

Dear members,

We have recently seen the publication of two new haematological malignancy diagnostic classifications: the World Health Organisation (WHO5) 5th edition and the International Consensus Classification (ICC). They provide comprehensive updates as a continuation of the 2016 revision of the 4th edition of the WHO classification and are authored by multiprofessional international groups of experts based on the best scientific evidence. While for the most part they agree and overlap with each other, the two classifications do differ in some areas. This includes varied terminology used for the same conditions, exclusion or reclassification of some entities, recognition of new classification groups which are not always fully overlapping and, in some instances using different defining diagnostic criteria for the same diseases.

Many international scientific meetings and guideline groups have intensely focused on comparative analysis of the two classifications and their routine diagnostic and clinical applicability. Widespread uncertainty has been replaced by pragmatic acceptance that the two classifications need to be considered jointly. The British Society for Haematology Laboratory Specialist Interest Group (BSH Lab SIG) and British Lymphoma Pathology Group (BLPG) were asked to help with this issue soon after the initial draft classifications were published. We jointly aim to aid the process of better understanding of the new classifications and their clinical application. Our two “sister” organisations include most diagnosticians and treating clinicians of haematological malignancies in the United Kingdom.

Our interim guidance based on the initial publications of the two classifications in journals, was that the safest practice in the immediate future would be to continue using the established 2016 revision of the WHO 4th edition (WHO4R), whilst as far as possible providing indicative diagnoses based on the two new classifications, particularly if relevant to clinical care, guidelines or clinical trials. We understood this may be burdensome, but there was no simple alternative. Our revised guidance is similar, but given that the WHO 5th (WHO5) and ICC classifications have now been published in their entirety; we now propose that the WHO5 classification replace the 2016 revision of WHO4R in integrated reports. That should be accompanied by the ICC classification, if the ICC and WHO diagnoses differ.

Some centres may decide to report both ICC and WHO even when identical. Some centres also chose to include the WHO4R classification on their final integrated report, to support clinicians and trials where possible. The decision to include WHO4R in the integrated report, is for local diagnostic centres.

References

1. The WHO Classification of Tumours - Haematolymphoid Tumours (volume 11) 5th Edition
ISBN-10: 9283245202
ISBN-13: 978-9283245209
Publisher: IARC
15th July 2024

Continued

2. The International Consensus Classification of Myeloid and Lymphoid Neoplasms

ISBN-10: 1975222598

ISBN-13: 978-1975222598

Publisher: Wolters Kluwer Health

3rd Jan 2025