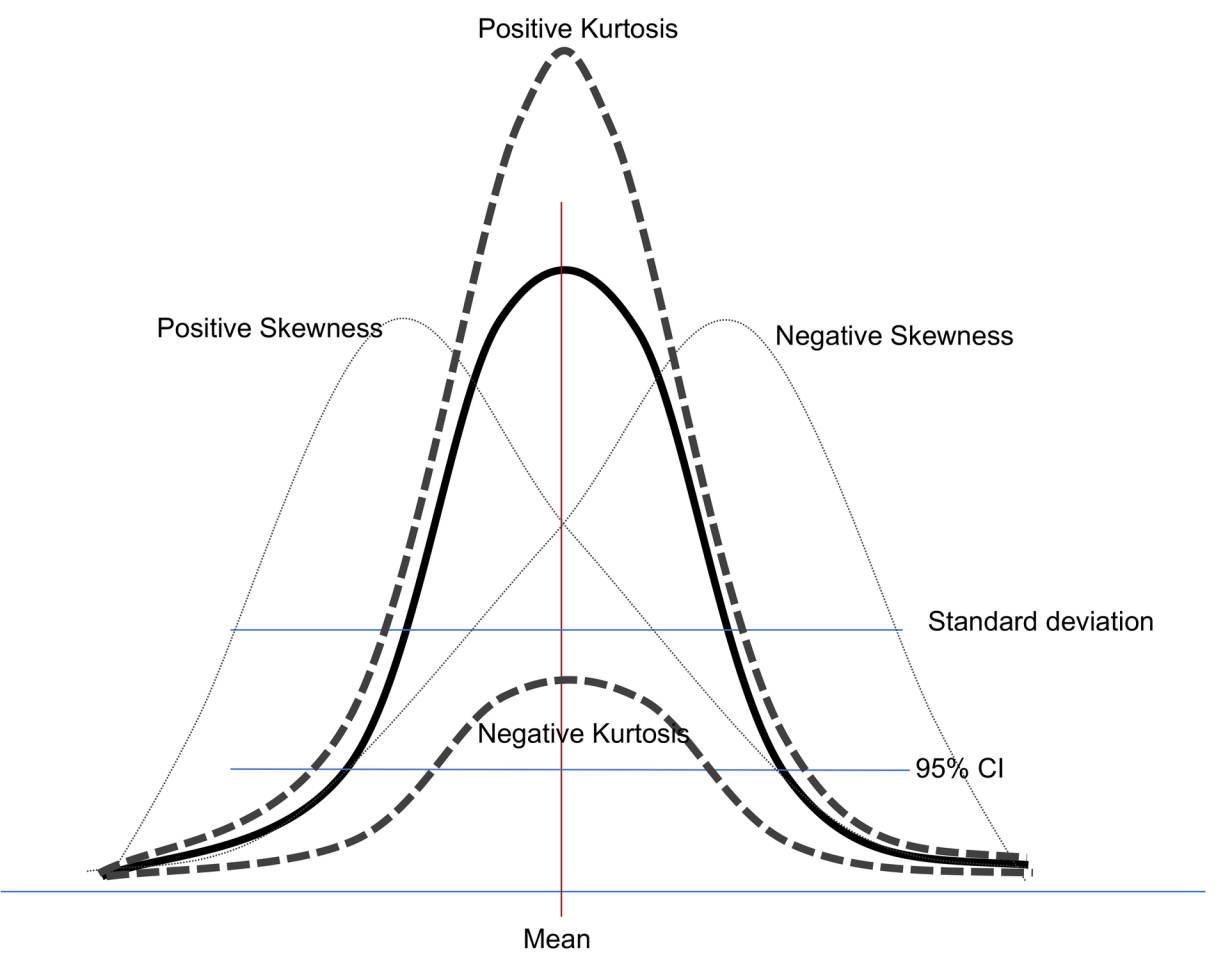
Patient with fewer inter-site dissimilarities have a better outcome regardless their CLOVAR gene signature

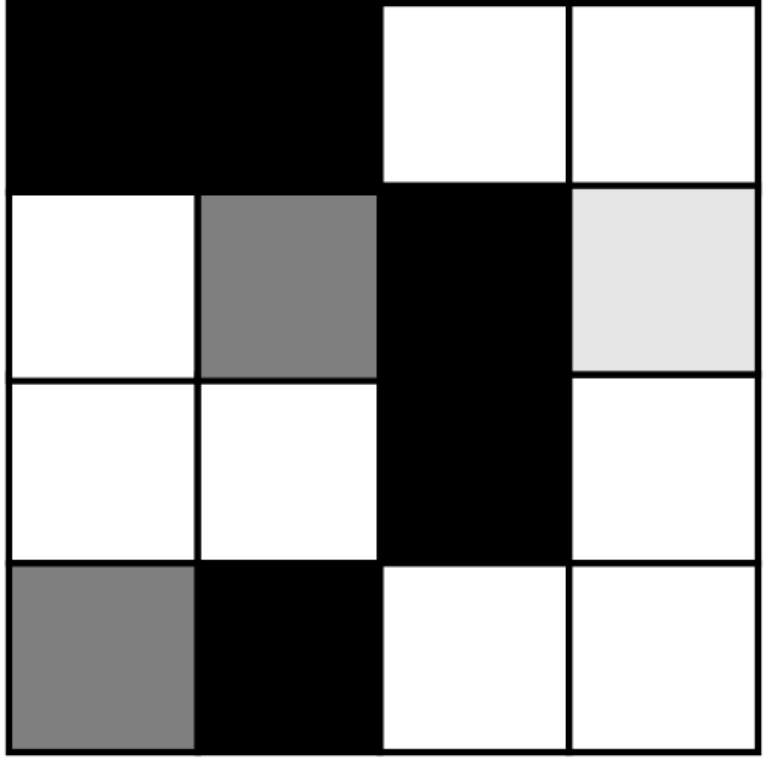
Patient with higher inter-site dissimilarities have a poorer outcome regardless their CLOVAR gene signature

Vargas et al, European Radiology 2017

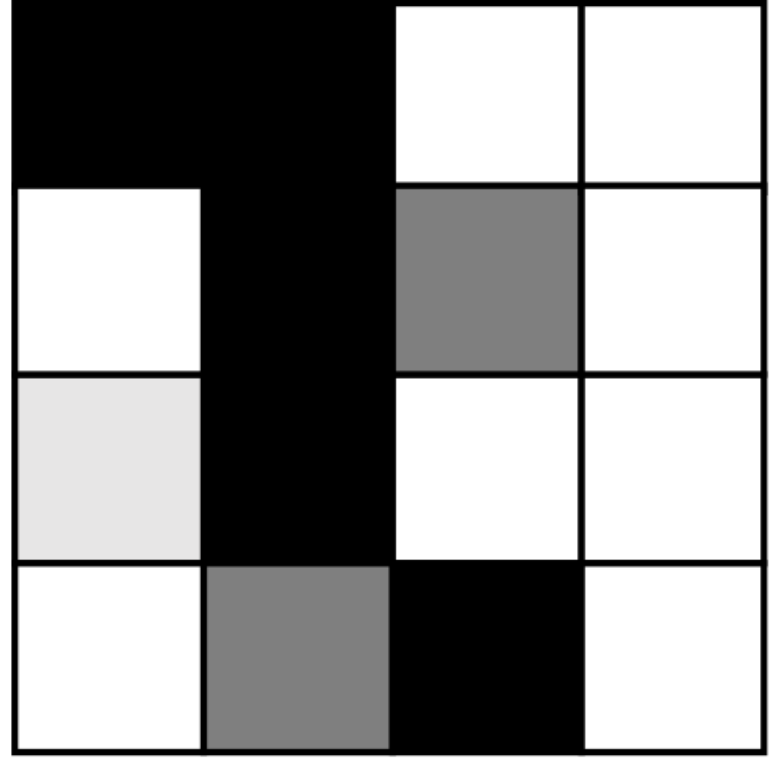
- Radiomic features related to ovarian mass size, randomness and homogeneity were associated with residual tumor at surgery
- A model including clinical and radiomic features performed better than only-clinical model to predict progression of the disease at 12 months

Rizzo et al, European Radiology 2018


Positive Kurtosis
Positive Skewness
Negative Skewness
Standard deviation
Negative Kurtosis
95% CI
Mean



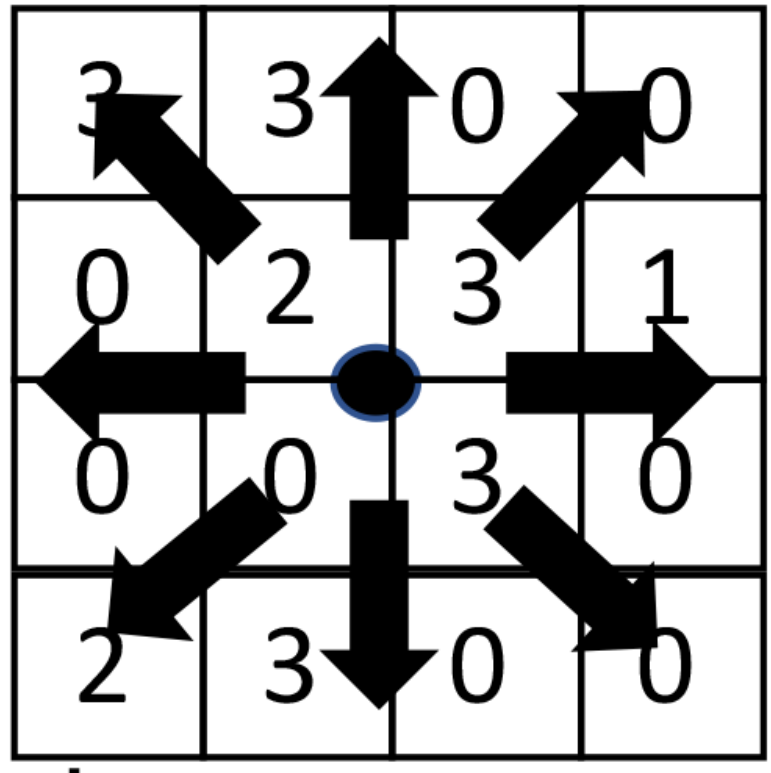
a



b

3	3	0	0
0	2	3	1
0	0	3	0
2	3	0	0

c



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