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Detection of flat colorectal neoplasia by artificial intelligence: A systematic review



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ABSTRACT

Objectives: This study review focuses on a deep learning method for the detection of colorectal lesions in colonoscopy and AI support for detecting colorectal neoplasia, especially in flat lesions.

Data sources: We performed a systematic electric search with PubMed by using "colonoscopy", "artificial intelligence", and "detection". Finally, nine articles about development and validation study and eight clinical trials met the review criteria.

Results: Development and validation studies showed that trained AI models had high accuracy—approximately 90% or more for detecting lesions. Performance was better in elevated lesions that in superficial lesions in the two studies. Among the eight clinical trials, all but one trial showed a significantly high adenoma detection rate in the CADe group than in the control group. Interestingly, the CADe group detected significantly high flat lesions than the control group in the seven studies.

Conclusion: Flat colorectal neoplasia can be detected by endoscopists who use AI

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Introduction

With remarkable advances in endoscopy and endoscopic diagnostics, even small lesions — as small as several millimeters, can be detected during endoscopy. The process from detection to treatment can now be performed with an endoscopy. Endoscopy is the most useful examination for the early detection of gastrointestinal cancer, and the effect of endoscopic screening has been reported to reduce the mortality caused by gastric cancer and colorectal cancer. It was reported that the mortality rate of those who underwent endoscopy for gastric cancer screening was 67% lower than that of those who underwent endoscopy for upper gastrointestinal series. Endoscopy for gastric cancer screening has also been reported to reduce mortality by 47% compared with those who have not undergone endoscopy for gastric cancer screening between the ages of 40 and 74 [1,2]. Regarding colorectal cancer, it has been reported that the detection and resection of neoplastic

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lesions (adenomatous polyps) during colonoscopy decreased the incident rate from 76% to 90%, and the mortality rate by 53% based on the results of the National polyp study and its cohort study conducted in the United States [3,4]. In other words, early detection and treatment of cancer are possible in the area of the gastrointestinal tract that can be observed by endoscopy. It is thought that this progress in both endoscopic diagnostics and technology has been established by a 1-on-1 detailed comparison between endoscopic findings and histopathological images, and now, lesions that could not be diagnosed earlier can also be diagnosed.

However, so-called "interval cancer", in which cancer is found even though the patient has undergone endoscopy, has become an important issue of endoscopy in recent years. In the differential diagnosis after lesion detection, there is a problem such as an experience difference in which the diagnostic accuracy differs between experts and beginners who perform endoscopy. In endoscopy examination, an endoscope is inserted into the living body through the mouth or anus, and the luminal surface of the target organ is visualized on a monitor with a high-definition image. The workflow of endoscopy for early detection and treatment of cancer mainly consists of four processes: 1) lesion detection, 2)

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differential/depth diagnosis, 3) treatment, and 4) surveillance [5–7]. In all these processes, the doctor makes a real-time clinical decision, by observing the captured endoscopic image on the monitor. For example, a missed lesion is the main cause of the above-mentioned "interval cancer" in which no lesion is expected to be found during the endoscopy, and it is reported that one of the causes is an experience gap between doctors [8]. This experience gap is a heavy burden for patients and is an issue that needs to be solved. This experience gap affects all the aforementioned processes, especially when a lesion is found, but the neoplastic lesion is mistakenly diagnosed endoscopically as a nonneoplastic lesion and the lesion is left in vivo. The accuracy of differential diagnosis and the detection of lesions is important, as it will otherwise provide the patient with wrong surveillance endoscopy intervals.

In the endoscopic image diagnosis support system using Al technology, in the field of gastrointestinal endoscopy, the Al system automatically analyzes the image displayed on the monitor of the endoscope and predicts the suspected lesion location, the differential diagnosis, the tumor depth of invasion, and the presence or absence of metastasis [9,10]. Because Al prediction is judged by setting an arbitrary threshold, endoscopic diagnosis becomes more objective, and it has been attracting attention in recent years from the viewpoint of improving the diagnostic ability of doctors, reducing human mistakes, and eliminating the experience gap of doctors. In a colonoscopy, six Al systems are now regulatory

approved in the EU and/or Japan; WISE VISION (NEC), CAD-EYE (Fujifilm medical), EndoBRAIN-EYE (Olympus), GI-Genius, Discovery AI (Pentax), and Endoscreener (Wision AI). In the present review, we focus on this deep learning method and the detection of colorectal neoplasms, particularly in flat lesions.

Data source and study flow

We performed a systematic electric search with PubMed for articles using the search terms "colonoscopy", "artificial intelligence", and "detection" (final access on 03/2021). The search was limited to fully published original articles described in "development and validation study" with testing on independent image sets, or "clinical trials" of the AI system by using deep learning technology for detecting lesions in colonoscopy, and written in English — published between 2016 and 2021 (Fig. 1). Literature search, study selection, and data extraction were independently performed by two authors (M.Y. and S.Y.), and disagreements were resolved through discussion with a third author (H.K.).

Application of deep learning technology for colonoscopy

Al is defined as " the science and engineering of making intelligent machines, especially intelligent computer programs" by John McCarthy, and intelligent learning is to find information that can be

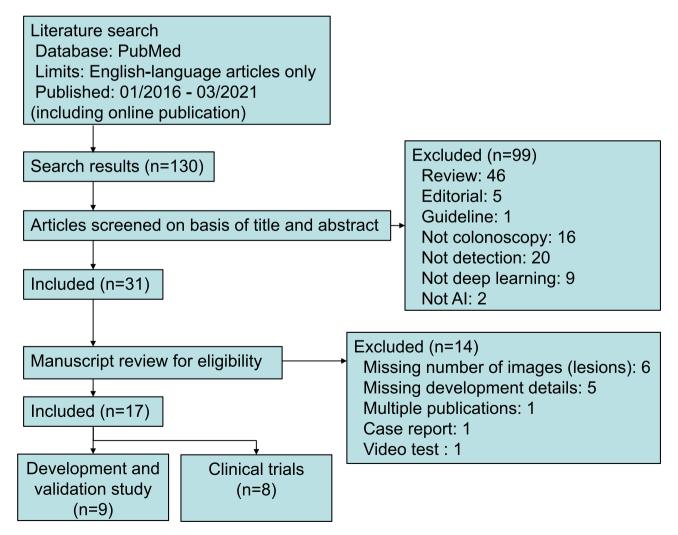


Fig. 1. Flow diagram of study selection.

used for inference from input data and to get a new conclusion based on that information [11]. Thus far, methods such as neocognitron, support vector machine, and deep learning have been developed as part of this intelligence program. AI has been booming in the 1960s and 1980s; however, its performance has been limited and it has not reached a breakthrough [12]. The current third AI boom was because of the Deep Belief Network reported by Geoffrey Hinton et al., in 2006 [13]. Now, it has developed into a convolutional neural network, which controls overfitting as exhibited in machine learning, and the learning performance has improved dramatically. This deep learning method is particularly suitable for extracting image features and is known to exert extremely high capabilities in detection, classification, and identification. Combined with recent improvements in computer performance such as GPUs, we are entering the third AI boom represented by "Deep Blue" in chess and autonomous driving [14]. The high performance of deep learning has been exhibited in global image recognition contests, and it is said to have already surpassed human ability [15]. It is expected that deep learning technology that makes this intellectual inference will be used in the medical field. From 2016 to 2017, studies regarding deep learning of skin cancer images, fundus photographs of diabetic retinopathy, and HE specimen images of breast cancer reported that diseases can be detected by AI with accuracy in comparison to expert doctors [16-20].

Utilization of deep learning technology for lesion detection in colonoscopy

Until recent years, a traditional machine learning technology has been used for automatic lesion detection in colonoscopy. However, the recent development of deep learning technology has helped in lesion detection. There has been a debate about the unclear process of deep learning judgment, the so-called "black box"

problem, and overfitting that the AI system can fit for the training and validation data, but cannot fit for independent test data. However, based on the findings of the deep learning, high-performance data for lesion detection in colonoscopy obtained from independent pure-test studies (Table 1) —conducted in Japan and Europe, South Korea, and China, six AI systems are now regulatory approved in the EU and Japan as described in the introduction.

The nine studies listed in Table 1 are development and validation studies of Al systems using deep learning technology for lesion detection in colonoscopy [9,21–28]. Each study includes an independent test set in addition to training and validation to evaluate the performance of the trained Al model. Although the performance of the trained Al model cannot be compared directly, because the test sets are all different, the sensitivities and specificities in the independent pure test sets are high — approximately 90% or more in each model. Regarding the images used for training, many images are needed for development and validation; around 1000 to 4000 still images or video frames can be used for supervised training.

The accuracy of the trained AI model is better in elevated lesions than in superficial lesions in the 2 studies (Table 1). AI shows the same behavior as humans, and it is considered that AI may be weak against images that have never been learned. Certainly, it can be seen that the model trained only with the video frames seems to be strong in the pure-test set of the video frames, and the model trained only with the still image is strong in the pure-test set using the still image. It is to be noted that values in the table are calculated per frame. In other words, considering that the video is composed of 30 frames per second, detection itself is possible only if the sensitivity is above 70%. Indeed, the AI detection image of the flat lesion is depicted in Fig. 2. The flat-type lesions are detected by AI. Furthermore, AI could also detect missed lesions (Fig. 3). Therefore, this lesion may have been detected if the doctor used AI.

Table 1Development and validation study of a deep learning model for the detection of the colorectal neoplasms during colonoscopy.

Author	Year of Publication	Country AI system, company		Trained			Pure test sets: still images				
				lesions, total, n	still images , n	video frames , n	images, n	Sensitivity , overall	Sensitivity , superficial lesions	Specificity , overall	
Yamada M et al.	2019	Japan	WISE VISION, NEC	2116	4087	891	4840	97.3% (95.9 -98.4)	92.9% (86.4–96.9	92.9% (88.5 -92.9)	
Hassan C et al.	2020	Italy	GI-Genius, Medtronic	2684	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	
Wang P et al.	2018	China	EndoScreener, Wision AI				27133	94.38%	NA	95.92%	
Urban G et al.	2018	USA	AI_for_GI	NA	8641	44947	8641	90%	NA	99.5%	
Misawa M et al.	. 2021	Japan	EndoBRAIN-EYE, Olympus	NA	NA	56668	NA	NA	NA	NA	
Lee JY et al.	2020	Korea		NA	NA	8075	1338	96.7%	89.8%	NA	
Ozawa T et al.	2020	Japan	AI Medical Service Inc.	4752	16418	NA	7077	92%		NA	
Jheng YC et al.	2021	Taiwan	GUTAID	NA	7838	NA	1273	89.8%	NA	96.8%	
Weigt J et al.	2021	Italy	CAD-EYE,Fujifilm	1132	NA	>200000	680	92.9% (88.7 -95.9)	NA	90.6% (86.1–94)	
Pure test sets:	video frames										
video (examina	ntion)			Specificity				Sensitivity			
, n			, overall				, superficial lesions				
77			75% (47.0-85.1)			95% (8	9.4-98.1)		NA		
338			99.7% (per lesion)			NA			NA		
192			92%			95%			NA		
9			93%			93%			NA		
113			91%			94%			97% (84.7	–99.9) (per lesion)	
15			89%			NA			NA		
NA			NA			NA			NA		
NA			NA			NA			NA		
NA			NA			NA			NA		

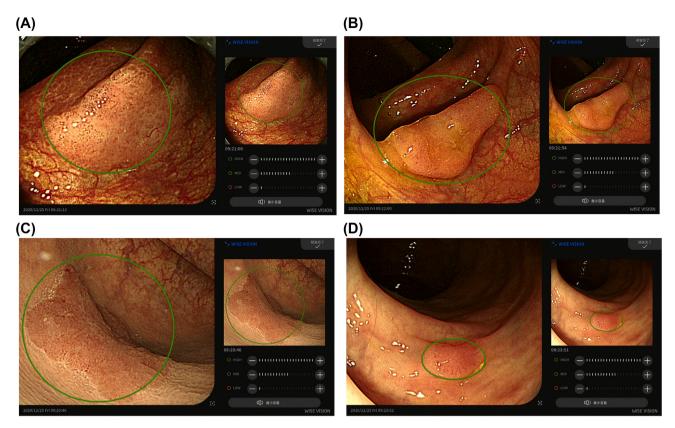


Fig. 2. Representative images of AI detection of flat and depressed lesions. A, B) sessile serrated lesion, C) laterally spreading tumor — nongranular type, D) superficial depressed lesion (0-IIc).

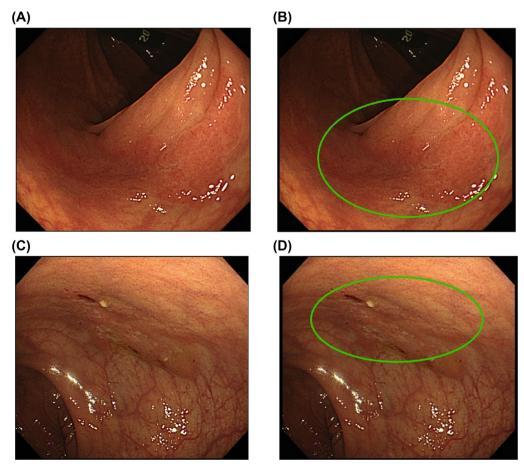


Fig. 3. Al detection for images of missed lesions. Al can detect these missed lesions. Therefore, this lesion may have been detected if the doctor used Al. A) missed laterally spreading tumor, nongranular type (high-grade dysplasia), B) A on Al, C) missed laterally spreading tumor, nongranular type (intramucosal cancer with signet ring cell carcinoma), D) C with Al.

Table 2Clinical trials using a deep learning model for the detection of the colorectal neoplasm during colonoscopy.

	Year of Publication		AI system	Study	Indication of colonoscopy	number		ADR PD)R	
Author		Country		Design		Control	CAD	Control	CAD	Control	CAD
Luo Y et al.	2020	China	Xiamen Innovision	back-to-back	NA	150	150	NA	NA	34% (51/150)	38.7% (58/150)
Wang P et al.	2020	China	EndoScreener	RCT	Screening 158 (16%) Symptomatic 804 (84%)	478	484	28%	34%*	37%	52%*
Wang P et al.	2019	China	Shanghai Wision A	RCT	Screening 84 (8%) Symptomatic 974 (92%)	536	522	20%	29%*	29%	45%*
Wang P et al.	2020	China	NA	back-to-back	Screening 113 (31%) Symptomatic 224 (61%) Surveillance 32 (9%)	369	369	26%	35%	38%	56%*
Repici A et al.	2020	Italy	GI-Genius	RCT	FIT 207(30%) Screening 153 (22%) Surveillance 164 (24%) Symptomatic 161 (24%)	344	341	40%	55%*	NA	NA
Gong D et al.	2020	China	ENDOANGEL	RCT	Screening 123 (18%) Symptomatic 545 (77%) Surveillance 36 (5%)	349	355	8%	16%*	34%	47%*
Liu P et al.	2020	China	EndoScreener	RCT	Screening 182 (23%) Symptomatic 608 (77%)	397	393	21%	29%*	33%	47%*
Su JR et al.	2020	China	AQCS	RCT	Screening/surveillance 216 (35%) Symptomatic 407 (65%)	315	308	17%	29%*	25%	38%*
Detected flat p	oolyps				Withdr	awal time					
Control 76% (61/80) 91% (279/308)		CAD 83%* (87/105) 94%* (473/501) (sessile)		370.15	Control 370.15 ± 31.44 6.99 (1.57)					CAD 373.17 ± 33.37 7.46* (2.02)	
(sessile) 49% (133/269) AMR of non-po 42% (33-52)			55	%* (273/498) %* (8–20)	6.39 (1. 7.14 (5.	,					(1.79) (5.5–10)
, ,	esion detected rate		27	1 %*	435 ± 1	49				417*	±101
NA 89% (182/204) (sessile)	(182/204) N		4.76 (2 %* (398/421) 6.94 (1 ssile)		•				6.38* (2.48) 7.29 (1.98)		
49% (47/96)			V-	/%* (84/177)	• • •				$7.03* \pm 1.01$		

AMR, adenoma miss rate; *, P < 0.05.

In clinical practice, elevated lesions, particularly pedunculated lesions, can be detected easily even by novice colonoscopists. Therefore, it will be important and expected that AI can accurately detect flat lesions that are characteristic of interval cancer [29–31]. Adenoma detection rate (ADR) and flat lesion detection rate are well-known quality indicators of colonoscopy, and AI needs to accurately detect flat lesions and we need to update the AI performance so that we can provide safe and high-quality colonoscopies in the world.

Clinical trials of deep learning technology in colonoscopy

Al system is used by humans; therefore, it is necessary to compare the difference in diagnostic ability between endoscopists those who use Al, and those who do not, rather than Al vs. doctor. Regarding the clinical trials of deep learning models for colorectal lesion detection, many clinical trials have been reported recently, and the representative ones are introduced here (Table 2). There were 8 reported clinical trials and the median difference of ADR between the CADe group and control group was 14% (13%–18%) [32–39]. All but one clinical trial showed significantly high ADR than the control group. PDRs are all significantly high in the CADe group than in the control group. Interestingly, the CADe group detected significantly high flat lesions than the control group in all seven studies. Therefore, it is considered that the detection of flat lesions is improved by using Al support as demonstrated by the data. However, withdrawal time excluding biopsy time was

significantly longer than that for the control group in the six studies.

Future view

Because of the deep learning research conducted thus far, a large amount of high-quality supervised data are still required. In deep learning, it is important to balance the amount of training data between each category and to improve the performance of the learning model. It is necessary to prepare images not only similar to lesions with low accuracy, but also those similar to lesions with high accuracy as further training data. Therefore, it is difficult to improve the diagnostic accuracy of AI for rare lesions. A new learning method that enables the reduction of supervised data is demanding. Independent pure-test sets are also very important in this research field.

In April 2018, the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) approved AI medical devices using deep learning to diagnose diabetic retinopathy — for the first time. Approval was based on the fact that diabetic retinopathy could be diagnosed with a sensitivity of 87.4% and a specialty of 89.5% in a clinical trial, and it went beyond the "support" of human diagnosis. This is the first product approved and permitted by the FDA to provide examination results even if the doctor did not interpret the image results. It is considered that discussions on whether to approve an AI system beyond the diagnostic "support" and necessary data will continue across the world.

Practice points

- 1) Flat colorectal lesions are likely to account for the majority of post-colonoscopy interval cancer.
- 2) Inexperienced endoscopists are less sensitive in detecting flat colorectal neoplasia.
- 3) Artificial intelligence shows a preliminary high accuracy for flat colorectal neoplasia in artificial studies, and it seems to increase its detection in comparative studies.

Research agenda

- 1) The benefit of AI in the additional detection of flat lesions with advanced neoplasia.
- 2) The accuracy of AI in the characterization of flat neoplasia, especially with regard to submucosal invasion.
- 3) The value of AI in addressing the choice between en bloc and piecemeal endoscopic resection or surgery for large or advanced flat lesions.

Declaration of competing interest

None.

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