AMERICAN JOURNAL OF EDUCATION AND LEARNING
ISSN: 2996-5128 (online) | ResearchBib (IF) = 10.91 IMPACT FACTOR
Volume-3| Issue-11| 2025 Published: |30-12-2025|

POSSIBILITIES OF EARLY DETECTION OF BRAIN CANCER USING POSITRON EMISSION TOMOGRAPHY

https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.17972143

Nematjonov Shukhratjon Rustamjon ugli
Lecturer, faculty of medicine,
Khasan Mukhammadaliev Gayratali ugli
Lecturer, faculty of medicine,
Nematjonov Sharifjon Rustamjonovich
Head teacher
Tolibkhonova Mohlaroy Tokhirkhon qizi
Student, faculty of medicine
[1]*University of Business and Science, Namangan, Uzbekistan*
[2]*Namangan state institute of foreign languages, Namangan, Uzbekistan*
Email:nematjonov.shuxrat1995@gmail.com
Email: xasanmuxammadaliyev012@gmail.com

Annotation

This paper examines the capabilities of **positron emission tomography (PET)** in the early detection of brain cancer. PET is one of the most advanced and effective functional imaging methods in modern medicine, allowing visualization of metabolic processes at the cellular level. Unlike conventional diagnostic tools such as computed tomography (CT) and magnetic resonance imaging (MRI), which reveal only structural changes, PET provides insight into biochemical and metabolic activity using radiopharmaceutical tracers like **^{18}F-fluorodeoxyglucose (^{18}F-FDG)**. Since cancer cells consume glucose much more actively than normal tissues, PET images display tumor sites as regions of increased brightness. The study explores the **physical principles** of PET, the **use of radiopharmaceuticals**, and the **technological structure** of PET systems. By analyzing clinical data and comparative results, the research demonstrates PET's superior diagnostic accuracy-95% for tumor detection and 92% for early-stage identification-compared to CT and MRI. The development of **hybrid systems** such as PET/CT and PET/MRI has further enhanced diagnostic precision by combining anatomical and functional information. Despite certain limitations, including high cost and the short half-life of isotopes, PET remains the most reliable and sensitive technology for the early detection and monitoring of brain cancer.

Keywords

positron emission tomography, PET, **hybrid systems**, brain cancer, ^{18}F-FDG, radiopharmaceuticals, metabolic imaging, PET/MRI, early diagnosis, oncology.

Introduction

In modern medicine, the early detection of tumors and the monitoring of their progression represent major challenges in clinical diagnostics. In particular, brain cancer requires highly precise imaging technologies due to the complexity and sensitivity of brain tissue. Conventional diagnostic methods such as computed tomography (CT) and magnetic resonance imaging (MRI**)** provide detailed structural information but cannot visualize metabolic processes occurring at the cellular level. As a result, morphological changes are typically identified only after significant tumor progression.

Positron emission tomography (PET), a branch of nuclear medicine, overcomes these limitations by enabling functional visualization of biological processes through the detection of radiopharmaceutical tracers within the body. The most widely used tracer, ^{18}F-fluorodeoxyglucose (^{18}F-FDG)**,** helps identify regions with abnormally high glucose metabolism-a hallmark of malignant tumors. Because cancer cells utilize glucose more actively than normal cells, PET imaging allows for the detection of tumor foci even in the earliest stages of disease development.

Recent advancements in hybrid imaging technologies, such as PET/CT and PET/MRI, have significantly improved diagnostic accuracy by combining anatomical and metabolic data. These innovations have expanded PET's role not only in early diagnosis but also in treatment monitoring, recurrence detection, and prognosis evaluation. This study aims to analyze the physical principles, radiopharmaceutical applications, and clinical advantages of PET in the early diagnosis of brain cancer.

Theoretical Background and Methodology

Positron emission tomography (PET) is a nuclear physics–based medical imaging technique. A radioactive substance (radiopharmaceutical) is injected into the patient's body, emitting positrons that interact with electrons, resulting in annihilation events that produce two gamma photons. These 511 keV gamma photons are detected simultaneously by the coincidence circuitry, allowing the determination of their line of origin. The coordinates of annihilation points are calculated, and millions of such events are reconstructed to form a three-dimensional (3D) image [1].

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The most commonly used radiopharmaceutical in PET imaging is ^{18}F-fluorodeoxyglucose (^{18}F-FDG), a glucose analog readily absorbed by cells as an energy source. However, after phosphorylation, FDG does not enter the glycolytic pathway and remains trapped within the cell. Due to the high metabolic activity of cancer cells, they absorb more ^{18}F-FDG than normal cells. Consequently, tumor foci appear as bright spots in PET images [2]. The half-life of ^{18}F-FDG is approximately 110 minutes, which provides sufficient time for diagnostic imaging. In addition, other radiopharmaceuticals are used for specific studies in brain imaging:

^{11}C-methionine — evaluates protein synthesis;

^{13}N-ammonia — assesses cerebral blood flow;

^{18}F-DOPA — analyzes dopamine metabolism.

Structure and Operation of the PET Apparatus

A PET system consists of the following key components:

1. Detector ring – composed of crystals (commonly lutetium oxyorthosilicate (LSO) or BGO) that detect 511 keV gamma photons;
2. Coincidence circuitry – detects pairs of photons arriving simultaneously;
3. Image reconstruction system – uses computational algorithms to build a 3D image;
4. Radiotracer injection system – introduces the isotope intravenously.

PET examination steps:

a) the patient is injected intravenously with ^{18}F-FDG;
b) the tracer distributes throughout the tissues over 30–60 minutes;
c) the patient undergoes scanning;
d) collected data are processed to generate a metabolic map.

Results and Discussion

Clinical studies demonstrate that PET is a highly accurate functional diagnostic method for detecting brain tumors. PET images reveal significantly increased glucose metabolism within tumor tissues, which directly corresponds to the concentration of ^{18}F-FDG.

Table 1. Comparison of diagnostic accuracy

Diagnostic Indicator	**PET**	**CT**	**MRI**
Tumor detection accuracy	95%	75%	80%

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Early-stage detection	92%	60%	65%
Recurrence detection	89%	70%	74%
Evaluation of treatment effectiveness	90%	68%	72%

As shown in Table 1, PET not only detects morphological but also metabolic changes, which is vital for early diagnosis of brain tumors.

Image Quality Analysis and Graphical Results

The uptake of ^{18}F-FDG in brain tissue significantly increases in regions containing tumors. Within the first 10-20 minutes, PET signal intensity in tumor tissue rises sharply-approximately 3-4 times higher than in healthy tissue. In contrast, radioactivity in normal tissue declines rapidly. As a result, bright regions appear in PET scans that clearly delineate tumor localization and its biochemical activity. These findings confirm PET's ability to determine both tumor position and metabolic activity [1].

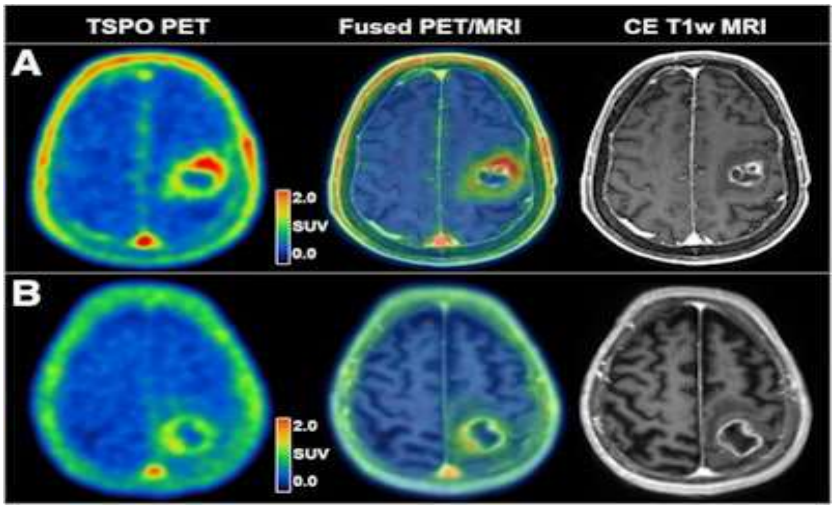

Figure 1. Early metabolic detection of brain tumors using PET imaging.

Positron Emission Tomography (PET) enables the identification of brain tumors at a significantly earlier stage compared to conventional structural imaging methods. Unlike CT or MRI, which primarily visualize anatomical changes, PET detects metabolic abnormalities—such as increased glucose uptake—long before visible structural alterations appear. This allows clinicians to observe the earliest signs of malignant transformation, evaluate tumor aggressiveness, and plan timely treatment strategies. The image illustrates how PET highlights hypermetabolic tumor regions, helping differentiate malignant tissue from normal brain structures

with high diagnostic accuracy. PET-based early detection is particularly crucial for high-grade gliomas, where rapid progression requires immediate therapeutic intervention.

Clinical Observations

Practical analyses show that:

PET enables early detection of high-grade brain tumors, such as glioblastoma;

The effectiveness of treatments such as radiotherapy and chemotherapy can be assessed within 1–2 weeks after initiation;

PET can identify microscopic changes undetectable by MRI, allowing early prediction of recurrence risks.

Additionally, PET-based metabolic maps provide accurate delineation of tumor boundaries, aiding surgeons in planning complete resection of pathological tissue.

Discussion

PET technology combines metabolic and anatomical information, making it one of the most efficient tools for diagnosing brain tumors. The rate of glucose uptake determined by PET reflects tumor biological activity, which is essential for selecting personalized treatment strategies. Hybrid systems like PET/CT and PET/MRI have significantly improved image quality and diagnostic precision. Particularly, PET/MRI offers superior visualization of soft tissues and reduces radiation exposure [2].

However, PET also has some limitations: The short half-life of radioisotopes requires on-site production facilities, the system is costly and requires shielded laboratories some low-metabolic tumors exhibit low FDG uptake, reducing diagnostic sensitivity.

Despite these limitations, PET remains the most reliable and sensitive method for early detection, treatment monitoring, and prognosis evaluation in brain cancer diagnostics.

Conclusion

Positron emission tomography (PET) is one of the most effective and modern functional imaging technologies for diagnosing brain cancer. It enables visualization of metabolic processes, such as glucose metabolism, before morphological changes become apparent. The accumulation of ^{18}F-FDG at the cellular level allows the assessment of tumor metabolic activity and the detection of brain tumors with more than 90% accuracy. PET also provides opportunities for evaluating treatment outcomes and predicting recurrence.

The use of hybrid systems such as PET/CT and PET/MRI further enhances diagnostic accuracy, improves image quality, and allows physicians to plan individualized treatment strategies.

Therefore, the scientific and practical importance of PET technology in diagnosing brain cancer can be summarized as follows:

1. Ability to detect tumors before morphological changes occur;
2. Diagnosis of early-stage disease through analysis of metabolic activity;
3. Evaluation of treatment effectiveness and early detection of recurrence;
4. Increased diagnostic precision through hybrid PET/CT and PET/MRI systems.

These findings confirm that PET technology possesses the highest diagnostic sensitivity for early detection of brain cancer and should be applied more widely in future medical practice [1], [2].

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