



Prediction of optimal debulking surgery in ovarian cancer

Yong Jung Song^{1,2}

¹Department of Obstetrics and Gynecology, Pusan National University Yangsan Hospital, Yangsan, South Korea; ²Research Institute for Convergence of Biomedical Science and Technology, Pusan National University Yangsan Hospital, Pusan National University School of Medicine, Yangsan, South Korea

Correspondence to: Yong Jung Song, MD. Department of Obstetrics and Gynecology, Pusan National University Yangsan Hospital, Yangsan, South Korea; Research Institute for Convergence of Biomedical Science and Technology, Pusan National University Yangsan Hospital, Pusan National University School of Medicine, 20, Geumo-ro, Mulgeum-eup, Yangsan-si, Gyeongsangnam-do, 50612, South Korea. Email: gynsong@gmail.com.

Abstract: The mainstay management of advanced ovarian cancer is maximal cytoreductive surgery followed by chemotherapy. Neoadjuvant chemotherapy (NACT) and interval debulking surgery (IDS) are alternative treatments for patients with comorbidity, poor performance status, and predicted for suboptimal debulking surgery. It is the invariable principle in any situation that no residual disease after the completion of surgery is useful for patients with ovarian cancer. Therefore, the prediction of optimal debulking before the treatment of ovarian cancer is of utmost importance. Many studies have reported on the use of serum biomarkers, such as cancer antigen 125 (CA125) or human epididymis 4 (HE4), and imaging studies, such as computed tomography (CT), diffusion-weighted magnetic resonance imaging (DW-MRI), and positron emission tomography (PET)/CT, to identify adequate surgical candidates for primary debulking surgery (PDS). Laparoscopy has also been studied as a reliable tool for the prediction of optimal debulking. Here, we summarize a review of the related literature.

Keywords: Ovarian cancer; optimal cytoreduction; prediction

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Introduction

Advanced ovarian cancer is the second most common female genital malignancy globally, with a 5-year survival rate ranging from 30% to 50% (1). Primary debulking surgery (PDS) and taxane-platinum combination chemotherapy are standard methods of management of epithelial ovarian cancer (EOC) (2,3). Many studies have reported that the significant prognostic factor for survival is the size of postoperative residual disease (4-6). Generally, optimal cytoreduction has been defined as the largest diameter of residual disease of less than 1 cm (3). Currently, no macroscopic residual disease (R0 resection) has incremental benefits over residual disease under 1 cm (7). Suboptimal surgery has a negative effect on survival, so treatment strategies to avoid unnecessary surgery should be considered (2,8). If complete cytoreduction is considered impossible or has unacceptable preoperative

morbidity, neoadjuvant chemotherapy (NACT) followed by interval debulking surgery (IDS) could be an alternative option according to the results of two landmark phase III clinical trials [European Organization for Research and Treatment of Cancer (EORTC) 55971 and primary chemotherapy versus primary surgery for newly diagnosed advanced ovarian cancer (CHORUS) trial] (9,10). If optimal debulking is predicted, PDS should be performed preferentially, but with the probability of sub-optimal debulking, NACT and IDS should be considered (11). Therefore, prediction of patients who are not feasible to achieve optimal debulking is important. Many investigations have been conducted to identify factors that most accurately predict patients who will be good candidates for optimal cytoreduction after PDS. However, there are no accurate and broadly used indications for NACT (12,13). Tumor markers, hematologic indicator, radiologic images, and diagnostic laparoscopy have been applied to predict optimal

debulking surgery in various studies. In some studies, high levels of tumor markers such as human epididymis 4 (HE4) and cancer antigen 125 (CA125) have been used as predictors of suboptimal debulking surgery (12,14,15). In several studies, large amount of ascites, liver parenchymal metastases, suprarenal lymphadenopathy, porta hepatis metastases, involvement of the mesentery root of the small bowel, lesser sac involvement, and diaphragmatic disease on computed tomography (CT) scan findings were reported as predictors for suboptimal debulking (3,16,17). Diagnostic laparoscopy might be useful for the direct visualization of tumor extension and more precise prediction of tumor resectability (8,18,19). However, there is no consensus on accurate prediction for optimal debulking surgery in patients with ovarian cancer. Here, we present a review of studies dealing with the various criteria used to evaluate optimal debulking in advanced EOC.

Tumor marker and hematologic parameters

CA125 and HE4

One of the most studied markers used in the prediction of optimal debulking in advanced ovarian cancer is CA125. Suidan *et al.* reported CA125 of at least 600 U/mL as a predictive marker for suboptimal residual disease (>1 cm residual) after PDS in multicenter, nonrandomized trial (16). Furthermore, a retrospective study identified that 90% reduction in preoperative CA125 level was associated with complete IDS after NACT (20). In a recent meta-analysis, the researchers made efforts to elucidate CA125 cut-off levels as a predictor of optimal debulking after PDS by integrating 14 studies with 2,192 patients. Results of preoperative serum CA125 for predicting optimal cytoreduction in advanced ovarian cancer is a low positive and high negative likelihood ratio, respectively. However, a preoperative serum CA125 level over 500 U/mL was significantly associated with suboptimal cytoreduction [odds ratio, 3.69; 95% confidence interval (CI), 2.02–6.73] (14). HE4 is another useful biomarker that has been studied to predict optimal debulking in advanced ovarian cancer. A meta-analysis by Pergialiotis *et al.* reported that the pooled sensitivity and specificity of HE4 for the anticipation of optimal debulking were 0.81 (95% CI, 0.74–0.86) and 0.80 (95% CI, 0.75–0.84), respectively. They also showed promising results that the diagnostic odds ratio was 13.88 (95% CI, 7.18–26.84) and area under the curve was 0.86 ± 0.03 (21).

Hematologic predictor

Recently, lymphocyte-monocyte ratio (LMR) was identified as a possible prognosticator for advanced ovarian cancer among hematologic inflammatory markers. Although mechanisms underlying the relationship between higher LMR and optimal cytoreduction have not been fully explained, some suggestions can be derived by considering the nature of these inflammatory cells. The role of lymphocytes is to fight against cancer cells. Monocytes increase as tumor burden grows in advanced ovarian cancer (22). Eo *et al.* published that higher LMR was found to be the strongest predictors for optimal cytoreduction ($P=0.0015$) in 154 patients with stage III–IV advanced ovarian cancer (15). However, there was no consensus on the cut-off values, and prospective use of these markers for optimal debulking cytoreduction in advanced ovarian cancer is under investigation. Furthermore, factors of performance and nutritional status, such as age, race, smoking status, creatinine, and albumin levels, have also been elucidated with respect to patient selection for NACT and IDS, taking into account the postoperative morbidity (23,24).

Preoperative images

CT

Preoperative imaging such as CT can provide crucial information about the location and extent of tumor. Gynecologic oncologist may predict optimal debulking with this information. Many investigators have studied the predicting capability for optimal debulking before PDS in patients with advanced ovarian cancer. Image-based models for the prediction of optimal debulking are summarized in Table 1. Bristow *et al.* reported that peritoneal thickening or implants (≥ 2 cm); involvement of the spleen, stomach, or lesser sac; bowel mesenteric extension (≥ 2 cm); suprarenal paraaortic lymph nodes enlargement (≥ 1 cm); and pelvic sidewall involvement and/or hydronephrosis were the most important predictive factors for suboptimal debulking. They proposed a unique predictive index score (PIS), which is figured by above-mentioned factors. Over PIS 4 had the highest overall accuracy at 92.7% and identified patients undergoing suboptimal debulking with a sensitivity of 100% (21/21). The specificity, or capability to identify patients undergoing optimal debulking, was 85.0% (17/20). The positive predictive values (PPVs) and negative predictive values (NPVs) of a PIS ≥ 4 were 87.5% (21/24).

Table 1 Models constructed by image to predict the optimal cytoreduction in patients with advanced ovarian cancer

First author	Modality	Patients (No.)	Findings included in the model	Prediction model for suboptimal cytoreduction
Bristow (25)	CT	42	2 points	Index score cutoff ≥ 4
			Peritoneal thickening	PPV 87.5%
			Peritoneal implants ≥ 2 cm	NPV 100%
			Small bowel mesentery involvement ≥ 2 cm	
			Large bowel mesentery involvement ≥ 2 cm	
			Omental involvement to stomach, spleen, or lesser sac	
			Extension to pelvic sidewall, parametrium, or ureter	
			Ascites (large volume)	
			Suprarenal paraaortic lymph nodes ≥ 1 cm	
			Performance status ≥ 2	
			1 point	
			Diaphragm or lung bars involvement ≥ 2 cm, or confluent plaque	
			Inguinal canal disease or lymph nodes ≥ 2 cm	
			Liver metastases ≥ 2 cm on surface, or parenchymal lesion (any size)	
			Porta hepatis or gallbladder fossa disease ≥ 1 cm	
Suidan (16)	CT	350	Infrarenal paraaortic lymph nodes ≥ 2 cm	
			4 points	Score ≥ 9 : suboptimal debulking rate 74%
			Lesser sac lesion > 1 cm	
			3 points	
			ASA score 3–4	
			2 points	
			Age ≥ 60 years	
			CA125 ≥ 500 U/mL	
			Suprarenal, supradiaphragmatic lymph node > 1 cm	
			Diffuse small bowel adhesion/thickening	
Janco (17)	CT	279	Perisplenic lesion > 1 cm	
			Root of superior mesenteric artery lesion > 1 cm	
			ECOG performance status ≥ 2	Independent predictor by multivariate analysis
			Diffuse peritoneal thickening	
			Lymphadenopathy	

Table 1 (Continued)

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First author	Modality	Patients (No.)	Findings included in the model	Prediction model for suboptimal cytoreduction
Forstner (26)	MRI	50	Small bowel implants Liver surface Diaphragm Mesenteric implants	PPV 91% NPV 97%
Espada (27)	MRI	34	1 point Small and/or large bowel mesentery Hepatic parenchyme, hylum, or surface implant >2 cm Spleen parenchyme, hylum, stomach or lesser sac Diaphragm Peritoneal thickening Peritoneal macroscopic implants ≥ 2 cm Massive ascites Suprarenal paraaortic lymph nodes ≥ 1 cm Miliary visceral peritoneum implants	Index score cutoff ≥ 6 PPV 85.7% NPV 92.6%
Michielsen (28)	MRI	161	Extra-abdominal distant metastases Hepatic metastases Duodenum, stomach, pancreas, celiac trunk, hepatoduodenal ligament, or portal vein Diffuse serosal small and/or large bowel carcinomatosis Superior mesenteric artery involvement >2 cm Suprarenal paraaortic lymph nodes	PPV 97.9% NPV 93.5%
Shim (29)	PET/CT	343	Diaphragm Ascites Peritoneal carcinomatosis Small bowel mesentery implants Tumoral SUV _{max} uptake ratio	Predictive accuracy (concordance index =0.881; 95% CI, 0.838–0.923)
Alessi (30)	PET/CT	23	Hepatic hilum Mesentery root	Sensitivity 1.00 (95% CI, 0.54–1.00) Specificity 1.00 (95% CI, 0.80–1.00)

CT, computed tomography; PPV, positive predictive value; NPV, negative predictive value; ASA, American Society of Anesthesiologists; CA125, cancer antigen 125; ECOG, Eastern Cooperative Oncology Group; MRI, magnetic resonance imaging; PET, positron emission tomography; CI, confidence interval; SUV, standardized uptake value.

and 100%, respectively (25). In multivariate analysis by Janco *et al.*, no ascites, omental involvement, and diffuse peritoneal thickening on CT were independently associated with optimal debulking. They also developed nomogram as a predictive model by combining age and performance status. For instance, if a 50-year old patient presents with ascites and diffuse peritoneal thickening on preoperative CT, the predicted probability of complete cytoreduction is approximately 27%, with a sensitivity and specificity of 84% and 43%, respectively (17). However, a systematic review to evaluate CT-based prediction models for optimal debulking in advanced ovarian cancer concluded that there are few studies externally validated with a high predictive value (11).

Magnetic resonance imaging (MRI)

Generally, diagnostic imaging is predominantly based on CT before surgery in advanced ovarian cancer. Unfortunately, this preoperative evaluation is incomplete as small tumor deposits can be missed and distinguishing malignant from benign tissue can be difficult. MRI has good image contrast of soft tissue and shows a detailed view of the structures and its position toward the surrounding tissue. Forstner *et al.* reported that the sensitivity and specificity of conventional MRI in predicting suboptimal debulking were 0.91 (95% CI, 0.59–1.0) and 0.97 (95% CI, 0.87–1.0), respectively. On the other hand, the sensitivity and specificity of CT for predicting suboptimal debulking were 0.50 (95% CI, 0.12–0.88) and 1.0 (95% CI, 0.91–1.0), respectively (26). A retrospective analysis by Espada *et al.* published that diffusion-weighted MRI (DW-MRI) precisely predicts optimal debulking in 91% of patients (31/34) using predictive score >6 (27). The authors asserted the superiority of DW-MRI over CT due to better contrast resolution resulting in improved detection of sites that are critical for surgery, such as intestinal serosal metastases, central mesenteric vessel metastases, and unresectable distant metastases. Michielsen *et al.* made a comparison between DW-MRI and CT for their diagnostic accuracy. PDS was performed in 44 of 94 patients, and suboptimal debulking (≥ 1 cm) was performed in 39 women (89%). In this analysis, the sensitivity and specificity for predicting suboptimal debulking (with residual disease of any size) of DW-MRI were 0.94 (95% CI, 0.83–0.99) and 0.98 (95% CI, 0.88–1.00), respectively. For CT, the sensitivity and specificity for predicting suboptimal debulking were 0.66 (95% CI, 0.52–0.78) and 0.77 (95% CI, 0.63–0.87), respectively (28).

Positron emission tomography (PET)/CT

PET/CT detects enhanced glucose metabolism of cancer cells, so it suggests valuable information on tumor extension, especially useful for the identification of distant metastases. A prospective study used a prediction model including five PET/CT features and a surgical aggressiveness index to predict suboptimal debulking with residual disease of any size in 343 women with advanced ovarian cancer (29). The authors identified several PET/CT factors that were independently associated with suboptimal debulking, such as diaphragmatic disease and small bowel mesentery metastases. The sensitivity and specificity of PET/CT for suboptimal debulking (with residual disease of any size) were 0.66 (95% CI, 0.60–0.73) and 0.88 (95% CI, 0.80–0.93), respectively. Alessi *et al.* reported that the sensitivity and specificity of PET/CT for evaluating incomplete debulking (with residual disease of any size) were 1.00 (95% CI, 0.54–1.00) and 1.00 (95% CI, 0.80–1.00) (30).

Combination preoperative image with tumor marker

A prospective trial of preoperative CT in combination with serum CA125 by Suidan *et al.* was conducted to calculate the rates of suboptimal PDS (≥ 1 cm residual disease) in patients with advanced ovarian cancer. Of 350 patients, 261 had optimal debulking and the remaining 89 had suboptimal debulking (31). The following criteria were independently associated with suboptimal debulking: age ≥ 60 years, CA125 level ≥ 500 U/mL, American Society of Anesthesiologists Physical Status (ASA) score 3 or 4, suprarenal lymphadenopathy (incorporating cardiophrenic) >1 cm, diffuse small bowel adhesions/thickening, spleen lesion >1 cm, small bowel mesentery extension >1 cm, involvement in the root of the superior mesenteric artery >1 cm, and lesser sac metastasis >1 cm. In a retrospective study of 129 patients with advanced ovarian cancer, Arab *et al.* demonstrated that serum CA125 >420 U/mL, massive ascites, and liver metastasis are powerful predictive factors for suboptimal debulking in PDS (32).

Diagnostic laparoscopy

The rationale for a laparoscopic evaluation before PDS includes (I) this surgical concept could avoid a useless laparotomy, which has no survival benefits due to suboptimal debulking; (II) patients not considered for

optimal debulking could proceed immediately to NACT; and (III) pathologic diagnosis and molecular profiling are possible. A study performed by Fagotti *et al.*, in which clinic-radiological factors were collected preoperatively and all patients were submitted to both laparoscopy and laparotomy sequentially (33), assessed items during laparoscopy including the bilaterality of ovarian masses, peritoneal and diaphragmatic carcinomatosis, omental cake or nodules, mesenteric retraction, bowel and stomach extension, liver involvements, and bulky lymph node enlargement. After completing laparoscopy, the surgeon stated the probability that optimal debulking was possible was based on the absence of the conventional criteria of unresectability, which were extensive bulky peritoneal carcinomatosis, porta hepatis involvement, retraction of the bowel mesentery, diaphragm bulky disease, and/or unresectable upper abdominal disease (34). Optimal debulking was completed in 87% of patients (34/39) who had favorable laparoscopic findings. They showed that the overall accuracy rate of laparoscopy was 90% for predicting optimal debulking. The NPVs of clinico-radiological evaluation and laparoscopy were 73% and 100%, respectively, and the PPVs were both 87%. Based on the above study, Fagotti *et al.* extended their laparoscopic evaluation trial (18) and showed prospective data of 113 patients who underwent laparoscopy. They used the predictive index value (PIV) score for investigating the probability of optimal debulking. The individual items were added up to obtain an overall score (33). The overall accuracy of the laparoscopy-based score ranged from 77% to 100% in predicting optimal debulking. The results confirmed that at a PIV of ≥ 8 , the probability of debulking optimally (residual tumor ≤ 1 cm) at laparotomy was 0. The role of diagnostic laparoscopy in predicting for R0 resection in advanced ovarian cancer was also evaluated by other researcher (35). In this study, diagnostic laparoscopy was performed in 87 patients. Candidates for R0 resection were 61% (53/87 patients) and, therefore, they performed PDS. The optimal debulking rate in this group was 96%. There were no major perioperative morbidity and mortality related to laparoscopy. Brun *et al.* conducted the external validation of using the Fagotti criteria in a cohort of 55 patients with stage III–IV ovarian cancer (36). Of the 55 patients, 26 underwent primary PDS after diagnostic laparoscopy, and the remaining 29 were treated with NACT. A PIV of ≥ 8 was associated with suboptimal cytoreduction. The sensitivity, specificity, PPV, NPV, and accuracy values were 46%, 89%, 89%, 44%, and 60%, respectively. The Fagotti group prospectively evaluated the

learning curve for determining the PIV. This study revealed laparoscopic-based scores of gynecologic oncologic fellows with at least 12 months experience similar to those of senior surgeons (37). Another group in Dutch published the laparoscopy to predict the result of primary cytoreductive surgery in advanced ovarian cancer patients (LAPOVCA) randomized clinical trial (38). They used the following criteria for prediction of suboptimal cytoreduction: extensive agglutinated intra-abdominal metastatic disease (including spleen or retrohepatic area involvement), extensive serosa invasion of the bowel and/or mesenteric involvement (the possibility of multiple bowel resections), and extensive (unresectable) peritoneal carcinomatosis at the subdiaphragm. Using these laparoscopic finding, futile laparotomy so called “suboptimal cytoreduction” appeared in 10% (10/102 patients) in the laparoscopy group versus 39% (39/99 patients) in the primary surgery group (relative risk, 0.25; 95% CI, 0.13–0.47; $P < 0.001$). Diagnostic laparoscopy before surgery decreases the number of futile laparotomies in patients with advanced ovarian cancer. The accuracy of diagnostic laparoscopy for predicting optimal debulking in patients with advanced ovarian cancer was evaluated in a recent Cochrane Review. The authors concluded that laparoscopy might be a useful diagnostic tool for predicting the residual disease after PDS. Therefore, the selection of women who would benefit from PDS may be possible. However, due to the large heterogeneity of the included studies, careful interpretation of the study result is crucial (39). The laparoscopic criteria for the prediction of optimal debulking are summarized in *Table 2*.

Conclusions

Basic treatment of patients with EOC is optimal cytoreduction with acceptable morbidity followed by platinum- and taxane-based chemotherapy. NACT may decrease the morbidity at the time of IDS; however, it does not improve survival. So, prediction for optimal cytoreduction is very important for not performing futile surgery. We reviewed that preoperative serum levels of CA125 and HE4 are useful biomarkers for optimal cytoreduction and another hematologic marker using lymphocyte-monocyte is being investigated. Imaging studies using CT, DW-MRI, and PET/CT are also valuable for the preoperative evaluation of optimal debulking. However, that these factors were investigated in a retrospective manner is a limitation. There has been no prospective study yet, and there is no competent method for predicting optimal

Table 2 Laparoscopic criteria for suboptimal cytoreduction in patients with ovarian cancer

First author	Patients (No.)	Laparoscopic criteria	Suboptimal cytoreduction
Fagotti (33)	64	2 points Omental involvement Peritoneal carcinomatosis Diaphragmatic carcinomatosis Mesenteric retraction Bowel infiltration Stomach infiltration Liver metastases	Index score cutoff ≥ 8 PPV 100% NPV 75%
Andikyan (40)	55	Extensive involvement of small and/or large bowel mesentery Celiac trunk Lesser sac, hepatic vein	Accuracy 98% 95% CI, 89.3–99.9%
Rutten (38)	201	Extensive agglutinated intra-abdominal metastatic disease (including spleen or retrohepatic area involvement) Extensive serosa invasion of the intestines and/or mesenteric involvement Extensive (irresectable) peritoneal metastases at the diaphragmatic level	Relative risk 0.18 (0.08–0.41); $P < 0.001$

PPV, positive predictive value; NPV, negative predictive value; CI, confidence interval.

cytoreduction. Large-scale randomized clinical trials of laparoscopic evaluation using the scoring system showed that it may be a useful tool. Therefore, an effort should be made to select patients with optimal cytoreduction prognoses using multiple methods, such as serum biomarkers, imaging studies, and diagnostic laparoscopy, and having discussions with multidisciplinary team to yield more results from large clinical trials.

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