

Allogeneic hematopoietic cell transplantation in patients with *GATA2* deficiency—a case report and comprehensive review of the literature

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Abstract

Recently, an immunodeficiency syndrome caused by guanine-adenine-thymine-adenine 2 (*GATA2*) deficiency has been described. The syndrome is characterized by (i) typical onset in early adulthood, (ii) profound peripheral blood cytopenias of monocytes, B lymphocytes, and NK cells, (iii) distinct susceptibility to disseminated non-tuberculous mycobacterial (NTM) and other opportunistic infections (particularly human papillomavirus), and (iv) a high risk of developing hematologic malignancies (myelodysplastic syndromes (MDS); acute myeloid leukemias (AML)). Considerable clinical heterogeneity exists among patients with *GATA2* deficiency, but once infectious symptoms occur or MDS/AML arises, survival declines significantly. Allogeneic hematopoietic cell transplantation (HCT) currently provides the only curative treatment option for both MDS/AML and dysfunctional immunity with life-threatening opportunistic infections. Strategies regarding timing of allogeneic HCT, antimicrobial prophylaxis and treatment, intensity of the preparative regimen, and optimal donor and graft source have not been clearly defined due to the rarity of the disease. Here, we provide a comprehensive analysis of the available literature and published case reports on the use of allogeneic HCT in patients with *GATA2* deficiency. In addition, a case of a young woman with *GATA2* deficiency, who developed an immune reconstitution inflammatory syndrome in her mycobacterial skin lesions post allogeneic HCT is presented and illustrates distinct problems encountered in this disease context.

Keywords *GATA2* deficiency · Allogeneic hematopoietic cell transplantation · Immune reconstitution inflammatory syndrome · Myelodysplastic syndrome

Introduction

Guanine-adenine-thymine-adenine 2 (*GATA2*) deficiency has been identified as the genetic origin to a multifarious disease involving a spectrum of hematologic and non-

hematologic anomalies. The most common features are cytopenias, immunodeficiency with increased susceptibility to opportunistic infections, and a high risk of developing myelodysplastic syndromes (MDS) and acute myeloid leukemias (AML) [1, 2].

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In 2010, Vinh et al. reported on a series of 18 patients, of which 14 suffered from infections with mycobacteria and human papillomavirus (HPV); in addition, 5 patients had fungal complications, predominantly histoplasmosis and molds. Of these 18 patients, 10 developed malignancies, specifically myelodysplastic syndromes (MDS) and acute myeloid leukemias (AML), and 5 patients displayed signs of pulmonary alveolar proteinosis (PAP) [3]. At that time, this distinct clinical syndrome was identified by patient history and routine laboratory work-up and was, because of the characteristic monocytopenia and frequent *Mycobacterium avium* complex (MAC) infections, referred to as MonoMAC syndrome [4]. Remarkably, among the first cohort of 18 patients in five families, several generations were affected, suggesting that the syndrome could be obtained by both autosomal dominant transmission or arise sporadically [3]. To unravel the genetic origin of *dendritic cell* (DC), *monocyte*, *B* and *natural killer* (NK) *lymphoid* (DCML) deficiency, a similar recently described syndrome [5], Dickinson et al. performed exome sequencing in four affected patients and identified only one gene, *GATA2*, to carry mutations in all examined unrelated individuals [6]. The finding that *GATA2* is also the key player in the pathophysiology of MonoMAC syndrome was confirmed soon after when 12 distinct mutations in *GATA2* were detected in 20 patients and relatives with this syndrome [7]. Further, mutations in *GATA2* were identified to underlie Emberger syndrome, a syndrome that encompasses the co-occurrence of primary lymphedema with MDS/AML, often in association with abnormalities in lymphocyte subsets, immune dysfunction with widespread cutaneous warts, and sensorineural deafness [8]. In the same year, the association between heritable *GATA2* mutations and familial MDS/AML was discovered [9]. Later, reports on cutaneous manifestations, including erythema nodosum-like inflammatory nodules, erythematous papules and indurated plaques with a histology presenting as panniculitis or granulomatous inflammation without microorganisms, which occasionally were accompanied by fever and arthralgias, have been added to the literature [10, 11]. Altogether, it has become clear that *GATA2* deficiency is a single genetic protean disease with a wide spectrum of hematologic and non-hematologic anomalies that can vary greatly in severity and range of clinical symptoms. Most importantly, however, *GATA2* deficiency predisposes patients to MDS/AML, which makes the disease a life-threatening condition (Fig. 1) [10].

In 2014, Spinner et al. reported on a large cohort of patients of various ethnic backgrounds (75% white, 16% Hispanic, 7% Afro-American, 2% Asian) with *GATA2* deficiency referred to the National Institutes of Health (NIH). Forty of the 57 patients were identified based on clinical presentation, mostly severe viral (32% of patients) or non-tuberculous mycobacterial (NTM; 28%) infections, MDS/AML (21%), lymphedema (9%), fungal infections (4%), or PAP. The other 17 patients

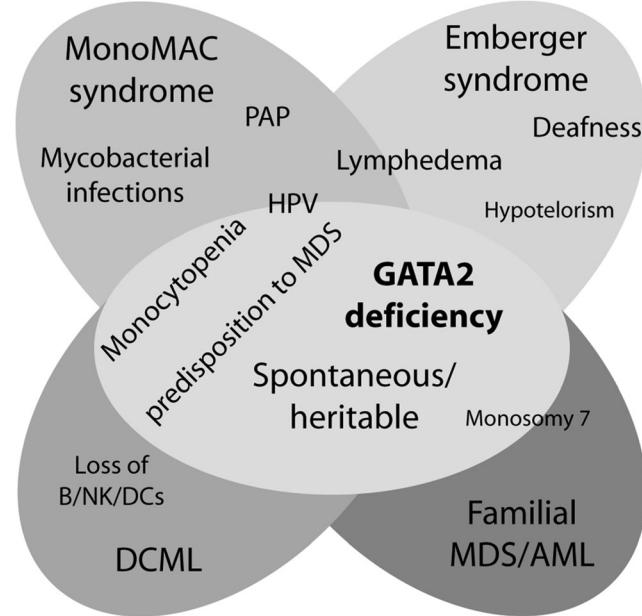


Fig. 1 Key clinical findings in MonoMAC syndrome, familial MDS/AML, dendritic cell, monocyte, and B and NK lymphoid deficiency (DCML) and Emberger syndrome that are all caused a germline *GATA2* mutation

were identified through screening of family members. The median age of initial clinical manifestation was 20 years with a wide age range from early childhood to late adulthood [1].

Analyzing datasets and stored material for genetic testing from the database of the European Working Group of MDS in childhood (EWOG-MDS) that were collected over a period of 15 years, Włodarski et al. reported in 2016 that germline *GATA2* mutations accounted for 15% of advanced and 7% of all primary cases of pediatric MDS. Of the 508 patients tested, 57 MDS patients had germline *GATA2* mutations. Prevalence of *GATA2* mutations was particularly high in those MDS patients with monosomy 7 (37% of all patients with monosomy 7), reaching a peak in adolescence (72% of adolescents with monosomy 7). In fact, this study identified *GATA2* as the most common germline defect predisposing to pediatric MDS. Within this group of patients with *GATA2* deficiency, 39% presented with immunodeficiency, 23% with lymphedema/hydrocele, and 9% with deafness. Moreover, anomalies of the urogenital tract and behavioral problems (e.g., autism and aggressive behavior) were reported as novel clinical features recurrently present in the investigated cohort in 12 and in 19% of patients with *GATA2* mutations, respectively [12].

In contrast to most congenital immunodeficiency syndromes, individuals with *GATA2* deficiency typically have normal blood counts during early childhood. Bone marrow samples of patients with *GATA2* deficiency typically are hypocellular, and when they develop MDS, they frequently show multi-lineage dysplasia with atypical megakaryocytes in >90% and abnormal plasma cells in half of the patients [1, 4,

[7]. Once cytopenias develop, these may exist for prolonged periods of time before clinical symptoms manifest, mostly with opportunistic infections, and the diagnosis is established [7]. *GATA2* deficiency is characteristically associated with profoundly decreased or absent counts of monocytes, dendritic cells (DC), natural killer (NK; both CD56^{bright} and to a lesser degree CD56^{dim} subpopulations), and B cells in the blood [1, 3, 13]. In contrast to blood DCs, epidermal Langerhans cells (but not dermal CD14⁺CD1a⁺ DC), tissue macrophages, and plasma cells appear to be preserved at sites of inflammation and immunoglobulin levels are mostly normal [2, 3, 5].

Increased susceptibility to infections with intracellular pathogens is likely a consequence of macrophage/monocyte dysfunction. Likewise, reduced phagocytic activity of pulmonary alveolar macrophages resulting from *GATA2* deficiency contributes to the common occurrence of pulmonary alveolar proteinosis (PAP) that can be observed in patients with *GATA2* deficiency [14]. The high frequency of human papilloma virus (HPV) and other viral infections results most likely from the profound absence of NK cells [7].

Preemptively, or with disease progression and diagnosis of MDS/AML, the indication for allogeneic hematopoietic cell transplantation (HCT) is given, as this approach provides the only long-term curative treatment for an otherwise often fatal disease. While allogeneic HCT can cure MDS/AML, the management of patients differs substantially during and following allogeneic HCT, as patients enter the procedure with active, often uncontrolled infections, which may persist and need to be controlled during the months to years of severe immunosuppression following the allogeneic HCT procedure.

As *GATA2* deficiencies are rare disease entities that only recently have been recognized, reports on outcomes and complications following allogeneic HCT are scarce and exist mostly in form of case reports or small case series. Here, we searched the literature and provide a comprehensive overview of reports on patients given allogeneic HCTs for *GATA2* deficiency. In addition, we present another clinical case to illustrate the practical difficulties encountered during allogeneic HCT and describe a pronounced immune reconstitution inflammatory phenomenon in this context.

Methods

We conducted a systematic review to analyze the available literature on the use and outcomes of allogeneic hematopoietic cell transplants (HCT) in patients with confirmed *GATA2* deficiency. The analysis was performed using PubMed (<http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov>) of the National Center for Biotechnology Information, National Library of Medicine of the National Institutes of Health, and Scopus (<http://www.scopus.com>). Reports from January 2010 until March 2018

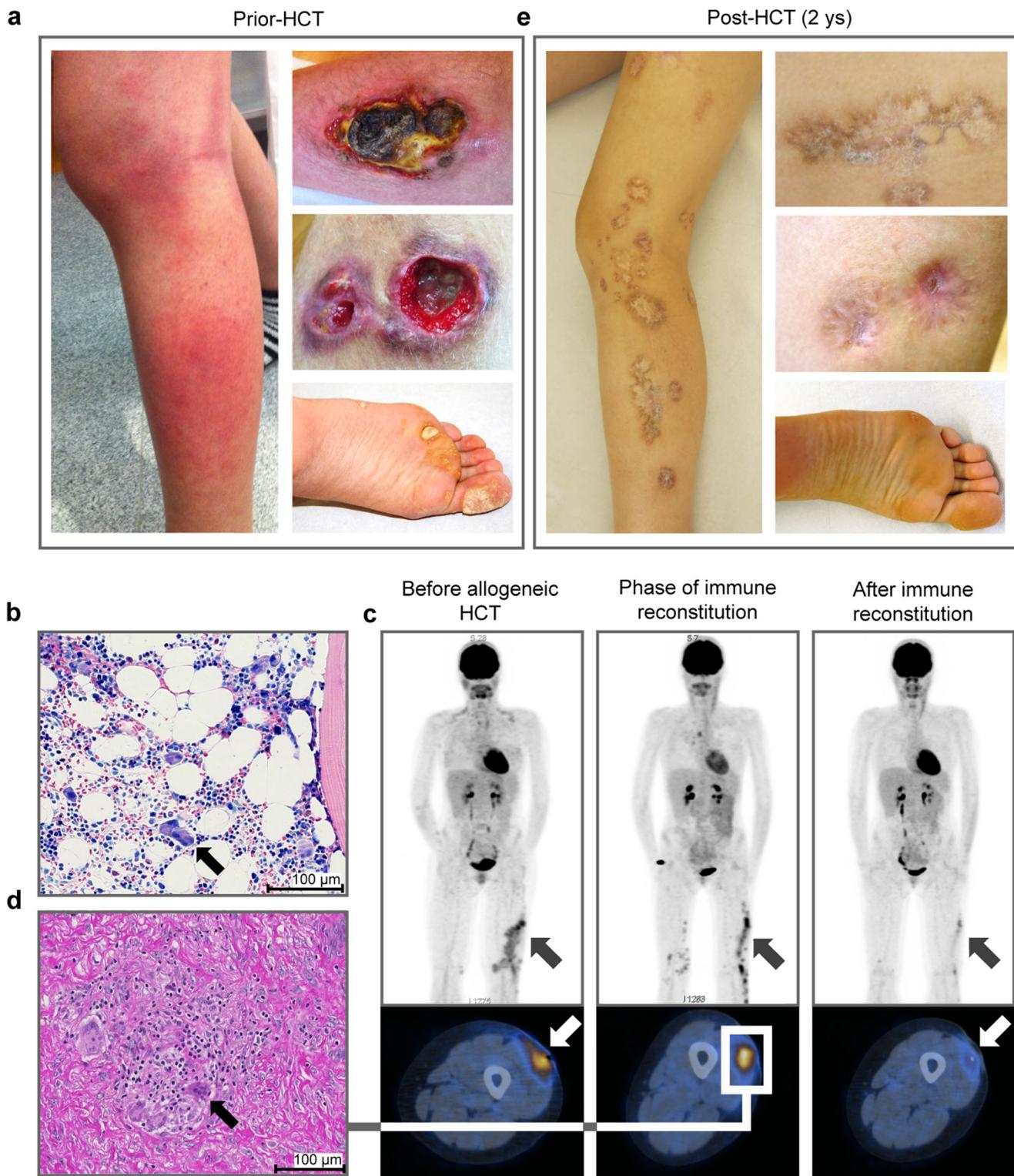
were included. The search included the terms “*GATA2* deficiency” and “*GATA2* hematopoietic cell transplantation” as well as the *GATA2* deficiency-associated diseases like “familial myelodysplastic syndromes (MDS)/acute myeloid leukemia (AML),” “dendritic cell, monocyte, B and NK lymphoid deficiency (DCML),” “Monocytopenia and mycobacterial infection (MonoMAC) syndrome,” and primary lymphedema associated with predisposition to acute myeloid leukemia (“Emberger syndrome”). Data on age, sex, *GATA2* mutations, symptoms, bone marrow morphology, cytogenetics, HCT-related details, and outcomes were comprehensively summarized using information as provided by the authors.

The patient described in this manuscript provided her informed consent; procedures were in accordance with the ethical standards of the responsible committee on human experimentation (institutional and national) and with the Helsinki Declaration of 1975, as revised in 2008.

Results

Case report

Here, we present a 17-year-old woman with prolonged history of severe infectious complications, particularly disseminated *Mycobacterium abscessus* infections manifesting as multiple ulcerated skin lesions and involvement of mediastinal lymph nodes. From early childhood on, the patient had contracted numerous warts (*Verruca vulgaris*) on hands and feet (Fig. 2a). Further, she suffered from recurrent upper respiratory tract infections, pneumonia with sepsis, and several episodes of otitis media during childhood. When the patient was 16 years old, the clinical course was complicated by symptomatic pulmonary embolism, which was interpreted as unprovoked. The CT scan also revealed evidence of interstitial pneumopathy, suggesting the presence of pulmonary alveolar proteinosis (PAP). PAP, however, was not confirmed as PAS staining of bronchoalveolar lavage (BAL) fluid turned out negative. Also, there was no evidence of PAP in the pre-HCT CT scan. Around the same time, the patient developed lymphedema of the lower extremity. One year later, at age 17, the patient developed cytopenias (hemoglobin 106 g/l, thrombocytes 148 G/l, leukocytes 3.2 G/l, ANC 2.64 G/l, monocytes 0.016 G/l, lymphocytes 0.53 G/l) (Fig. 3a). Analysis of lymphocyte subpopulation by flow cytometry showed reduced counts of B, NK, and CD4⁺ and CD8⁺ T cells; monocytes and blood dendritic cells were completely lacking (Fig. 3a–d). Bone marrow examination revealed the diagnosis of MDS (WHO 2008 refractory cytopenia with multi-lineage dysplasia (RCMD); WHO 2016 MDS with multi-lineage dysplasia (MDS-MLD)) (Fig. 2b) without cytogenetic aberrations (as assessed by karyogram and FISH) and no evidence of *AML1-ETO*, *CBFb-MYH11*, *FLT3-ITD*, *PML-RARα*, and



TCR γ rearrangements (as assessed by PCR) or *NPM1* mutation (assessed by sequencing). Detection of a *GATA2* mutation (1045T>G C349G) by PCR confirmed the diagnosis of a MonoMAC syndrome/*GATA2* deficiency. There was no family history of similarly affected patients, suggesting the mutation was acquired rather than inherited.

The patient was referred to our center for upfront allogeneic HCT without prior induction chemotherapy. At that time, she had ongoing disseminated and ulcerated *Mycobacterium abscessus* lesions of the skin (Fig. 2a), which were clinically stable and controlled under therapy with clarithromycin, but still had detectable mycobacteria by PCR. Prior to allogeneic

Fig. 2 Clinical manifestations. **a** Pre-HCT, images of mycobacterial skin and soft tissue lesions of the leg (right panel top: ulcerated skin lesion; right panel middle: wound healing after surgical intervention; right panel bottom: HPV-associated plantar warts). **b** H&E staining of bone marrow biopsy at diagnosis of MDS, displaying characteristic dysplastic megakaryocytes (arrow). **c** 18F-FDG-PET-CT scans before HCT (left), in the phase of immune reconstitution (middle), and after complete resolution of inflammation /IRIS (right). Arrows indicate areas with increased metabolic activity due to chronic mycobacterial infection (left) and due to immune reconstitution inflammation (middle). **d** H&E staining of an inflamed subcutaneous lesion of the upper leg during immune reconstitution revealing a focal acute and chronic granulomatous, ulcerating inflammation/immune response with giant cells (arrow) without evidence of persistent mycobacteria. **e** 2 years post-HCT, images of healed skin and soft tissue lesions (left side and right panel top images); complete resolution of HPV-associated plantar warts (right panel bottom)

HCT, the anti-infective regimen was escalated with azithromycin, moxifloxacin, linezolid, and tigecycline to achieve an optimal reduction of the bacterial burden (Fig. 3a). Following a reduced intensity conditioning regimen with fludarabine (30 mg/m^2 day – 7 to – 2) and busulfan (0.8 mg/kg and adjusted to serum levels every 6 h from day – 4 to – 3), $8.12 \times 10^6 \text{ CD34}^+$ peripheral blood stem cells/kg body weight from a 10/10 HLA-matched unrelated donor were transplanted. Graft-versus-host disease (GVHD) prophylaxis comprised anti-thymocyte globulin (ATG; 10 mg/kg day – 4 to – 1), cyclosporine A (CSA; starting on day – 4), and mycophenolate mofetil (MMF; starting on day + 1). Antibiotic treatment was continued during the phase of the allogeneic HCT, except linezolid, which was replaced by amikacin due to hemotoxicity of linezolid (Fig. 3a). In addition to the anti-mycobacterial therapy, the patient was treated with meropenem, piperacillin/tazobactam, caspofungin, and valaciclovir because of fever in neutropenia and aphthous stomatitis. After engraftment (on day + 25), the quadruple anti-mycobacterial therapy was reduced to a triple therapy with azithromycin, moxifloxacin, and tigecycline and continued until 14 weeks post-HCT, when antibiotic therapy was stopped (Fig. 3a).

Besides prolonged nausea, diminished appetite, and significant weight loss (13 kg; minimal weight 43.5 kg, BMI 16.0 kg/m^2), the post-HCT course was rather uncomplicated. There were no signs of acute or chronic GVHD. MMF was tapered from day + 54 and stopped on day + 70; CSA was tapered from day + 108 and stopped on day + 208 post-HCT (Fig. 3a). With the reduction and discontinuation of pharmacological immunosuppression, multiple mycobacterial abscesses, which had been visible but clinically stable during and early after HCT, started swelling and appeared inflamed, and the patient complained about pain in these areas. An ^{18}FDG PET-CT scan confirmed increased metabolic activity within the lesions; however, it did not help to clarify whether this inflammation was due to uncontrolled infection or rather immune reconstitution clearing the mycobacterial infection

(*immune reconstitution inflammatory syndrome (IRIS)*) (Fig. 2c). To better explain the cause of the inflammation and to decide whether to re-initiate antibiotic therapy, a biopsy/excision of a metabolically active skin lesion was obtained (on $d + 216$) for histologic analysis and microbiologic work-up. Histology revealed an inflammatory, chronic granulomatous ulceration (Fig. 2d) without evidence of acid-fast rods (as assessed by Ziehl-Neelsen staining). Likewise, culture and PCR for mycobacteria were negative. With these findings, the process was interpreted as an immune reconstitution phenomenon (IRIS), which lasted over several months. Ultimately, lesions and ulcerations healed and inflammation subsided at approximately 9 months post-HCT. At the same time, the multiple warts on feet and hands (*Verruca vulgaris*) disappeared spontaneously (Fig. 2a). Today, 42 months post-allo-HCT, the patient's immune system appears recovered with normal counts of monocytes and B, NK, and CD4^+ and CD8^+ T cells (Fig. 3a–b), full donor chimerism, no ongoing infections, and no increased susceptibility to infections. Regarding the MDS, the patient has been in an ongoing complete remission since transplantation. The *GATA2* mutation ($1045\text{T}>\text{G}$ C349G) was no longer detectable in bone marrow or blood following the allogeneic HCT.

Allogeneic hematopoietic cell transplantation in *GATA2* deficiencies

Allogeneic HCT represents a potentially curative therapy for the abnormal hematopoietic and lymphoid system of patients with *GATA2* deficiency. However, these patients pose a particular therapeutic challenge due to their disease-associated comorbidities, including life-threatening infections with their respective long-term antimicrobial treatments, pulmonary alveolar proteinosis (PAP) resulting from defective alveolar macrophages, and others. Although allogeneic HCT can reverse the hematologic, immunologic, and to some extend the clinical phenotype, it is not entirely clear who exactly should be candidates for allo-HSCT and when is the best time to perform the procedure. There is a high clinical variability in onset, course, and severity of manifestations with incomplete penetrance and lack of close phenotype-genotype correlation data in *GATA2* deficiency even within families. Thus, not every patient with *GATA2* deficiency may actually require an allogeneic HCT and the benefit of the treatment must outweigh the risks and complications inherent to the procedure, including toxicity of the conditioning regimen, GVHD, uncontrolled infections, and treatment-related mortality. Moreover, optimal conditioning regimen and donor stem cell source remain unclear.

Besides two small prospective studies [15–17] and the two larger analyses mentioned above (EWOG-MDS and NIH [1, 12]), only case reports and small case series describing use and outcomes of allogeneic HCT in patients with *GATA2*

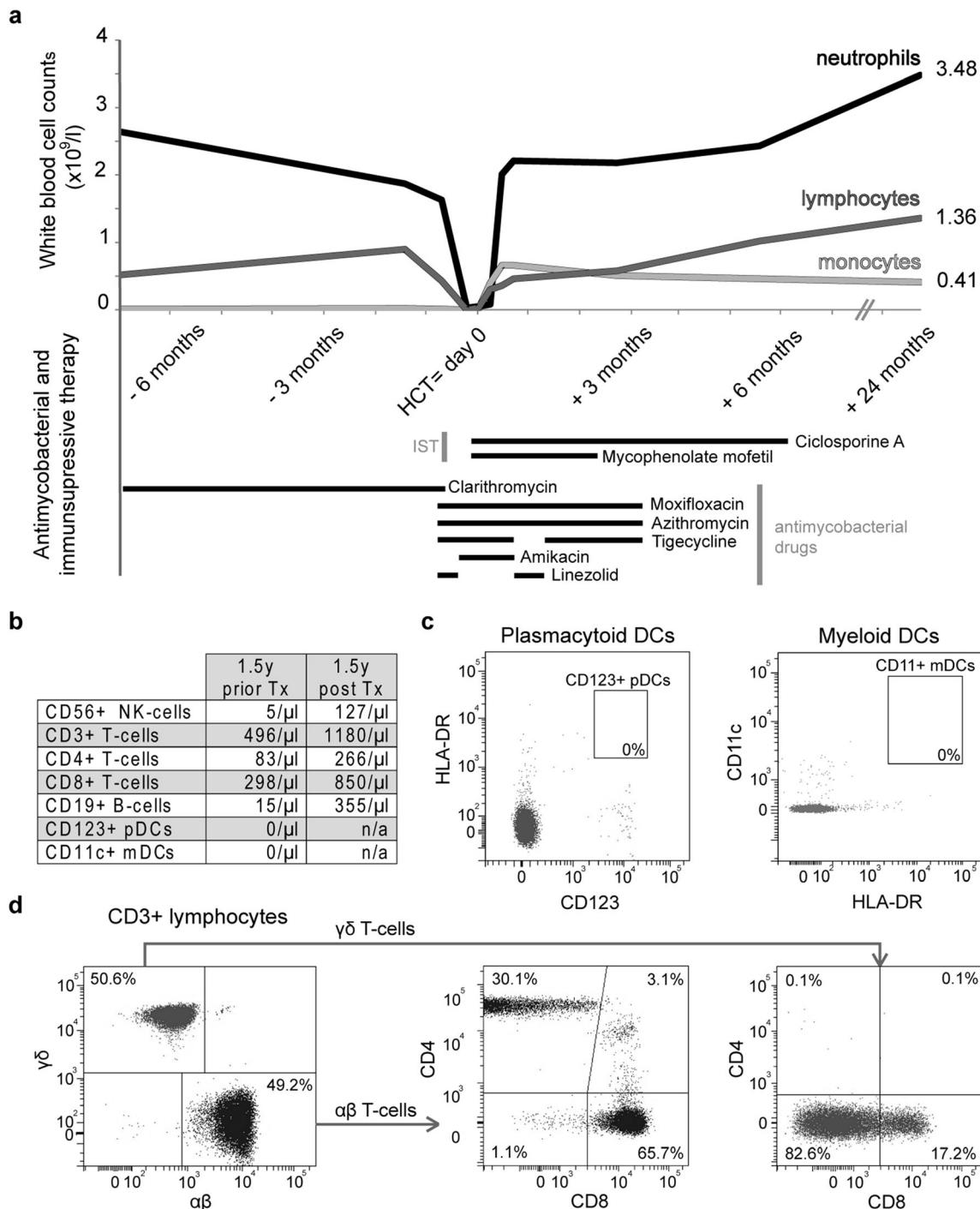


Fig. 3 Blood values, lymphocyte subpopulations, and immunosuppressive/ anti-mycobacterial treatments. **a** Timeline of white blood cell counts (WBC), displaying neutrophils (black), lymphocytes (dark gray), and monocytes (light gray); in addition immunosuppressive (IST) and anti-mycobacterial therapies are displayed. Day zero is the day of graft infusion (HCT). **b** Lymphocyte subpopulations at diagnosis and at 18 months post allogeneic HCT. **c** Representative immunophenotypic plots displaying the lack of CD123⁺ HLA-DR⁺ lineage^{neg} plasmacytoid

dendritic cells (DC) (left plot) and CD11c⁺ HLA-DR⁺ lineage^{neg} myeloid DC (right plot) at diagnosis. **d** Representative immunophenotypic plots displaying the distribution of ab and gd subfractions of CD3⁺ T cells (plot on left side). $\alpha\beta$ T cells contained more CD8⁺ cells with an inverse CD4:CD8 ratio of approximately 0.5 (plot in middle). $\gamma\delta$ T cells comprised mostly CD4⁻ CD8⁻ double-negative cells (> 80%) and some CD8⁺ cells (< 20%), but no CD4⁺ cells (plot on right side)

deficiency exist. Supplemental Table 1 displays patient characteristics, transplant conditions, and outcomes of 183 patients who underwent allogeneic HCT for treatment of genetically

proven or highly suggestive GATA2 deficiency between 2010 and 2018 [2, 3, 5, 8–10, 18–39]. The supplemental text provides a comprehensive description of these published data

Table 1 Compiled patient and treatment characteristics

	Total (patients)	Details provided (n)	183	138	75%
Age			Mean (years)	22.7	
			Median (years)	21	
			Range (years)	4–53	
	n		n	%	
Sex	137	Female	63	46	
		Male	74	54	
Symptoms	77	HPV	45	70	
		HSV	9	16	
		EBV	11	14	
		NTM	24	31	
		Other infections	38	49	
		Lymphedema	14	18	
		PAP	7	9	
Bone marrow	136	MDS	114	84	
		AML/ALL	14	10	
		CMML	2	2	
		Normal/others	6	4	
Cytogenetics	138	Monosomy 7	62	45	
		Trisomy 8	21	15	
		Other aberrations	28	20	
		Normal or not reported	45	33	
Conditioning	99	NMA/RIC	29	29	
		MAC	70	71	
Graft source	111	BM	59	53	
		PBSC	46	41	
		CB	6	5	
Donor	121	MRD	28	23	
		MUD	70	58	
		Haplo	17	14	
		CB	6	5	
Complications post-HCT	116	GVHD (total)	46	40	
		Acute GVHD	33	28	
		Chronic GVHD	14	12	
		GVHD (not specified)	9	8	
		Infections	26	22	
Outcome	130	Alive	99	74	
		Died	31	26	

sets. Table 1 displays the compiled data on 138 patients with *GATA2* deficiency, in whom more detailed information regarding characteristics, hematologic features, disease, conditioning regimens, graft source, outcomes, and complications are provided by the authors.

The age at transplantation ranged between 4 and 53 years; 46% of patients were females, and 54% were males.

Indication for HCT The vast majority of patients underwent allogeneic HCT with the diagnosis of MDS (84%) or acute

leukemias (10%; mostly AML, including one acute lymphoblastic leukemia). There were also transplants performed in patients with CMML (2%) and in patients prior to development of a malignancy but for better management and control of infectious complications (4%).

Conditioning, graft source, donors Of those patients with documented details, approximately one third was prepared with nonmyeloablative or reduced intensity conditioning. Particularly in the earlier years, concerns regarding the

tolerability of the chemotherapy were raised because of active severe infections and often poor clinical condition of the patients. However, using these conditioning regimens, a substantial proportion of engraftment failures and late graft rejections were documented, and therefore, conditioning regimens were intensified. From those patients given myeloablative conditioning, it appears that toxicity is not exceedingly higher compared with patients without *GATA2* deficiency and treatment-related morbidity is manageable. Approximately half of the patients received bone marrow or peripheral stem cell grafts; six patients were given cord blood units. The majority of donors used were matched-unrelated donors (58%), followed by matched-related donors (23%), mismatched related/haploidentical (14%) donors, and cord blood (5%).

Graft-versus-host disease One third of documented patients developed GVHD post-allogeneic HCT (40%), mostly acute GVHD (28%) and less frequently chronic GVHD (12%). This frequency of GVHD appears low, but may also be due to lacking documentation in the case reports and case series. In the phase 1/2 study reported by Grossman et al. 7/14 (57%) had acute GVHD, mostly of the skin. Three of 14 patients developed °III–IV GVHD of two or more organs. [16]. The recent follow-up study using more intensive busulfan-based conditioning revealed a slightly higher rate of °III–IV acute GVHD (26%) in recipients of MRD and MUD grafts, but not in those given haploidentical grafts. Similarly, MRD and MUD recipients had a higher rate of chronic GVHD (46%) compared with recipients of haploidentical grafts (28%) [17]. In most other publications, no detailed information on severity of symptoms, treatment, and response to treatment is given. However, it appears that the proportion of patients developing GVHD is comparable to other transplant cohorts.

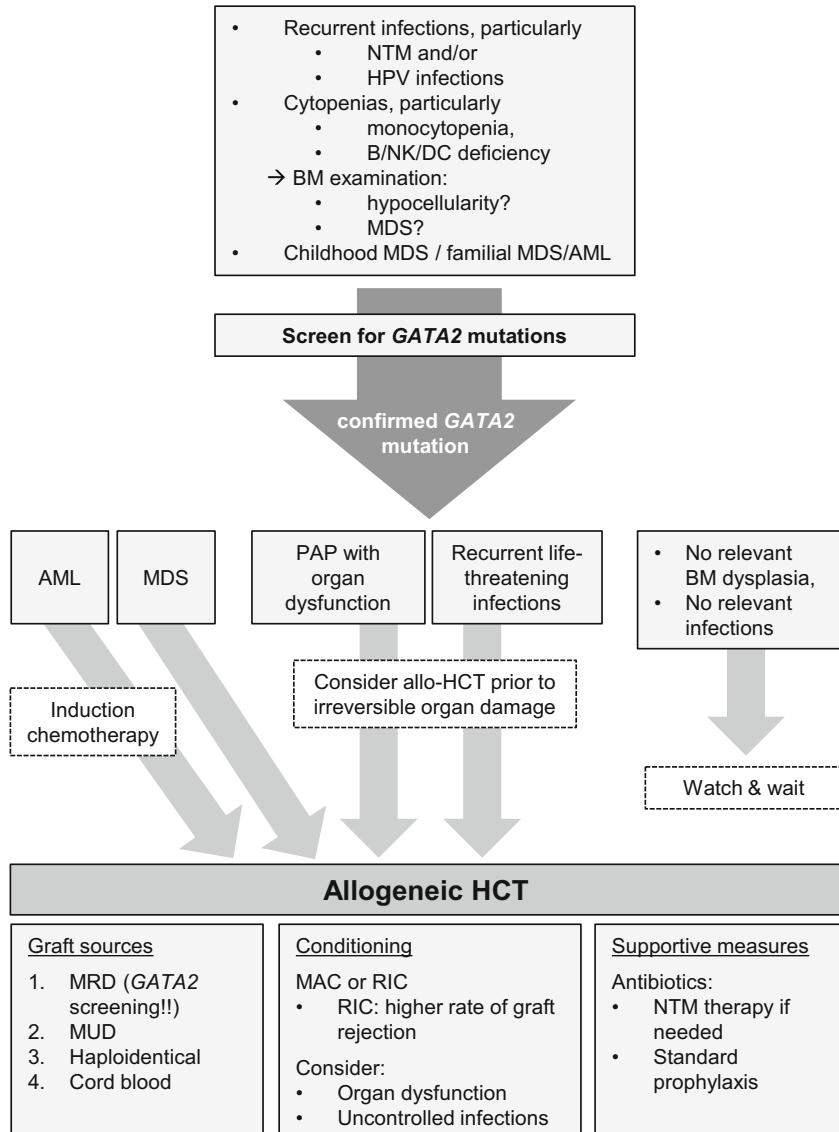
Infections At the time of HCT, more than 70% of patients had HPV infections; 31% had NTM infections, and in 79%, “other bacterial, fungal, parasitical, or viral infections” were documented. Due to the lack of data or reporting, the number of those without infections cannot be determined. After successful allogeneic HCT, the incidence of HPV, and mycobacterial and fungal infections decreased considerably. Post-transplant infections were reported in approximately 22% of patients, but pathogens appeared to be similar to typical to post-HCT infections in other cohorts. In contrast, opportunistic infections that manifested prior to transplant did not appear to pose a major problem—most likely because patients were kept on antibiotic prophylaxis. In most case reports, no details on antibiotic prophylaxis were given; however, within the clinical phase 1/2 study described above, patients with fully treated NTM infections (negative cultures, lesions stable, or regressing on imaging studies) prior to HCT were kept on prophylactic azithromycin until the time of transplant and about a year after. Patients that were, at the time of transplant,

because of recent episodes of infection or bone involvement still under additional rifamycin treatment were switched to moxifloxacin before the start of the conditioning regimen to avoid possible drug interactions. Most patients that were still treated for active infection at the time of transplant were kept on all the anti-mycobacterial drugs at last 6–12 months after transplant [15, 16]. Of note, full immune reconstitution of B, NK, and monocyte populations with reversal of the phenotype and inflammatory lesions can take months to years, in some cases more than 3.5 years, and can be accompanied by immune reconstitution inflammatory syndrome [16, 32] (Supplemental Table 1).

Lungs Pulmonary alveolar proteinosis (PAP) was present in seven reported patients (9% of those with documented symptoms). In four out of seven patients with PAP, a positive family history was present; in two out of seven, the family history was negative for immunodeficiencies or myeloid neoplasms. In one out of seven patients, no information is given. Of note, it appears that pulmonary symptoms and function can markedly improve with allogeneic HCT in patients with PAP. The rational for the improvement is via reconstitution of the alveolar macrophage compartment as some of the pulmonary changes seen in *GATA2* deficiency likely result from pulmonary alveolar macrophage dysfunction. One patient with severe pulmonary hypertension and PAP, which made him a lung transplant candidate prior to HCT, responded well but subsequently developed bronchiolitis obliterans and required lung transplantation 4.5 years post-HCT. Another patient died early after transplant. Both patients had severe PAP requiring pulmonary lavage prior to transplant and supplemental oxygen at the time of HCT [15, 16]. As both PAP and pulmonary arterial hypertension respond well to HCT, recurrent lung infections or declining lung function should be considered an indication for allogeneic HCT before severe organ dysfunction manifests (Fig. 4) [32].

Immune reconstitution inflammatory syndrome post-allo-HCT As the immune system regains its potency after prolonged periods of significant immunosuppression, clearance of infectious foci can lead to a paradoxical clinical deterioration when intense inflammatory infiltrates are formed. The so-called IRIS is frequently observed in patients with HIV once highly active antiretroviral therapy (HAART) is initiated and the immune system recovers. Infections associated with IRIS include *Mycobacteria*, *Cryptococci*, CMV, JC virus, and candida. In non-HIV settings, IRIS is a rare phenomenon that has been described mostly in case reports of transplant recipients [40, 41]. Most reported patients were recipients of solid organs, whereas IRIS following allogeneic HCT appears to be less frequent, possibly because of the prolonged immunosuppression used post-HCT [42–45]. Features of IRIS are variable, but onset is usually acute with localized or generalized

Fig. 4 Diagnostic work-up and therapeutic strategies. No formal recommendations on the indication for allo-HCT, conditioning regimens, donor source, and antibiotic prophylaxis are currently available. NTM non-tuberculous mycobacteria, HPV human papilloma virus, NK natural killer, DC dendritic cell, BM bone marrow, MDS myelodysplastic syndrome, AML acute myeloid leukemia, PAP pulmonary alveolar proteinosis, allo-HCT allogeneic hematopoietic cell transplantation, MRD matched-related donor, MUD matched-unrelated donor. MAC myeloablative conditioning, RIC reduced intensity conditioning



inflammation [45]. Overall, post-transplant IRIS remains a poorly studied entity, and because of the lack of reliable measures to diagnose IRIS in the clinical context, it can be difficult to separate IRIS from worsening of the underlying infectious disease. Thus, it is important to understand these inflammatory syndromes and adjust therapy accordingly—particularly in contexts where patients with prior, long-term immunodeficiencies and chronic opportunistic infections undergoing allogeneic HCT [40, 41].

Discussion

Heterozygous *GATA2* germline mutations can be inherited or acquired de novo. Such *GATA2* deficiency can cause a multi-faceted clinical syndrome that typically involves functional and numeric deficiencies of the lymphoid, immune, and

hematopoietic systems, often paired with features such as lymphedema, congenital deafness, and, as a consequence of immune dysfunction, opportunistic infections. Most importantly, however, *GATA2* deficiency predisposes patients to the development of malignant hematologic diseases, particularly MDS/AML. The natural history of *GATA2* deficiency is variable, with some patients presenting early in life, often with rather unspecific symptoms, such as recurrent infections, and others becoming symptomatic only after many decades [12].

The human *GATA2* gene is located on chromosome 3q21, has six exons, and belongs to a family of zinc finger transcription factors that are critical regulators in hematopoiesis [46]. *GATA2* transcription is regulated by several transcription factors such as *ETS1*, *BMP4*, *NOTCH1*, *PU.1*, and *EVII* and by the cytokines IL-1 and TNF α . The dynamic expression patterns of *GATA1* and *GATA2* are critically influencing the coordination of hematopoietic homeostasis, including genesis,

survival, and maintenance of hematopoietic stem cells (HSC) and progenitor cells [47], whereas downregulation of *GATA2* appears to be necessary for lineage differentiation [46]. Accordingly, *GATA2* knockout mice have profound defects in definitive hematopoiesis, and *GATA2* deficient embryos die of anemia at day 10–11 of gestation. In heterozygous adult mice with *GATA2* haploinsufficiency, an increased proportion of quiescent HSC with increased apoptosis can be observed, resulting in defects in the self-renewal and proliferation capacity of HSC, abnormal HSC homeostasis, and a reduced HSC pool [6, 46, 48, 49]. Of note, in humans with myeloid malignancies with inv(3)(q21q26.2) or t(3;3)(q21;q26,2), these chromosomal rearrangements can result in dysregulation of the proto-oncogene *EVII* at 3q26.2 by reposition of a distal *GATA2* enhancer and thereby ectopically activate *EVII*, while simultaneously conferring functional *GATA2* haploinsufficiency [50].

Genetic aberrations of *GATA2* are highly heterogeneous and occur throughout the coding region, resulting in the creation of stop codons, frameshift mutations, deletions, substitutions, indel mutations, and point mutations [12, 34, 47, 51]. To this point, no correlation between the type of *GATA2* mutation and the clinical phenotype could be established [12]. Likewise, the molecular basis for the progression of *GATA2* deficiency into MDS/AML has not been clarified. It is believed that secondary genetic events may be responsible for the clinical heterogeneity among cases with *GATA2* deficiency as well as the progression into MDS/AML, as suggested by a recently published case report: whole genome sequencing in a patient with germline *GATA2* mutation revealed new mutations in *EZH2*, *HECW2*, and *GATA1* that appeared to be important secondary events leading to the development of MDS/AML in this patient [25]. The hypothesis that additional genetic events determine the clinical outcomes, including the development of malignancy, is supported by the fact that *GATA2* deficiency is commonly associated with cytogenetic aberrations, including partial deletion or monosomy of chromosome 7, and additional acquired mutations, such as those in *ASXL1* [10].

Given the genetic heterogeneity and variability of the natural history and course of *GATA2* deficiency, the best timing of allogeneic HCT is not clear. Some carriers remain rather asymptomatic throughout life; however, once symptoms develop, survival declines [1]. Thus, the ideal time for transplant would be after the onset of pathological abnormalities but before the development of organ damage or malignancy (Fig. 4). Practically, this means that with progressive bone marrow dysplasia and occurrence of cytogenetic abnormalities, the primary indication for allogeneic HCT is given. Performing the transplant procedure during the hypocellular phase of MDS allows upfront transplantation, whereas with transformation into overt AML, typically an induction chemotherapy prior to HCT with additional toxicity is necessary. Another indication for transplantation, and thereby replacement of the dysfunctional immune system, is the development

of recurrent severe opportunistic infections that can also be life-threatening. Progressive lung injury from infection and PAP represents a third reason for all HCT. Both frequent pneumonias and PAP result in gradual deterioration of lung function, and therefore, HCT should be performed prior to irreversible organ damage [32].

Details of HCT for treatment of *GATA2* deficiencies have not been studied extensively in a prospective fashion. Only two small prospective studies have been performed, one as a pilot study on the feasibility of nonmyeloablative conditioning for allo-HCT ($n = 14$ patients) and one as a follow-up trial testing a more intensive, busulfan-containing regimen ($n = 22$ patients). In addition, there are two larger datasets and a number of case reports and small case series available. Here, we performed a comprehensive search of the available literature on the use of allogeneic HCT in patients with *GATA2* deficiency. In the earlier years, patient preparation was typically done by reduced intensity conditioning due to concerns regarding uncontrolled infections and increased toxicity in these often fragile patients. However, with such reduced intensity conditioning, engraftment failure was observed in a substantial proportion of patients. Thus, in later experiences, more intensive, myeloablative conditioning was used, and this resulted in more uniform engraftment and a reduced risk of relapse [12, 16]. Although available data from those case reports and series do not provide extensive details on post-HCT course and complications, it appears that infections that were recorded were similar to those observed in “normal” transplant cohorts, whereas uncontrolled opportunistic infections during pharmacological immunosuppression were not reported. Likewise, the rate of GVHD appears to be comparable to other cohorts (Table 1 and Supplemental Table 1).

Our case presented here adds to the literature the finding of immune reconstitution inflammatory syndrome (IRIS) in a young woman with *GATA2* deficiency, evolving MDS-MLD and multiple *Mycobacterium abscessus* granulomata. With the reduction of pharmacological immunosuppression, inflammation of the lesions increased and lesions became painful. PET-CT imaging revealed increased metabolic activity. Fearing for uncontrolled infection, a biopsy of the lesion was taken and revealed no evidence of mycobacteria by PCR and culture, which supported the diagnosis of immune reconstitution rather than uncontrolled infection. Ultimately, healing of the granulomatous lesions and the multiple warts on hands and feet took approximately 6–9 months. This case illustrates the typical course and problems encountered during treatment of patients with *GATA2* deficiencies and other states of immune dysfunction and thereby may help to guide treatment decisions of other patients.

Today, it is clear that only allogeneic HCT can cure the dysfunctional hematopoietic and immune systems in patients with *GATA2* deficiency. In the light of evolving gene-repair technologies implementing CRISPR/CAS methodologies, it

appears conceivable that one day, gene therapy represents an alternative treatment approach. Not only would such a repair rectify the incompetence of the immune system, but might also give HSCs an advantage to outcompete cytogenetically abnormal cells and thereby prevent or lower the risk of malignant transformation.

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Compliance with ethical standards

Conflict of interest The authors declare that they have no conflict of interest.

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