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Novel Biomarkers for Early Detection of Diabetic Nephropathy

Franca Jones*

Department of Biophysical Microstructures, University of Nuclear Physics, Poland

INTRODUCTION

Diabetic Nephropathy (DN) is a leading cause of Chronic Kidney Disease (CKD) and End-Stage Renal Disease (ESRD) worldwide. Early detection is crucial to prevent disease progression and improve patient outcomes. Traditionally, albuminuria and estimated Glomerular Filtration Rate (GFR) have been the primary markers for DN diagnosis. However, these markers have limitations, as structural kidney damage can precede detectable albuminuria. Novel biomarkers offer a promising approach for earlier and more accurate detection. This article explores emerging biomarkers with potential clinical applications in detecting diabetic nephropathy at an early stage. NGAL is a small protein released by tubular epithelial cells in response to kidney injury. Elevated levels in urine and plasma have been associated with early tubular damage in DN, even before the onset of albuminuria. Studies suggest NGAL can predict the progression from normal albuminuria to microalbuminuria, making it a valuable early marker. KIM-1 is an epithelial transmembrane protein expressed in response to kidney damage. It plays a role in the regeneration process of injured renal tubules. Increased urinary KIM-1 levels have been observed in patients with diabetes before any significant decline in renal function, highlighting its potential as a sensitive marker for DN onset.

DESCRIPTION

Cystatin C is a low-molecular-weight protein that is freely filtered by the glomerulus and reabsorbed by the proximal tubules. Unlike creatinine, cystatin C is less affected by muscle mass, diet, or age, making it a more reliable marker for early kidney dysfunction. Research indicates that rising cystatin C levels precede albuminuria and decline in eGFR, suggesting its utility in detecting subclinical DN. Podocytes play a critical role in maintaining glomerular filtration barrier integrity. Podocin and nephrin are structural proteins of podocytes, and their increased urinary excretion reflects early podocyte injury, a hallmark of DN. Studies have linked elevated levels of these proteins to the progression of DN, even in patients with normal albuminuria. These pro-inflammatory cytokines are involved in kidney inflammation and fibrosis. Elevated levels have been correlated with early DN development. A marker of oxidative DNA damage, 8-OHdG levels in urine and plasma are higher in diabetic patients and may indicate early oxidative stress-related renal injury. The incorporation of these novel biomarkers into routine clinical practice could revolutionize DN management. Early detection allows for timely interventions, such as optimized glycemic control, Renin-Angiotensin-Aldosterone System (RAAS) inhibition, and lifestyle modifications, which can slow disease progression. However, further large-scale studies and validation in diverse populations are necessary to establish standardized cut-off values and improve diagnostic accuracy.

CONCLUSION

Novel biomarkers, including NGAL, KIM-1, cystatin C, podocyte proteins, and inflammatory markers, provide promising tools for the early detection of diabetic nephropathy. Their integration with traditional markers may enhance risk stratification and facilitate earlier interventions, ultimately improving patient outcomes. Continued research and clinical trials are needed to translate these findings into widespread clinical practice. Elevated levels have been correlated with early DN development. A marker of oxidative DNA damage, 8-OHdG levels in urine and plasma are higher in diabetic patients and may indicate early oxidative stress-related renal injury. The incorporation of these novel biomarkers into routine clinical practice could revolutionize DN management.

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CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The author declares there is no conflict of interest in publishing this article.

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Corresponding author Franca Jones, Department of Biophysical Microstructures, University of Nuclear Physics, Poland, E-mail: jonesf@gmail.com

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