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·人工智能+医学科研·

人工智能辅助 CT 诊断淋巴结转移：融合模型、多癌种应用与可解释性挑战

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[摘要] 淋巴结转移的准确诊断对癌症分期、治疗选择和预后评估至关重要。CT作为常规影像学检查手段,在淋巴结转移诊断中有重要作用,但其在识别短径<1 cm的小淋巴结及微转移灶方面仍存在明显局限。近年来,人工智能(AI)技术在医学影像分析中快速发展,为提升CT诊断淋巴结转移的精确度提供了新的技术路径。本文系统综述了AI辅助CT诊断淋巴结转移的研究进展,重点分析了影像组学、深度学习及其融合模型在不同癌种淋巴结转移诊断中的技术特点、诊断效能及临床应用现状,并对其未来发展方向与面临的挑战进行展望。

[关键词] 人工智能; 计算机断层扫描; 淋巴结转移; 影像组学; 深度学习

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Artificial intelligence-assisted CT diagnosis of lymph node metastasis: integrated models, multi-cancer applications, and interpretability challenges

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[Abstract] Accurate diagnosis of lymph node metastasis is critical for cancer staging, treatment selection, and prognostic evaluation. Computed tomography (CT), as a conventional imaging modality, plays a significant role in diagnosing lymph node metastasis. However, it remains limited in the identification of nodes with short-axis diameter <1 cm and micrometastases. In recent years, artificial intelligence (AI) technology has advanced rapidly in the field of medical image analysis, offering novel technical pathways to improve the accuracy of CT-based diagnosis of lymph node metastasis. This article reviews the research progress in AI-assisted CT diagnosis of lymph node metastasis, with a focus on the technical characteristics, diagnostic performance, and clinical applications of radiomics, deep learning, and their integrated models across various cancer types. Future directions and existing challenges are also discussed.

[Key words] artificial intelligence; computed tomography; lymph node metastasis; radiomics; deep learning

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癌症已成为威胁人类健康的重大全球性疾病负担^[1]。流行病学数据显示,肺癌、肝癌、胃癌、结直肠癌和食管癌占中国癌症总死亡人数的67.5%^[2]。淋巴结转移状态是决定癌症分期、指导治疗决策(如手术范围、是否需要新辅助化疗)和

评估患者预后的主要因素之一,其准确诊断对优化患者管理具有重要意义^[3]。

目前,淋巴结转移的诊断金标准是病理学检查,但其侵入性不可避免。细针抽吸细胞学检查(fine needle aspiration cytology, FNAC)操作

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简便,但因取样组织量有限可能导致漏诊^[4]。前哨淋巴结活检(sentinel lymph node biopsy, SLNB)精确度高,但可能引发上肢水肿等术后并发症^[4]。PET-CT能进行全身评估,但价格昂贵且对微小转移灶不灵敏,限制了其广泛应用^[5]。CT因其无创、经济、普及等优势成为了临床常规的影像学检查手段^[6]。然而,CT检查依赖于影像科医生的主观评估,在识别形态不典型、尺寸微小(短径<1 cm)或对比度低的转移淋巴结时灵敏度和一致性有限^[7]。

为应对这些挑战,基于人工智能(artificial intelligence, AI)的定量影像分析技术应运而生。影像组学通过高通量提取医学图像中的定量特征揭示肿瘤内在异质性^[8]。深度学习,特别是基于卷积神经网络(convolutional neural network, CNN)的模型,能够自动从图像中学习复杂的、与任务相关的抽象特征,减少了对特征工程的依赖,在医学影像分析领域取得了突破性进展^[9]。这些技术为提高CT诊断淋巴结转移的准确性和可重复性提供了新的契机。目前已有大量研究成功开发了针对单一癌种的AI模型^[10-14],但泛癌种模型研究尚少。本综述旨在系统总结AI辅助CT诊断淋巴结转移的研究进展,剖析其优势与挑战,并展望未来发展前景。

1 AI辅助CT诊断淋巴结转移的核心技术

AI辅助CT诊断淋巴结转移的常用模型包括影像组学、深度学习及其融合模型(图1)。现有研究证实,基于CT的AI模型在预测多种癌症淋巴结转移方面表现出色^[10,13,15-25],见表1。

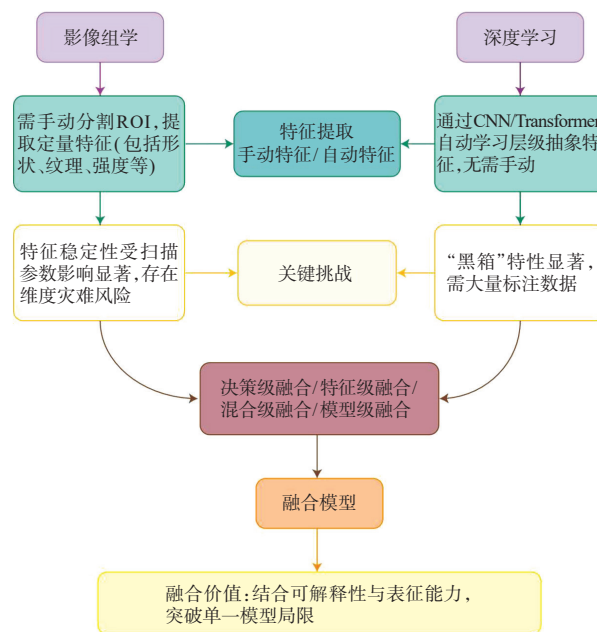


图1 影像组学与深度学习技术路径对比及融合策略
维度灾难是指高维特征导致的模型过拟合。ROI:感兴趣区域;CNN:卷积神经网络。

表1 AI辅助CT诊断淋巴结转移的代表性研究

癌种	模型类型	AUC值	关键研究	技术突破点	临床价值
肺癌	影像组学	0.686~0.880	Yan等 ^[17]	双区域(肿瘤+淋巴结)纹理特征提取/形态特征分析	提高小淋巴结检出率
	深度学习	0.948~0.961	Ma等 ^[18]	3D CNN+影像组学特征SHAP/Grad-CAM可视化	减少亚厘米级淋巴结转移的漏诊
	融合模型	0.907(外部验证)	Yin等 ^[19]	Swin Transformer架构自动特征学习	指导亚肺叶切除手术范围
胃癌	影像组学	0.872~0.938	Ding等 ^[20]	瘤周脂肪异质性质量化	无创筛查早期胃癌淋巴结转移
	深度学习	0.876(外部验证)	Jin等 ^[21]	Transformer多站点纹理/形态特征分析	指导个体化手术治疗和预测预后
	融合模型	0.822(国际多中心验证)	Dong等 ^[22]	深度学习列线图预测淋巴结转移数量	预测淋巴结转移数量且与生存预后关联
胰腺癌	深度学习	0.92	Bian等 ^[10]	自动分割模型,独立深度网络/放射组学预测模型	预测生存预后,减少假阴性
	融合模型	0.88~0.91(多中心验证)	Gu等 ^[23]	放射组学深度学习特征	预测无病生存期
头颈部癌症	融合模型	0.950	Chen等 ^[24]	特征融合策略构建模型	辅助术前精确识别淋巴结转移
	融合模型	0.83(局部复发), 0.90(远处转移)	Bae等 ^[25]	解剖图注意力机制建模淋巴引流	提高灵敏度,辅助诊断
	融合模型	0.89~0.90	Wang等 ^[13]	采用2种融合策略开发3D+2D深度学习融合模型	提高隐匿性淋巴结转移的检出率,避免过度治疗

AI:人工智能;CT:计算机断层扫描;AUC:曲线下面积;CNN:卷积神经网络;SHAP:Shapley可加性解释;Grad-CAM:梯度加权类激活映射。

1.1 影像组学模型 影像组学通过计算机技术从CT图像高通量提取人眼无法分辨的定量特征（如形状、一阶统计、纹理等），以量化肿瘤的表型异质性及微环境信息，从而减小主观阅片的误差^[26]。一项针对非小细胞肺癌的大型meta分析显示，基于CT的影像组学模型预测淋巴结转移的汇总灵敏度为0.84（95%CI 0.79~0.88），特异度为0.82（95%CI 0.75~0.87），AUC值高达0.90（95%CI 0.87~0.92）^[27]。同样，在结直肠癌^[14]和十二指肠乳头状癌^[28]中，影像组学也展现了卓越的预测性能。影像组学模型预测淋巴结转移的优势在于能够量化肿瘤的微观异质性；特征具有一定的可解释性，有助于临床理解；对数据量的需求相对深度学习较小。但也存在以下局限性：严重依赖手工或半自动的肿瘤分割，耗时且易引入操作者间变异；高维特征易导致过拟合和维度灾难风险；模型性能易受扫描设备、成像参数等异质性因素影响，泛化能力面临挑战。

1.2 深度学习模型 深度学习模型，特别是CNN及其衍生的先进架构（如Transformer），能够通过多层网络结构直接从原始像素数据中自动学习分层特征，无需手动设计和筛选特征^[29]。这使其在处理复杂的图像模式识别任务中表现出巨大优势。例如，Ma等^[18]采用Swin Transformer架构开发的

肺腺癌淋巴结转移预测模型，在3个独立队列中AUC值高达0.948~0.961，显著优于传统的临床模型和影像组学模型（ $P<0.05$ ）。Zheng等^[30]基于Transformer的网络模型也成功用于预测胃癌新辅助化疗后的淋巴结转移，同样表现出稳健的性能。深度学习模型预测淋巴结转移的优势包括：端到端的自动特征提取，精度高；能有效捕捉图像的深层、复杂和空间上下文信息；在大样本数据下通常表现最佳。存在的局限性包括：通常需要大规模、高质量的标注数据进行训练；模型是“黑箱”，决策过程缺乏透明度和可解释性，影响临床采纳；计算资源需求大，部署成本高；缺乏可靠的不确定性估计，使医生难以判断预测结果的可信度。

1.3 深度学习与影像组学融合模型 为了结合深度学习强大的表征能力与影像组学特征的可解释性，融合模型应运而生（图2）。研究表明，设计精良的融合策略往往能实现性能互补。Wang等^[13]在喉鳞状细胞癌的研究中，融合了3D深度学习、2D深度学习、影像组学和临床数据的模型在所有队列中均取得了最高的AUC值（0.89~0.90）。同样，在胃癌^[22]和口腔癌^[24]中，融合模型也表现出优于单一模型的潜力。然而，简单的特征拼接未必能带来性能提升，这表明需要设计更精巧的融合框架以发挥协同效应^[31]。

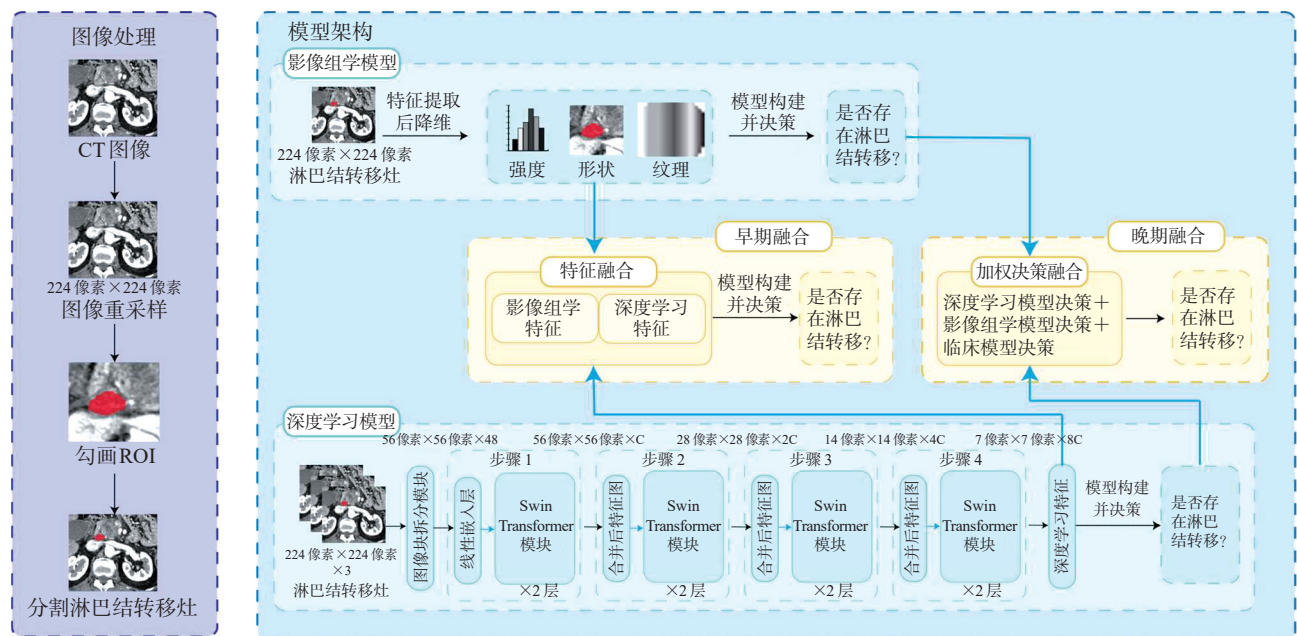


图2 单一模型及融合模型架构示意图

CT:计算机断层扫描;ROI:感兴趣区域;C:通道数.

2 AI辅助CT诊断各类癌症淋巴结转移的临床应用

2.1 肺癌 非小细胞肺癌约占所有肺癌病例的85%^[32],其淋巴结转移状态是影响治疗策略的关键预后因素^[33]。除了前述Ma等^[18]基于Swin Transformer构建的高性能模型外,多模态融合策略也展现出巨大潜力。Yin等^[19]开发了一个融合CT影像特征和临床知识的多模态深度学习模型,在独立外部验证集中AUC值达到0.907,同时实现了0.878的特异度,证明了多源信息整合的价值。Yan等^[17]开发的“肿瘤-隆突下淋巴结”双区影像组学模型也优于单区域模型(AUC值为0.794),证实了多区域联合建模的价值。这相较于传统CT形态学评估0.7~0.8的AUC值^[34]有显著的性能飞跃,为肺癌的精准分期提供了更可靠的工具。

2.2 胃癌 胃癌的术前淋巴结分期对于确定根治性手术范围至关重要^[35]。局部淋巴结转移是根治性手术患者预后评估的重要预测因素之一^[36]。影像组学在此领域应用广泛,一项meta分析证实了其良好的诊断性能,整合临床变量后AUC值提升至0.90^[37]。还有研究发现,基于瘤周脂肪区域构建的影像组学模型预测性能优越(外部验证集中AUC值为0.872),明显优于基于CT报告的手动分类(AUC值为0.674),凸显了肿瘤微环境的重要性^[20]。在深度学习方面,Jin等^[21]开发的系统能够同时预测11个淋巴结站点的转移状态,中位AUC值达到0.876,远超传统临床病理模型(AUC值为0.652),为临床提供了更精细化的分期工具。

2.3 胰腺癌 胰腺癌预后极差,准确的术前淋巴结评估是决定治疗策略的核心^[38-39]。传统CT诊断胰腺癌淋巴结转移的灵敏度仅为44.2%,特异度为82.4%^[40]。AI技术带来了突破。Bian等^[10]开发的全自动深度学习模型在一项纳入734例胰腺导管腺癌患者的研究中,独立验证集AUC值为0.92,明显优于放射科医生的人工评估(AUC值为0.65)、临床模型(AUC值为0.77)和传统影像组学模型(AUC值为0.68)。Gu等^[23]针对非功能性胰腺神经内分泌肿瘤开发了放射组学深度学习模型,其在多中心队列中表现出卓越的性能(AUC值为0.88~0.91),有望为这类肿瘤淋巴结清扫范围的决策提供更精准的依据。

2.4 头颈部癌症 头颈部解剖结构复杂,淋巴结转移模式多变,为影像学评估带来巨大挑战。融合模型在该领域显示出强大潜力。Chen等^[24]构建的

深度学习与影像组学融合模型在预测口腔鳞状细胞癌颈部淋巴结转移时,AUC值高达0.950,且灵敏度(92.0%)显著高于临床医生(60.0%~72.0%)。Bae等^[25]利用图神经网络开发的RadGraph框架能够整体建模头颈部多个解剖区域并进行空间分析,在预测远处转移方面AUC值达到了0.90。这些进展为指导头颈部癌症淋巴结清扫范围和预测隐匿性转移提供了强有力的技术支持,有效弥补了传统CT检测的局限性。

3 面临的挑战与局限性

3.1 数据质量与标准化问题 模型性能高度依赖于大规模、高质量、标准化的数据。然而,不同中心的CT扫描参数、重建算法和造影方案存在巨大差异,严重影响模型的泛化能力^[41]。此外,病理确认的微转移灶(最长径<2 mm)存在诊断者间差异以及阳性/阴性样本不均衡的问题,都对数据质量提出了更高要求。推广Node-RADS等标准化报告系统和遵循《人工智能医学影像研究报告检查清单:作者与审稿人指南》等AI报告指南是未来的方向^[42-43]。

3.2 模型验证与泛化能力 当前多数研究局限于回顾性单中心验证,缺乏严格的外部验证和前瞻性研究^[44],而这对于评估模型在真实临床环境中的性能至关重要。模型在真实世界临床环境中的性能可能下降^[45]。此外,为单一癌种开发的模型通常难以直接应用于其他癌种,开发泛癌种模型仍是未来的重要挑战。未来应积极开展前瞻性随机对照试验来验证AI的临床价值^[46]。

3.3 临床转化与实用性 深度学习模型高昂的计算成本限制了其在基层医院的部署。如何将AI系统无缝集成到现有的临床工作流程(如医院信息系统、影像归档和通信系统)而不增加医生负担,是一个现实问题^[45]。此外,目前普遍缺乏对AI辅助诊断的成本效益分析,难以说服医疗机构进行投资决策。

3.4 可解释性与可信度 深度学习的“黑箱”特性是其临床应用的最大障碍之一^[47]。医生无法理解模型的决策依据,在面临高风险决策时难以完全信任^[48]。尽管出现了如梯度加权类激活映射和Shapley可加性解释方法等可解释性技术来可视化模型的关注区域或特征贡献^[49](图3),但这些事后解释方法仍难以完全揭示模型的内在逻辑。此外,当AI发生误诊时相关的法律和伦理责任界定尚不明确。

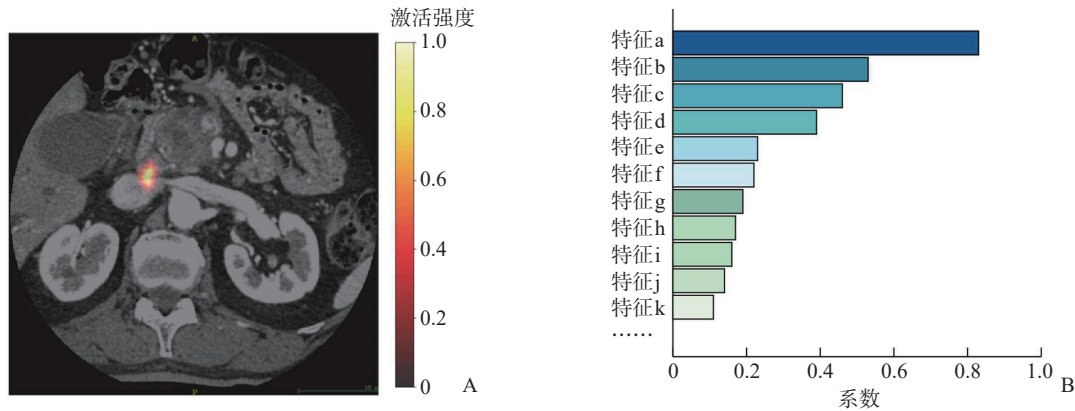


图3 模型可解释性验证示意图

A:梯度加权类激活映射可视化淋巴结转移的热图;B:Shapley可加性解释特征贡献条形图。

4 未来发展方向与展望

4.1 技术发展趋势 以Transformer为代表的新型网络架构在捕捉全局依赖关系方面优于传统CNN,且在多种癌症中展现出潜力。自监督学习可利用海量无标注数据进行预训练,有望缓解对大规模标注数据的依赖。联邦学习则能在保护数据隐私的前提下实现多中心协同建模,但需通过差分隐私等技术应对其安全风险^[50]。整合CT、MRI、PET-CT等影像数据乃至病理图像(如全数字切片^[51])和基因组学数据^[52],是提升模型性能和全面刻画肿瘤生物学特性的重要方向。

4.2 临床应用前景 未来的AI模型不仅是诊断工具,更将成为精准医学的决策支持系统。通过开发轻量化模型可推动AI在基层医疗机构的早期筛查应用。更重要的是,AI有望从影像特征中提取预后生物标志物,预测患者的生存期、复发风险和治疗反应,实现从“辅助诊断”到“智能诊疗”的转变。

4.3 标准化建设需求 为确保AI技术的健康发展,亟须建立覆盖数据采集、算法性能评估、安全性评估和临床验证全流程的技术标准与行业规范^[45]。这需要多学科团队(临床医生、数据科学家、AI研发人员、伦理学家、监管人员)的通力合作,并加强对医务人员的AI技术培训,以确保AI在临床实践中得到负责任的应用。

5 小结

AI辅助CT诊断淋巴结转移已展现出巨大的临床应用价值和广阔的发展前景。影像组学、深度学习及其融合模型在多种癌症中均取得了超越传统方法的诊断效能,为临床精准决策提供了强有力的辅助工具。然而,该领域仍面临数据标准化、模型

外部验证、临床转化和可解释性等诸多挑战。未来的发展应聚焦于开展大规模多中心前瞻性研究,加强模型的可解释性与可信度,推进多模态数据与新技术的深度融合,并建立完善的行业标准与监管框架。随着这些问题的逐步解决,AI必将成为癌症精准诊疗不可或缺的一部分,并最终改善患者的临床结局。

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