

CLINICAL PHARMACOGENOMICS: TRANSLATING GENETIC VARIATION INTO INDIVIDUALIZED DRUG THERAPY

R. KALYANI^{1*}, B.VARALAKSHMI¹, K.SIRISHA¹, P.HARINI¹, V.C.RANDEEP RAJ²¹Student, Avanthi Institute of Pharmaceutical Sciences, Vizianagaram.²Associate Professor, Avanthi Institute of Pharmaceutical Sciences, Vizianagaram.

*CORRESPONDING AUTHOR

R. Kalyanai

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ABSTRACT

Clinical pharmacogenomics (PGx) is an emerging component of precision medicine that examines how inherited genetic variation influences an individual's response to medicines. Genetic differences affecting drug-metabolizing enzymes, transporters, receptors, immune pathways and therapeutic targets can contribute to interindividual variability in drug efficacy, toxicity and pharmacokinetics. Integration of pharmacogenomic information into clinical practice can therefore support selection of appropriate medicines, individualized dosing and prevention of avoidable adverse drug reactions. Important gene–drug associations include CYP2C19–clopidogrel, CYP2D6–codeine and antidepressants, CYP2C9/VKORC1–warfarin, TPMT/NUDT15–thiopurines, DPYD–fluoropyrimidines and HLA-B*57:01–abacavir. Clinical implementation is supported by evidence-based resources and guidelines developed by organizations such as the Clinical Pharmacogenetics Implementation Consortium (CPIC), the Dutch Pharmacogenetics Working Group (DPWG), PharmGKB and regulatory agencies. However, challenges involving test accessibility, cost, interpretation, healthcare professional education, electronic health record integration, reimbursement, ethical considerations and population diversity continue to limit widespread implementation. Recent developments in pre-emptive panel testing, clinical decision-support systems and standardized genotype-to-phenotype interpretation are facilitating broader integration of PGx into healthcare. This review discusses the principles, clinical applications, implementation strategies, benefits and limitations of clinical pharmacogenomics and highlights its potential role in individualized and safer pharmacotherapy.

Keywords: Clinical pharmacogenomics, pharmacogenetics, precision medicine, personalized medicine, pharmacogenomic testing, adverse drug reactions, genotype-guided therapy, pharmacogenomic biomarkers.

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1. INTRODUCTION

The response to a medicine varies considerably among individuals even when the same drug and dose are administered for the same clinical condition. Differences in age, sex, organ function, concomitant medications, disease status, adherence and environmental factors contribute to this variability. Genetic variation represents another important determinant of drug response and can influence drug absorption, distribution, metabolism, excretion, pharmacodynamic activity and susceptibility to adverse drug reactions (ADRs) [1].

Pharmacogenomics refers broadly to the study of how variations in the genome influence drug response, whereas pharmacogenetics traditionally emphasizes the relationship between individual genetic variants and drug effects. In clinical practice, these concepts support the identification of patients who may require an alternative medicine, altered dose or additional monitoring.

The objective of clinical pharmacogenomics is not simply to identify genetic variants but to translate clinically meaningful genetic information into an actionable therapeutic decision. Current regulatory and clinical resources recognize pharmacogenomic information in relation to drug exposure, therapeutic response, adverse-event susceptibility and genotype-specific dosing [2].

The increasing availability of genetic testing and the development of standardized clinical guidelines have accelerated the movement of PGx from research laboratories toward routine patient care. Nevertheless, implementation remains heterogeneous across healthcare systems [3].

2. GENETIC BASIS OF VARIABILITY IN DRUG RESPONSE

Genetic variation may occur as single-nucleotide variants, insertions, deletions, copy-number variations, structural variants or combinations of variants forming specific haplotypes. The functional consequences of these variants depend on the gene involved and the biological pathway affected.

Pharmacogenomic genes can broadly be categorized into:

1. Drug-metabolizing enzymes
2. Drug transporters
3. Drug targets and receptors
4. Immune-related genes
5. Genes associated with drug toxicity

Cytochrome P450 enzymes such as **CYP2D6**, **CYP2C19** and **CYP2C9** are among the best-characterized pharmacogenes. Genetic variation can result in different metabolic phenotypes, commonly described as poor, intermediate, normal or ultrarapid metabolizers. These phenotypes may alter systemic drug concentrations and consequently influence efficacy or toxicity [4].

For example, CYP2D6-mediated metabolism is relevant to several drugs. Individuals with reduced CYP2D6 activity may have increased exposure to certain active drugs, whereas ultrarapid metabolism of prodrugs such as codeine can increase formation of active metabolites and potentially increase toxicity risk.

3. MAJOR CLINICAL APPLICATIONS

3.1 CYP2C19 and Clopidogrel

Clopidogrel is an antiplatelet prodrug requiring metabolic activation. CYP2C19 genetic variation influences the formation of its active metabolite. Patients with reduced-function CYP2C19 alleles may have decreased activation of clopidogrel and consequently reduced platelet inhibition.

This represents one of the important examples of pharmacogenomics influencing cardiovascular pharmacotherapy. Clinical guidelines provide genotype-based recommendations that can assist clinicians in selecting an alternative antiplatelet strategy when clinically appropriate [5].

3.2 CYP2D6 and Opioid Therapy

CYP2D6 genetic variation can affect the metabolism of several analgesics and psychotropic medicines. Codeine, for example, requires conversion to morphine for part of its analgesic effect. Patients with markedly reduced CYP2D6 activity may experience inadequate analgesia, whereas individuals with very high CYP2D6 activity may generate greater quantities of morphine.

Therefore, CYP2D6 genotype can be clinically relevant when certain CYP2D6-dependent medicines are prescribed, particularly where alternative therapeutic options are available [6].

3.3 CYP2C9, VKORC1 and Warfarin

Warfarin has a narrow therapeutic index and exhibits substantial interindividual variability in dose requirements. Variants in **CYP2C9** influence warfarin metabolism, while variants in **VKORC1**, the pharmacological target of warfarin, influence sensitivity to the drug.

Genetic information can therefore contribute to estimation of an individual's dose requirement, alongside clinical variables such as age, body size, interacting medicines and comorbidities [7].

However, genotype is only one determinant of anticoagulant response, and clinical monitoring remains essential.

3.4 TPMT and NUDT15 with Thiopurines

Thiopurine medicines such as azathioprine and mercaptopurine can cause severe myelosuppression in susceptible individuals. Variants affecting **thiopurine S-methyltransferase (TPMT)** and **nudix hydrolase 15 (NUDT15)** can reduce the capacity to handle thiopurine metabolites and increase toxicity risk.

Current CPIC recommendations incorporate both TPMT and NUDT15 genotype information into thiopurine dosing decisions [8]. The relevance of NUDT15 is particularly important because the frequency of clinically important variants differs among populations.

This example illustrates why pharmacogenomic implementation should consider genetic diversity rather than relying exclusively on data derived from a limited number of ancestral groups.

3.5 DPYD and Fluoropyrimidines

Fluoropyrimidines, including 5-fluorouracil and related medicines, are widely used in oncology. Variants in the **DPYD** gene can reduce dihydropyrimidine dehydrogenase activity and increase the risk of severe or potentially life-threatening toxicity.

DPYD-guided treatment represents an important application of pre-treatment pharmacogenomic assessment because identifying susceptible patients can allow clinicians to consider dose modification or alternative therapy when appropriate [9].

3.6 HLA-B*57:01 and Abacavir

Abacavir-associated hypersensitivity is strongly associated with the **HLA-B*57:01** allele. Genetic testing before treatment has become a classic example of pharmacogenomics being used to prevent a serious immune-mediated adverse reaction.

The FDA's pharmacogenomic resources include HLA-associated information for abacavir and other drugs where genomic biomarkers have clinical or regulatory relevance [2, 9].

4. PHARMACOGENOMIC TESTING STRATEGIES

Two major approaches to clinical PGx testing are **reactive testing** and **pre-emptive testing**.

Reactive testing

Reactive testing is performed when a specific drug is being considered or prescribed. For example, a clinician may order a pharmacogenomic test when a patient is about to receive a medicine associated with a clinically actionable gene–drug interaction.

Advantages include targeted testing and avoidance of unnecessary testing. However, waiting for the result may delay treatment when laboratory turnaround time is substantial.

Pre-emptive testing

Pre-emptive testing involves testing patients before a specific pharmacogenomic decision is required. Multiple pharmacogenes may be assessed using a panel, with clinically relevant results stored for future use.

Recent reviews indicate that pre-emptive panel testing has considerable potential because many patients may carry at least one actionable pharmacogenetic variant. However, questions concerning cost-effectiveness, test selection, data interpretation and identification of populations most likely to benefit remain important [10].

5. ROLE OF CPIC AND OTHER EVIDENCE-BASED RESOURCES

Clinical implementation requires more than identification of a statistically significant genetic association. Clinicians need clear guidance explaining how a genetic result should influence treatment.

The **Clinical Pharmacogenetics Implementation Consortium (CPIC)** develops genotype-based prescribing guidelines designed to help clinicians translate available genetic results into therapeutic decisions. CPIC guidelines use standardized approaches for genotype interpretation, evidence evaluation and clinical recommendations [11].

Other important resources include the **Dutch Pharmacogenetics Working Group (DPWG)** and **PharmGKB/ClinPGx**. Differences may occur among guidelines because organizations may evaluate evidence using different methodologies, populations and clinical assumptions [12].

The FDA also maintains tables describing pharmacogenomic biomarkers and pharmacogenetic associations relevant to drug labeling. Importantly, the presence of an association in an FDA resource does not necessarily mean that testing is mandatory before prescribing every corresponding drug; the clinical meaning depends on the individual drug label, evidence and clinical circumstances [2, 12].

6. CLINICAL DECISION SUPPORT AND ELECTRONIC HEALTH RECORDS

One of the major developments in clinical PGx is integration with **electronic health records (EHRs)** and clinical decision-support systems.

A pharmacogenomic result can be stored as a structured, reusable clinical data element rather than remaining as a laboratory report. When a clinician subsequently prescribes a relevant medicine, the electronic system can identify the gene–drug interaction and provide an evidence-based recommendation.

Modern implementation programs increasingly focus on standardized reporting, machine-readable recommendations and integration of pharmacogenomic information with medication ordering systems [13].

This approach is particularly valuable for pre-emptive testing because genetic information may remain clinically relevant for many years and can potentially inform multiple future prescribing decisions.

7. BENEFITS OF CLINICAL PHARMACOGENOMICS

Clinical pharmacogenomics may provide several potential benefits:

- Reduction in preventable ADRs.
- Improved probability of therapeutic response.
- Individualized drug selection.
- Optimization of drug dosage.
- Reduction of therapeutic trial-and-error.
- Identification of patients at increased risk of toxicity.
- Improved medication safety.
- Potential reduction in healthcare utilization associated with adverse drug reactions.
- Support for precision medicine.
- Generation of clinically useful information for future prescribing.

Clinical PGx programs have been implemented in academic medical centers, hospitals and other healthcare settings, with evidence indicating potential benefits in medication safety and treatment optimization [14].

However, the magnitude of benefit varies according to the drug, genetic marker, clinical setting, testing strategy and quality of implementation.

8. CHALLENGES IN CLINICAL IMPLEMENTATION

Despite scientific advances, several challenges continue to restrict widespread implementation.

8.1 Cost and accessibility

The cost of genetic testing, laboratory infrastructure and interpretation may represent barriers, particularly in resource-constrained healthcare systems. Although sequencing and genotyping costs have decreased substantially, total implementation costs also include informatics, personnel, quality assurance and clinical education [3, 14].

8.2 Interpretation of genetic results

A genetic variant does not automatically translate into a clinically meaningful prescribing decision. Genotype must be translated into a predicted phenotype and then interpreted in the context of the relevant drug, disease and patient characteristics.

Standardization is particularly important for genes such as CYP2D6, where differences in genotype-to-phenotype interpretation can lead to inconsistent clinical classifications [15].

8.3 Healthcare professional education

Doctors, pharmacists, nurses and laboratory professionals require sufficient knowledge to understand genetic reports and communicate their implications to patients.

Pharmacists may have an important role in medication selection, dose optimization, interpretation of PGx reports and monitoring of treatment outcomes.

8.4 Electronic health record integration

Without appropriate EHR integration, pharmacogenomic results may be overlooked when a relevant medicine is prescribed. Successful implementation therefore requires clinical decision-support systems capable of delivering appropriate information at the point of prescribing.

8.5 Ethical and privacy concerns

Genetic information has implications extending beyond the immediate therapeutic decision. Patients may have concerns about privacy, data security, potential discrimination and secondary use of genetic information.

Appropriate consent, secure storage, controlled access and transparent communication are essential components of responsible PGx implementation.

8.6 Population diversity

Many pharmacogenomic studies have historically included populations that do not adequately represent global genetic diversity. Consequently, the performance of some genetic tests or interpretation algorithms may vary among populations [3, 15].

This is particularly important for countries such as India, which contain substantial genetic diversity. Expansion of pharmacogenomic research involving diverse Indian populations is therefore important for developing evidence that is applicable to local healthcare settings.

9. Pharmacogenomics in the Indian Healthcare Context

India has a large and genetically diverse population and a substantial burden of chronic diseases, cardiovascular disorders, cancer and infectious diseases. Pharmacogenomics could potentially contribute to individualized therapy in these areas.

However, implementation in India requires consideration of several practical factors, including availability of validated testing laboratories, affordability, clinician awareness, genetic counselling, regulatory frameworks, data protection and population-specific evidence.

Developing institutional PGx programs in teaching hospitals could provide opportunities for collaborative research involving clinical pharmacists, pharmacologists, physicians, geneticists, laboratory scientists and bioinformaticians.

A practical Indian implementation model could begin with a limited number of well-established actionable gene–drug pairs rather than attempting universal genomic testing immediately. Such an approach could facilitate development of laboratory capacity, clinical workflows and healthcare-professional expertise.

10. Future Perspectives

The future of clinical pharmacogenomics is likely to involve integration of genomic information with other clinical and biological data. Rather than considering genotype independently, future precision-medicine systems may combine pharmacogenomic information with age, organ function, disease phenotype, drug interactions, therapeutic drug monitoring and other biomarkers.

Artificial intelligence and machine learning may further support interpretation of complex genomic and clinical datasets. However, computational predictions require appropriate validation and should complement rather than replace clinically validated evidence.

Pre-emptive pharmacogenomic testing is also receiving increasing attention. A recent review concluded that evidence increasingly supports pre-therapeutic PGx panel testing for drugs covered by established guidelines, while emphasizing the need for additional evidence concerning cost-effectiveness and identification of patients who derive the greatest benefit [10, 16].

Recent implementation literature also indicates that several historical barriers have been reduced, while challenges involving equity, evidence standards, reimbursement, test quality, EHR integration and education remain [17-18].

Thus, the next stage of clinical pharmacogenomics will depend not only on discovering additional gene–drug relationships but also on establishing sustainable healthcare systems capable of converting genomic information into timely clinical action [19-20].

11. CONCLUSION

Clinical pharmacogenomics represents an important transition from conventional population-based prescribing toward individualized pharmacotherapy. Genetic variation can influence drug metabolism, pharmacological response and susceptibility to serious adverse reactions, creating opportunities for genotype-informed drug selection and dosing. Clinically established examples involving CYP2C19, CYP2D6, CYP2C9, VKORC1, TPMT, NUDT15, DPYD and HLA-B demonstrate that pharmacogenomic information can have practical therapeutic implications. The availability of CPIC and DPWG guidelines, PharmGKB/ClinPGx resources and regulatory pharmacogenomic information provides an increasingly structured foundation for implementation. Nevertheless, clinical PGx requires appropriate testing, interpretation, professional education, EHR integration, ethical safeguards and evidence relevant to diverse populations. The future of pharmacogenomics will therefore depend on successful translation of genomic discoveries into accessible, evidence-based clinical workflows. When appropriately implemented, PGx can become an important component of medication optimization, supporting safer and more individualized pharmacotherapy.

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13. CONFLICT OF INTEREST

Not applicable

14. INFORM CONSENT AND ETHICAL DECLARATIONS

Not Applicable

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