Annals. Series on Economy, Law and Sociology, Volume 7, Number 1/2024
Romania, June, 2024 ISSN ONLINE 2067-5704
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NEEDED TO SAVE A LIFE, POINT OF VIEW FROM EXPERIENCE

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ABSTRACT: The use of advanced imaging techniques in the treatment of patients with brain tumor lesions is essential for effectively managing these complex pathologies. The rigorous evaluation of these methods relies on modern imaging, which offers a comprehensive understanding of the patient's clinical condition. Magnetic resonance imaging (MRI) and computed tomography (CT) techniques are fundamental, providing detailed visualization of brain structures and characterizing tissue lesions. MRI reveals critical aspects such as peri-tumoral and altered nerve tissue edema, playing a key role in determining the tumor stage. Functional techniques such as tractography and positron emission tomography (PET) add another dimension by assessing brain function. These methods help identify areas of brain activity related to cognitive functions, facilitating surgical planning and minimizing neurosurgical risks. Monitoring the evolution of lesions during treatment through periodic reconstruction allows for a dynamic assessment of the therapeutic response, which is crucial for quickly adjusting treatment plans and improving patients' survival prospects. Integrating advanced imaging techniques in centers of excellence for neuro-oncology must be a priority, as it contributes to accurate diagnosis and continuous monitoring. Positron emission tomography combined with computed tomography (PET-CT) provides valuable information on the metabolic activity of tissues and is used to detect brain tumors. Tractography, specific for the visualization of white matter, allows for better surgical planning, reducing postoperative neurological risks. Together, these imaging methods provide neurosurgeons with essential information for optimal management of brain tumors.
KEYWORDS: Radiology, Neurosurgery, Imagistic evaluation, Technology innovation, Innovation,

DOI 10.56082/annalsarscieco.2024.1.10

1. INTRODUCTION

The use of advanced imaging techniques for patients with brain tumor lesions is central to managing these complex pathologies. Understanding this condition requires imaging, and a thorough assessment using modern techniques offers crucial insights into the patient's clinical status, facilitating a personalized and informed therapeutic approach. [15]

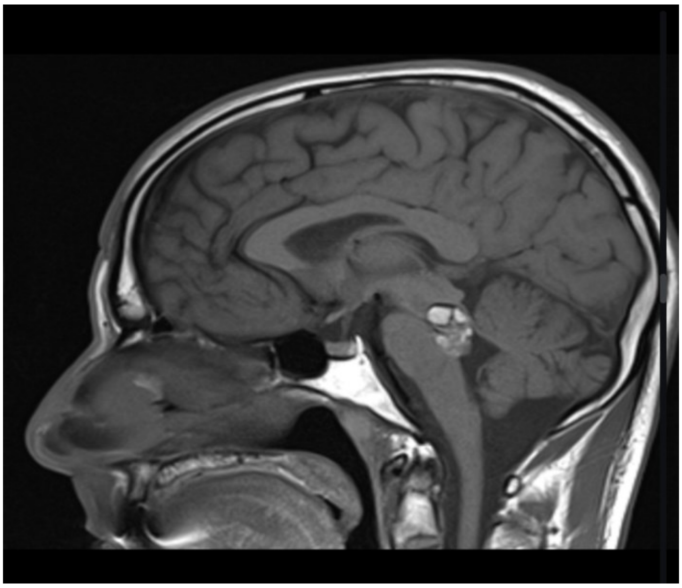

Figure 1. Cerebral tumor evidence by MRI scan. [5]

Nuclear magnetic resonance (MRI) (figure 1) and computed tomography (CT) prove essential in the context of brain tumors. These imaging methods facilitate detailed anatomical visualization of brain structure and tissue characterization of lesions. MRI highlights aspects such as peri-tumoral edema and changes in nervous tissue structure. This type of imaging is crucial for determining the tumor stage and providing valuable information on the size, location, and kind of lesion.

Functional techniques, such as tractography and positron emission tomography (PET), enable the evaluation of the brain's structure and function. These methods can identify areas of brain activity linked to cognitive, linguistic, or motor functions, thereby facilitating the planning of surgical interventions. [10] By precisely localizing critical functions, the risk of post-operative neurological damage can be minimized, which is vital for ensuring a favorable prognosis. [3]

An essential aspect of managing brain tumors is monitoring the evolution of lesions during treatment. Periodic imaging reconstructions using these advanced techniques aid in assessing responses and providing essential therapeutic data on the effects of chemotherapy, radiotherapy, and surgery. This dynamic approach enables rapid adjustments to treatment plans based on tumor responses, significantly impacting patient survival rates. [14]

The use of advanced imaging techniques in managing patients with brain tumor lesions is not only beneficial but essential. This highlights the importance of accurate diagnosis and continuous monitoring to improve prognosis. Therefore, integrating these advanced technologies must become a priority in centers of excellence for neuro-oncology, enhancing patients' quality of life and increasing survival rates.

Positron Emission Tomography combined with Computed Tomography (PET-CT) merges the benefits of positron emission tomography (PET) and CT. PET utilizes radioactive substances that attach to specific molecules in the body, enabling visualization of the metabolic activity of tissues. In neurosurgery, PET-CT is valuable for detecting brain tumors, assessing treatment response, and identifying areas of epileptic activity. [2] The integration with CT offers precise anatomical information, enhancing the interpretation of PET data.

Tractography is an advanced imaging technique based on Nuclear Magnetic Resonance that allows for the visualization and mapping of white matter bundles in the brain. It employs complex algorithms to trace the direction of nerve fibers, [6] providing insights into the anatomical connections between various brain regions. This technique is particularly beneficial for planning complex surgical interventions, as it is crucial to avoid damage to significant nerve bundles. Tractography can identify nerve pathways affected by tumors or lesions, aiding in more precise surgical planning and reducing the risk of postoperative neurological deficits. [3], [4]

When used together, these imaging methods provide neurosurgeons with essential information for diagnosing, planning surgical interventions, and evaluating outcomes. The choice of the optimal method depends on the suspected condition, the urgency of the situation, and the specific information required.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Positron emission tomography (PET) is a functional molecular imaging technique that provides information about the metabolic and physiological processes in the body. Unlike anatomical imaging techniques such as MRI and CT, PET presents a picture of metabolic and functional activity in tissues, offering essential complementary information for diagnosis and monitoring. This literature review focuses on the physical principles of PET, the technical aspects of the technology, its diverse clinical applications, and its limitations, providing a critical perspective on the contribution of PET to the advancement of nuclear medicine and other medical fields. [7]

The physical principles of PET involve detecting gamma radiation emitted by positron-emitting radioactive isotopes injected intravenously into the patient (Figure 3.). [1] These isotopes are attached to specific molecules, such as glucose (fluorodeoxyglucose, FDG), which are preferentially metabolized by particular tissues. After injecting the radioisotope, the PET scanner detects pairs of gamma photons emitted during the annihilation of the positron and an electron. A three-dimensional image of the radioisotope distribution in the body is created by simultaneously detecting these photons and using image reconstruction algorithms. Areas with an increased radioisotope concentration indicate enhanced metabolic activity, which may be linked to pathological processes such as tumor growth or inflammation.

Technical aspects of PET technology: PET technology has evolved significantly, improving spatial resolution and detector sensitivity. Modern PET scanners utilize high-resolution detectors capable of identifying more annihilation events, enhancing image quality. [7] Advances in image reconstruction technology have minimized artifacts, resulting in more explicit and more accurate images. Integrating PET with other imaging modalities, such as CT or MRI, offers complementary anatomical information, aiding the interpretation of PET images. PET/CT is a widely used hybrid technology that combines the strengths of PET in visualizing metabolic activity with the benefits of CT in revealing detailed anatomy. Although PET/MRI is less frequently used, it provides superior anatomical image quality compared to PET/CT. [2]

Clinical Applications of PET: PET is widely used in oncology, neurology, cardiology, and other medical fields for diagnosis, staging, treatment monitoring, and prognosis. [5]

In oncology (Figure 2.), PET detects and stages tumors, monitors treatment response, and identifies recurrences. It facilitates the detection of small lesions that may be invisible to other imaging methods and provides insights into the tumors metabolic activity, aiding treatment planning. In neurology, PET is utilized to evaluate neurodegenerative diseases, including Alzheimer's disease, Parkinson's disease, and epilepsy. [9] PET enables visualization of metabolic changes in the brain, offering valuable information regarding the severity of the disease and the response to treatment. [10]

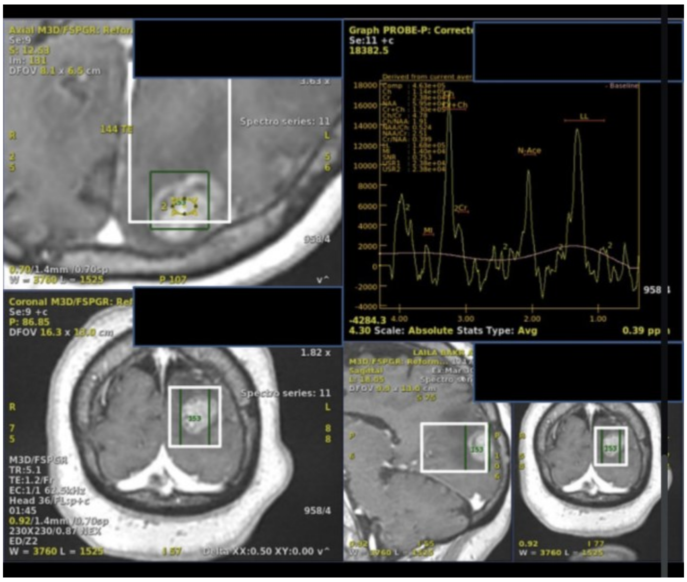

Figure 2. Brain tumor evaluated by PET-CT. [7]

PET Limitations: While PET offers valuable insights, it has some limitations. Although the exposure to ionizing radiation is relatively low compared to other nuclear imaging techniques, it still poses a potential health risk. The duration of the examination can be lengthy, requiring the patient to remain immobilized for a certain period. Additionally, the cost of a PET examination is significantly higher than that of other imaging methods. [1] Interpreting PET images necessitates specialized medical expertise, and errors in interpretation can lead to significant clinical consequences. Moreover, PET's spatial resolution is lower than that of MRI or CT, which limits the detection of small lesions. Lastly, the availability of PET scanners is restricted in some regions, potentially hindering access to this technology. [15]

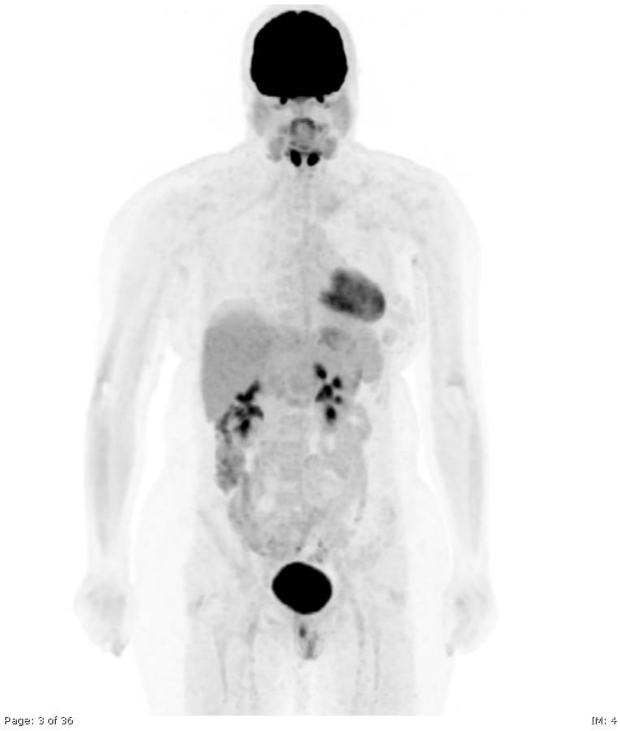

Figure 3. Normal body scan with PET-CT. [1]

Future developments in PET: Ongoing research in the field of PET focuses on enhancing the technology, developing new radiotracers, and expanding clinical applications. Developing high-resolution detectors, advanced reconstruction techniques, and noise reduction technologies enable images of remarkable clarity. The research aims to create more specific radiotracers for various tissues and pathological processes, providing more precise and sensitive information. Integrating PET with other imaging modalities, such as MRI or CT, allows for acquiring complementary information and enhancing diagnosis and treatment monitoring. The use of artificial intelligence (AI) in processing and analyzing PET images has the potential to automate specific tasks, improve diagnostic accuracy, and facilitate image interpretation. [17]

Tractography is an advanced medical imaging technique derived from magnetic resonance imaging (MRI) (Figure 1.) that facilitates the in vivo visualization and mapping of white matter tracts in the brain (Figure 4.) and spinal cord. Unlike conventional anatomical imaging techniques, which offer static images of anatomical structures, tractography provides dynamic information about neuronal connections, shedding light on the functional architecture of the central nervous system.

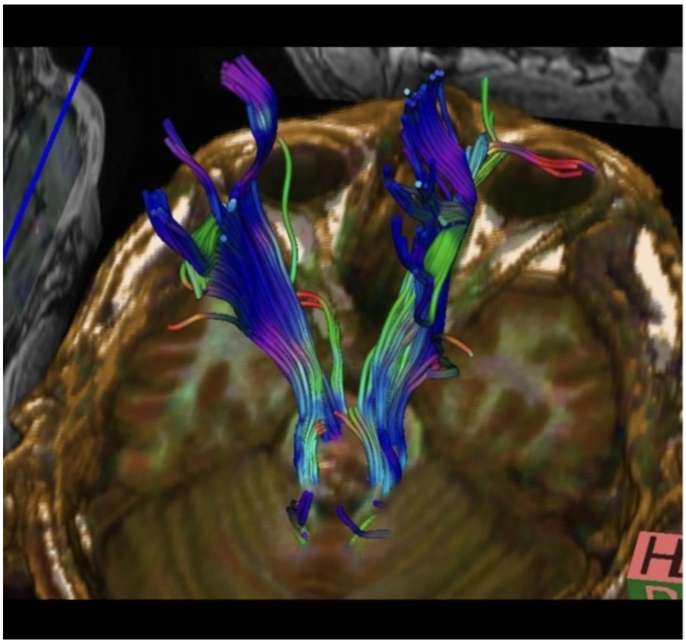

Figure 4. Evidence of motor fibers in a patient with a brain tumor. [5]

This literature review examines tractography's physical and methodological principles, its various clinical applications, and its limitations, emphasizing its significant contribution to clinical neuroscience and biomedical research. [4], [6], [9]

Physical and methodological principles of tractography: Tractography relies on measurements of water diffusion in white matter. Water molecules preferentially diffuse along the axes of nerve fibers due to their myelinated structure. Diffusion tensor imaging (DTI) is the primary MRI technique to acquire this information (Figure 5.). [5]

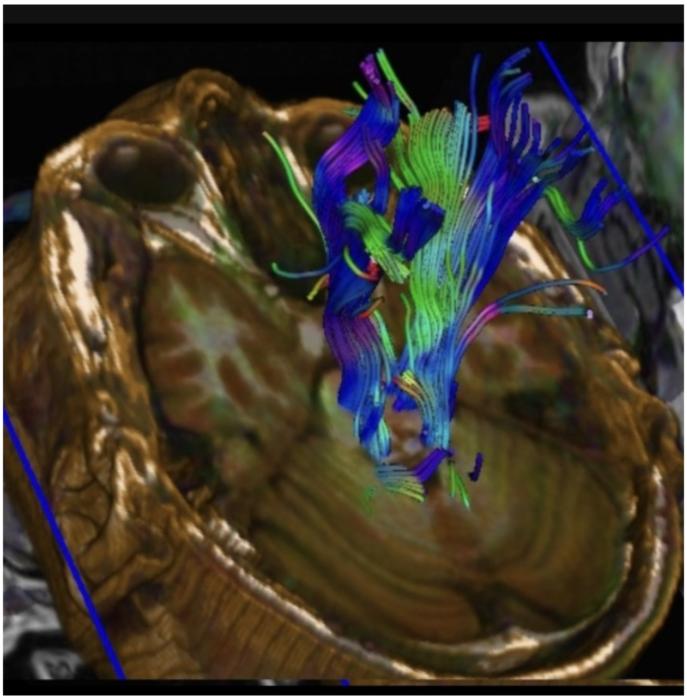

Figure 5. Evidence of functional fibers. [5]

DTI assesses the diffusion tensor, a 3x3 matrix that describes the direction and magnitude of water diffusion in each voxel. [13] Quantitative indicators such as fractional anisotropy (FA) and the primary diffusion direction can be extracted from the diffusion tensor. FA indicates the extent of diffusion anisotropy, with higher values reflecting a more organized orientation of nerve fibers. The primary diffusion direction represents the main orientation of nerve fibers within each voxel. [13], [16]

Tractography algorithms utilize this information to reconstruct the trajectories of nerve fibers. There are various tractography methods, each with its advantages and limitations. Deterministic methods, such as those based on the principal diffusion direction, are straightforward and rapid but can be sensitive to noise and struggle in areas with intersecting fibers. [8] Probabilistic methods, like those based on probabilistic diffusion models, are more resilient to noise and can estimate the trajectories of fibers in complex regions with greater accuracy.

More advanced tractography methods have emerged, including those based on orientation distribution functions (ODFs), which offer improved angular resolution and enable more precise intersecting fiber reconstruction. [4]

Clinical Applications of Tractography: Tractography has diverse applications in neurology, neurosurgery, psychiatry, and studies of neural connectivity. In neurology, it assesses the integrity of white matter tracts in various conditions, such as multiple sclerosis, traumatic brain injury, stroke, and neurodegenerative disorders. [5]

Tractography enables the identification of focal lesions and diffuse alterations in white matter, providing vital information for diagnosis and prognosis (Figure 6). [5], [8] In neurosurgery, tractography aids in planning surgical interventions, allowing avoidance of damage to critical nerve tracts. (Figure 1,6) This contributes to improved surgical outcomes and reduced risk of neurological deficits. In psychiatry, tractography investigates neural connectivity in psychiatric disorders such as schizophrenia, depression, and anxiety disorder. [9]

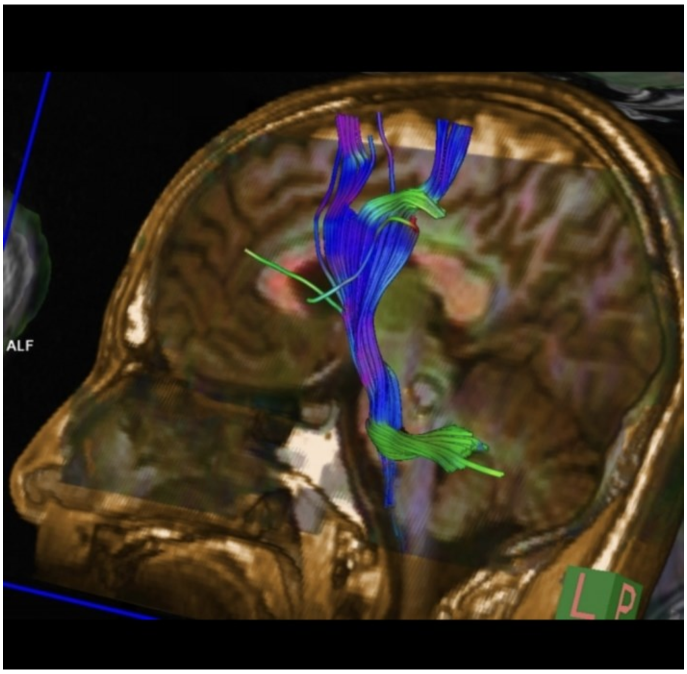

Figure 6. Evidence of functional fibers and the brain lesion. [5]

Limitations of tractography: Although tractography provides valuable information about neural connections, it also has certain limitations. The resolution of MRI constrains the spatial resolution of tractography, which can result in errors when reconstructing nerve fibers, particularly in areas with high fiber density or intersecting fibers. [10] Tractography algorithms rely on specific simplifying assumptions about water diffusion, which may not hold in complex scenarios. Motion artifacts and noise can negatively impact DTI data quality, leading to nerve fiber reconstruction errors. [12] Interpreting tractography results necessitates specialized expertise, as erroneous interpretation can have significant clinical consequences. Validating tractography through histological methods is often challenging and costly.

Future developments in tractography revolve around ongoing research to enhance DTI data acquisition and processing techniques, create more sophisticated tractography algorithms, and merge tractography with various imaging modalities. [11] Introducing high-resolution MRI sequences facilitates the capture of DTI data with exceptional spatial resolution, thereby increasing the accuracy of nerve fiber reconstruction. Algorithms driven by machine learning promise to boost the accuracy and robustness of fiber reconstruction. Combining tractography with other imaging modalities, such as fMRI, provides valuable complementary insights into neuronal function and connectivity. [9]

3. DISCUSSION

Positron emission tomography is a functional molecular imaging technique of high diagnostic value, providing essential information about metabolic and physiological processes in the body. Its advantages, including the capability to visualize the metabolic activity of tissues, make it a vital method in many medical fields, particularly in oncology. While it has certain limitations, such as radiation exposure, high costs, and the need for specialized expertise to interpret the images, the benefits of PET significantly outweigh these disadvantages. Ongoing research in the field of PET aims to enhance the technology and develop new clinical applications, thereby ensuring a significant contribution to the advancement of nuclear medicine and other medical fields. The careful use of PET, coupled with the accurate interpretation of the images by specialists, is crucial to fully benefiting from the valuable information provided by this technology.

Tractography is a sophisticated medical imaging technique that offers valuable insights into the functional architecture of the central nervous system. Its various applications in neurology, neurosurgery, and psychiatry enhance diagnosis, treatment planning, and our understanding of neurological mechanisms. While it does have certain limitations, ongoing research in this field aims to improve technologies and algorithms, thereby expanding the potential of tractography in biomedical research and clinical practice. The interpretation of tractography results requires specialized expertise and must be correlated with other clinical data to ensure accurate diagnoses and optimal treatment planning.

Brain tumors represent a significant challenge in neuro-oncology, significantly impacting morbidity and mortality. Effectively managing these lesions demands accurate assessment, early diagnosis, and personalized therapy planning. In this context, advanced imaging techniques, such as positron emission tomography, computed tomography (PET-CT), and tractography, are crucial for enhancing diagnosis and treatment strategies. This article emphasizes the importance of these techniques in saving the lives of patients with brain tumors, underscoring their contributions to diagnosis, treatment planning, assessment of therapeutic response, and reduction of surgical risks.

Early and accurate diagnosis of brain tumors is critical for determining a patient's prognosis. PET-CT combines two advanced techniques: PET, which assesses cellular metabolism using a radioactive agent, and CT, which provides precise anatomical details. This combination enables doctors to identify the tumors location and its metabolic characteristics. Studies have shown that PET-CT can detect tumors invisible on conventional tomography due to its ability to highlight the increased metabolic activity of tumor cells.

In the case of glial tumors, which resemble normal brain tissue on standard imaging, PET-CT can help differentiate between benign and malignant lesions. This precise diagnostic capability confirms the tumors presence and allows the physician to assess its stage and aggressiveness, thus influencing future therapeutic decisions.

Treatment planning for patients with brain tumors is a complex process that requires integrating information from multiple sources. Tractography, a technique derived from magnetic resonance imaging (MRI), enables visualizing neuronal connections by identifying axonal pathways. This is essential in brain tumors, as many are located near vital neurological structures. By utilizing tractography, neurosurgeons can accurately assess the location and orientation of nerve pathways, allowing for a safer and more efficient surgical plan.

In cases where tumors are located near the motor cortex, understanding neural connections assists the surgeon in avoiding intraoperative nerve damage, thereby reducing the risk of postoperative neurological deficits. This enhances the likelihood of a successful intervention and improves the patient's long-term quality of life.

Another crucial aspect of brain tumor management is monitoring the response to treatment. This is essential for determining the effectiveness of the administered therapy, whether it involves chemotherapy, radiotherapy, or surgery. PET-CT is a valuable tool in this process, as it enables rapid assessment of metabolic changes in the tumor.

After treatment initiation, PET-CT can determine whether the tumor is responding to therapy. For instance, a decrease in FDG avidity indicates reduced metabolic activity, suggesting a favorable response to treatment. This information can influence the continuation of a specific therapeutic protocol and allow for rapid adjustments to therapeutic approaches in cases of suboptimal response.

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