Abstract

Objective: To assess the incidence trends of oesophageal adenocarcinoma and cardia carcinoma in Asian countries based on published literature.

Method: Medical literature was searched by using MEDLINE (1991 to 2011). Latest incidence data were obtained from the website of the International Agency for Research on Cancer.

Results: In the Asian countries squamous cell carcinoma (SCC) remains the most common oesophageal carcinoma. In the East Asian region, although the incidence of oesophageal adenocarcinoma (OAC) is relatively high, each country appears to have different incidence trends of OAC. In most of these countries relative incidence trends of cardia carcinoma (CC) appear to follow those of OAC, regardless of the direction of the trend. CC and gastric non cardia carcinoma (GNCC) have opposing trends.

Conclusion: These observations support the hypothesis that aetiology of CC and GNCC are different. In South Asian countries, published data are not adequate to comment on the incidence trends of OAC and CC.

Key words: Oesophagus, carcinoma, adenocarcinoma, cardia, gastro-oesophageal junction, incidence, trends, Asia

Introduction

Squamous cell carcinoma (SCC) has been the most common tumour in the oesophagus with adenocarcinoma coming second, a long way behind the former. However, a steady rise in the incidence of oesophageal adenocarcinoma (OAC), with declining incidence of SCC, has been reported in North America and Western Europe, since the 1970s. Presently, OAC has taken over SCC to become the most common oesophageal cancer, in North America and in some countries of Western Europe (1,2,3,4). In the USA the relative incidence of OAC has risen from 23.9% to 161% during 1976 - 2007 (SEER Cancer statistics). The aetiology of OAC is different. The aetiology of OAC is different.
aetiology of OSCC is uncertain and factors such as, tobacco smoking, consumption of alcohol and hot beverages have been implicated (5,6,7). However the aetiopathogenesis of OAC is well established and is as follows; gastro-oesophageal reflux induced damage in the oesophageal squamous epithelium leading to cardiac metaplasia of the oesophagus leading to intestinal metaplasia of cardiac mucosa of the esophagus (Barrett oesophagus) leading to increasing dysplasia leading to adenocarcinoma (8,9,10,11,12). Barrett oesophagus significantly increases the risk of OAC development (8,11,12). Therefore, it is important to recognize the rising trend of OAC to strengthen surveillance for Barrett oesophagus in patients with gastro-oesophageal reflux disease (GORD). The prevalence of GORD is higher in the West (10-20%) compared to Asia (<5%) (13).

The rising incidence of cardia carcinoma (CC) similar to OAC has been observed in North America and Western Europe (4,14,15). In the USA, OAC and CC are the most rapidly increasing malignancies (14). However the incidence of gastric non cardia carcinoma (GNCC) shows a decreasing trend in these countries. Clinically and aetiologically too CC and gastro-oesophageal junctional carcinoma have been shown to have similarities to OAC as opposed to GNCC (15,17,18,19,20,21,22).

Objective
To analyse the incidence trend of OAC and CC in Asia based on published data.

Materials and Methods
A MEDLINE search was done for period 1991 to 2011. The latest incidence data were obtained from the web site of the International Agency for Research on Cancer (IARC) (3). Selection of countries for the review was based on the availability of relevant data over a sufficiently long period of time to discern incidence trends. In the absence of published data, incidence trend in Sri Lanka was analysed using data from the National Cancer Control Programme. West Asia was excluded due to marked differences in socioeconomic and ethnic profiles. The indicators used to demonstrate the trends were, relative incidence of OAC and relative incidence of CC. These indicators were calculated by using data from reviewed articles. The relative incidence of OAC was calculated by dividing the incidence of OAC by the incidence of OSCC. The relative incidence of CC was calculated by dividing incidence of CC by incidence of GNCC. Both indicators were given as percentages (ie. multiplied by one hundred).

Results
In Asia, SCC remains the most common oesophageal cancer and the incidence of OAC is lower than in the West (3). The current incidence of OSCC and OAC of several selected countries representing different geographic regions of Asia together with two Western countries, for comparison, is shown in table 1. Higher relative incidence rates of OAC are noted in major cities associated with higher living standards. Therefore, the national average of OAC incidence rates for India, Pakistan, the Philippines and China could be lower than those shown in table 1. The incidence trends of OAC and CC in each country selected for the review are as follows; Singapore, is a multiethinic country with rapid economic development and adaptation of western like lifestyle. A classic example of rising incidence of OAC, similar to those observed in the West several decades back, is observed in Singapore.
Fernandes et al have reported opposing incidence and the overall relative incidence of OAC has risen from 0.3% to 15% (Fig 1) (23). Deans et al have reported opposing incidence trend of CC and GNCC during 1968 - 2007, and the relative incidence of CC has risen from 6.7% to 19.3% (Fig 2).

Taiwan and South Korea, with higher socioeconomic standards in Asia, the relative incidence of OAC and CC has not changed significantly (25, 26, 27). The actual incidence of CC and GNCC has also not changed significantly in both countries (25, 26, 27). In Taiwan, the relative incidence of OAC has been 3.8% to 2.9% during 1970-1999 and relative incidence of CC 6.6% to 7.4% during 1991-2000 (26, 27).

Japan, although the actual numbers of the OAC appeared to have increased, there are no marked changes in the relative incidence of OAC. The relative incidence of OAC in Japan, reported in several studies are as follows; 1.2% to 1.3% during 1973-1997; 3.5% to 4.3% during 1993-2001; 2.6% to 1.5% during 1980-94 (28, 29, 30). Kusano et al showed a rising incidence of adenocarcinoma involving the gastro-oesophageal junction from 2.3% to 10% during 1963 – 2005 (31). Opposing incidence trends of CC and GNCC have been a consistent finding in Japan, according to Blaser et al the relative incidence of CC has risen from 0.4% to 4.7% during 1969-97 (30, 32) (Fig 2).

**China**, a study carried out in Zhejiang Province, shows a rising incidence of both

<table>
<thead>
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<th>Country</th>
<th>OSCC</th>
<th>OAC</th>
<th>Relative OAC</th>
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<tr>
<td></td>
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<td>Female</td>
<td>Male</td>
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<tr>
<td>India (Chennai)</td>
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<tr>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Singapore</td>
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<td>Korea</td>
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<tr>
<td>Japan (Osaka Prefecture)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Israel</td>
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<td>Bahrain</td>
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<tr>
<td>USA (SEER data)</td>
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<td>3</td>
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<td>UK (East England)</td>
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Table 1. Age-standardized incidence rates (W)/100,000 of OSCC and OAC and relative incidence of OAC (Source: cancer incidence in five continents volume IX)
OSCC and OAC, with stable relative incidence of OAC, viz, 1.1% to 1.9% from 1970 to 2001 (33). In Cixian county, where very high incidence of OSCC and CC are reported, ASR (per 100,000) of CC has increased significantly from 13.8 to 28.6 for males and from 7.1 to 12.9 for females during 1988-2003 (34). However, the incidence trends of the histological types of oesophageal carcinoma have not been addressed in this study. In Gansu province, increased incidence of proximal gastric carcinoma and declining incidence of gastric antral carcinoma has been reported during 1993-2004 (35). However, being a large country with significant geographical variations in living standards and life styles, China has varied incidences of OSCC, OAC and CC in different regions. Therefore, these studies carried out in different provinces are not comparable.

**Hong Kong**, is a region with high socioeconomic standards in Asia, and the relative incidence of OAC has been reported to be higher than in most other East Asian countries (36). However, in Hong Kong, ASR of both OSCC and OAC has decreased with a drop in relative incidence of OAC, from 10.5% to 6% during 1984-2003 (36) (Fig 1). Epidemiological studies on CC in Hong Kong could not be found in the literature.

**India**, published data depicting trends of OAC and CC are limited in South Asia. One Southern Indian population shows a higher incidence of OSCC with steady lower incidence of OAC; the relative incidence of OAC has been 8.3% to 8.5% during 1989-2004 (37). However, another study in Southern India shows a progressive increase in incidence of OAC involving the gastro-oesophageal junction during 1985-2004 (38).

**Sri Lanka**, data from the National Cancer Control Programme (NCCP) shows that SCC is the most common type of oesophageal carcinoma. The incidence of OSCC has not shown a significant change in the trend. However, the incidence of OAC has progressively increased during 2000-2005 (Fig 3a). The relative incidence of OAC has increased

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**Fig 1. Relative incidence trends of OAC**

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**Sri Lanka**, data from the National Cancer Control Programme (NCCP) shows that SCC is the most common type of oesophageal carcinoma. The incidence of OSCC has not shown a significant change in the trend. However, the incidence of OAC has progressively increased during 2000-2005 (Fig 3a). The relative incidence of OAC has increased
from 8% to 14% during this period (Fig 3b). The Incidence data of the histological types of oesophageal carcinoma are available in NCCP only from year 2000. The incidence of CC is unknown in Sri Lanka. However, there has been a drop in the ASR of oesophageal carcinoma and a small but progressive increase in the ASR of gastric carcinoma during 1995–2000 (Fig 4).

Asian oesophageal cancer belt, which spans from the Caspian littoral of Iran across Afghanistan, Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, Turkmenistan, and into northern China, has some of the highest incidence of OSCC in the world, and OAC of the gastric cancers, the site was not specified in NCCP data for 2005. Therefore, it is not possible to draw conclusions on the incidence of CC in Sri Lanka.

**Fig 2. Relative incidence trend of CC**

It is important to investigate whether or not this rise in gastric cancer incidence is due to increasing incidence of CC. However, in 88.8%
remains low in these regions (3,39). Published data regarding the incidence trends of OAC and CC are not available for these countries.

Discussion
In the reviewed East Asian countries trends of OAC have not been similar (Fig 1). The typical rising pattern of OAC that was observed during the early part of the OAC epidemic in the West is seen only in Singapore. In Hong Kong, a declining trend of OAC is observed. Others have not shown marked differences in the incidence trends (Fig 1). Although the reasons for these observations are not readily apparent, it should be noted that socioeconomic and cultural features are more varied and complex in these countries than in the West. Despite improved socioeconomic status and adaptation of western like life styles, these East Asian countries have also maintained their local cultures and traditional life styles. This mixture of traditions and behavior, perhaps combined with different genetic profiles, may be responsible for observed differences in OAC trends. On the other hand, Singapore being a multi ethnic society appears to be more westernized than the rest of the East Asian countries. The socio economic standards and cultural features of South Asia are different from those of East Asia. Data from the South

Fig 3b. Incidence of histological types of oesophageal carcinoma in Sri Lanka from 2000 to 2005.
The trend of relative incidence of OAC remains low in these regions (3,39). Published data regarding the incidence trends of OAC and CC are not available for these countries.

Fig 4. Age standardized incidence rates (W)/100,000 for oesophageal and gastric carcinoma in Sri Lanka from 1985 to 2005
Indian population show steady incidence of OAC during the study period. The observed fluctuations in the relative incidence of OAC (Fig 1) are due to changes in the incidence of OSSC. Although there is a rising trend of OAC in Sri Lanka, the observed time period may be inadequate to draw conclusions. In all reviewed East Asian countries the relative incidence trends of CC appear to follow those of OAC regardless of the direction (Fig 2). However, it should be noted that the parameters used to measure the two trends are different. In most of these countries, CC and GNCC have shown opposing trends. Similar incidence trends of CC, OAC and GNCC have also been observed in North America and Western Europe (4,14,15). These observations support the hypothesis that aetiopathogenesis of CC and GNCC are different.

There is controversy as to whether cardia carcinoma (CC) and junctional carcinoma are oesophageal or gastric in origin. Aetiologically, there are studies suggesting that, unlike in the distal stomach, intestinal metaplasia and adenocarcinoma in the cardia are not related to Helicobacter pylori infection (18,19,20,21). Furthermore, several studies have produced evidence to suggest that adenocarcinoma arising in the lower oesophagus, gastro-oesophageal junction and cardia is one disease entity of oesophageal origin and is aetiologically related to GORD (9,10,18,21,22). Chandrasoma et al have proposed that the cardia, which is lined by non-specialized columnar epithelium (cardiac mucosa), is the dilated distal part of the oesophagus due to GORD induced damage (11,12,40,41). According to this hypothesis, The aetiopathogenesis of CC is similar to OAC and CC arises in the dilated distal oesophagus which anatomically appears as the proximal most part of the stomach (11-13,21,22,40). Further supporting this hypothesis, the gene expression profile of intestinal metaplasia of the cardia has been shown to be similar to Barrett oesophagus and different to intestinal metaplasia of the distal stomach (42).

**Conclusion**

In the Asian countries SCC remains the most common oesophageal carcinoma. In the East Asian region, although incidence of OAC is relatively high, each country appears to have different incidence trends. In most East Asian countries, the relative incidence trends of CC appear to follow those of OAC, regardless of the direction of the trend and opposing trends are observed between CC and GNCC. These observations support the hypothesis that aetiopathogenesis of CC and GNCC are different. In South Asian countries, published data are not adequate to comment on the incidence trends of OAC and CC.

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**References**


