Application of Machine Learning Algorithms in Breast Cancer Diagnosis and Classification

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Abstract

Breast cancer continues to be the most frequent cancer in females, affecting about one in 8 women and causing the highest number of cancer-related deaths in females worldwide despite remarkable progress in early diagnosis, screening, and patient management. All breast lesions are not malignant, and all the benign lesions do not progress to cancer. However, the accuracy of diagnosis can be increased by a combination or preoperative tests such as physical examination, mammography, fine-needle aspiration cytology, and core needle biopsy. Despite some limitations, these procedures are more accurate, reliable, and acceptable, when compared with a single adopted diagnostic procedure. Recent studies have shown that breast cancer can be accurately predicted and diagnosed using machine learning (ML) technology. The objective of this study was to explore the application of ML approaches to classify breast cancer based on feature values generated from a digitized image of a fine-needle aspiration (FNA) of a breast mass. To achieve this objective, we used ML algorithms, collected a scientific dataset of 569 breast cancer patients from Kaggle (https://www.kaggle.com/uciml/breast-cancer-wisconsin-data), analyze and interpreted the data based on ten real-valued features of a breast mass FNA including the radius, texture, perimeter, area, smoothness, compactness, concavity, concave points, symmetry, and fractal dimension. Among the 569 patients tested, 63% were diagnosed with benign breast cancer and 37% were

diagnosed with malignant breast cancer. Benign tumors grow slowly and do not spread while malignant tumors grow rapidly and spread to other parts of the body.

Keywords

Breast cancer; malignant; benign; machine learning; computer-based learning

1. INTRODUCTION

Breast cancer continues to be the most frequent cancer in females, affecting about one in 8 women and causing the highest number of cancer-related deaths in females worldwide despite remarkable progress in early diagnosis, screening, and patient management[1,2,3]. All breast lesions are not malignant tumors and all the benign lesions do not progress to cancer. The screening and diagnosis of breast cancer have improved by a combination or preoperative tests such as physical examination, mammography, fine-needle aspiration cytology, core needle biopsy, digital breast tomosynthesis, ultrasound, and magnetic resonance[4,5,6,7]. However, these diagnostic procedures have their own limitations. For example, the analysis of mammographic images shows low contract between normal tissues and lesions, which makes it difficult to distinguish malignant masses from benign ones in the images[8,9]. Early detection and accurate prognostication are fundamental to identify patients who could benefit from the treatment and reduce the mortality of cancer diseases[10,11,12].

The use of computer-based learning models has become a predominant area of cancer research. In recent years, several researchers have focused on building systems, both hybrid and fully automatic systems, that could facilitate the diagnosis, prognosis, and prediction of breast cancer outcomes taking a leap using Statistics and Artificial Intelligence. The development of these systems requires different techniques, where the most common are machine learning (ML) algorithms. Several scientific studies have published algorithms and nomograms predicting the pathologic stage of patients with clinically localized cancer or Gleason score upgrading[13,14,15,16,17]. Specifically, ML allows the integration or combination of different layers of data, such as those from medical images, laboratory results, clinical outcomes, biomarkers, and biological features for better prognostication and stratification of patients toward personalized medicine[18,19]. Despite a large scientific interest in this field of research, these prediction models are not frequently used due to limitations in usability and applied computational approaches. Many recent studies have demonstrated that ML approaches have been applied to breast cancer survival prediction, diagnostic ultrasound, and breast cancer outcome prediction with tumor tissue images[20,21,22,23]. Therefore, the objective of this study was to explore the application of ML approaches to classify breast cancer based on feature values generated from a digitized image of a fine-needle aspiration of a breast mass.

2.   APPROACHES

2.1.   Source of Dataset and Information

We used a publicly available breast cancer dataset from the University of Wisconsin Hospitals, Madison, Wisconsin, USA. This dataset was generated by Dr. William H. Wolberg (General Surgery Department., University of Wisconsin, Clinical Sciences Center, Madison, WI 53792)[24], and consisted of 569 breast cancer patients available on UCI Machine Learning Repository: https://archive.ics.uci.edu/ml/datasets/ Breast+Cancer+Wisconsin+%28Diagnostic%29.

2.2.   Machine Learning Methods

This study was based on Machine learning (ML) algorithms to analyze the dataset of 569 patients with breast cancer and thereby interpreting results. ML is a branch of artificial intelligence (AI) that is used to classify data based on models which have been developed and for predictive analytics, in particular breast cancer[25,26]. It provides tools by which large quantities of data can be automatically analyzed. In the case of the present study, we utilized ML algorithms and collected a scientific dataset of breast cancer patients from Kaggle (https://www.kaggle.com/uciml/breast-cancer-wisconsin-data) and interpreted these data based on different features. The features were computed from a digitized image of a fine needle aspirate (FNA) of a breast mass. Ten (10) real-valued features including: [1] radius (*mean of distances from center to points on the perimeter*), [2] texture (*standard deviation of gray-scale values*), [3] perimeter, [4] area, [5] smoothness (*local variation in radius lengths*), [6] compactness (*perimeter^2 / area - 1.0*), [7] concavity (*severity of concave portions of the contour*), [8] concave points (*number of concave portions of the contour*), [9] symmetry, and [10] fractal dimension *("coastline approximation" - 1)* were computed for each cell nucleus. Specifically, we used the features to differentiate between benign and malignant tumors.

RESULTS

The data presented in this manuscript are available on UCI Machine Learning Repository: https://archive.ics.uci.edu/ml/datasets/Breast+Cancer+Wisconsin+%28Diagnostic%29. In this study, 569 patients with breast cancer were diagnosed at the Wisconsin Hospital. Among the 569 patients diagnosed with breast cancer, 63% were benign and 37% were malignant (Fig. 1).

The geometrical and textural features of the most precise core of biopsy were considered and computed in this study (Table 1). As seen in table 1, the geometrical features and textural features are accurate analyses obtained from a digitized image of a fine needle aspirate (FNA) of a breast mass. These features represent simplest attributes of breast cancer images, and they are important for breast cancer analysis. The mean value of each feature for benign tumor (non-cancerous) is lower when compared to each feature for malignant tumor (cancerous), suggesting that malignant tumor spread to the other parts of the body. Taken together, features as seen in Table 1 below allow us to differentiate between benign and malignant.

Seven (7) real-valued features including radius, texture, perimeter, area, compactness, concavity, and concave points of the cell image allow us to differentiate between benign and malignant. Out of the 7 real-valued features, we selected three (3) features (area, perimeter, and radius) and constructed bar graphs to illustrate that breast cancer can be classified based on the values generated (Fig. 2, 3, 4).

Fig. 2 shows the number of patients with benign tumor and/or malignant tumor relatively to the area of the cell image. The lower the value of the area of the cell image indicates benign breast cancer; suggestive the tumor did not spread to other parts of the human body. The higher value of the area of the cell image indicates that the breast cancer has spread to other parts of the human body.

Fig. 3 shows the number of patients with benign tumors and/or malignant tumors relatively to the perimeter of the cell image. The lower value of the perimeter of the cell image indicates benign breast cancer. The higher value of the perimeter of the cell image indicates malignant breast cancer, suggestive that breast cancer has spread to other parts of the human body.

Fig. 4 shows the number of patients with benign tumors and/or malignant tumors relatively to the radius of the cell image. The lower the value of the radius of the cell image indicates benign breast cancer; suggestive the tumor did not spread to other parts of the human body. The higher value of the radius of the cell image indicates that the breast cancer has spread to other parts of the human body.

Three real-valued features including smoothness, symmetry, and fractual dimension of the cell image do not indicate a particular preference of one diagnosis over the other. Out of the 3 features, we selected 2 features (symmetry and fractual dimension) and constructed bar graphs to illustrate that breast cancer cannot be classified based on the values generated (Fig. 5 and 6).

Fig. 5 shows the number of patients with benign tumor and/or malignant tumor relatively to the symmetry of the cell image.

Fig. 6 shows the number of patients with benign tumor and/or malignant tumor relatively to the fractual dimension of the cell image.

Overall, smaller mean values of radius, texture, perimeter, area, compactness, concavity, and concave points of the cell image tend to indicate benign tumors as seen in table 1. Larger mean values of radius, perimeter, area, compactness, concavity, and concave points of the cell image tend to indicate malignant tumors. Mean values of smoothness, symmetry, and fractual dimension of the cell image do not indicate a particular preference of one diagnosis over the other as seen in Table 1.

Knowing the difference between benign tumors and malignant tumors is very important in the field of medical science and cancer research. In addition, knowing this information may help doctors figure out the best way to manage and treat cancer, in particular breast cancer. Benign tumors grow slowly and do not spread while malignant tumors grow fast and spread

to other parts of the body. Benign tumors are non-cancerous while malignant tumors are cancerous. These tumors can spread to other parts of the body from the point of origin and may destroy adjacent normal cells or tissues. Table 2 below shows the characteristics of normal cells, benign and malignant tumors.

DISCUSSION

Breast cancer is the leading cause of death among middle aged and older women[27]. The present study demonstrates the potential of machine learning (ML) approaches for detecting, analyzing, and classifying breast cancer. Using ML, we were able to evaluate different features of a digitized image of a fine needle aspirate (FNA) of a breast mass made available to researchers by Wolberg et al.[24,28]. The FNA of a breast mass describes the characteristics of the cell nuclei present in the image. FNA is a type of biopsy procedure where a very thin needle is inserted into an area of abnormal tissue or cells with a guide of computerized tomography (CT) scan or ultrasound monitors[29,30,31]. The collected sample is then transferred to a pathologist to study it under a microscope and examine whether cells in the biopsy are normal or abnormal. The results generated based on different feature values indicated that among the 569 patients diagnosed with breast cancer, 63% were benign and 37% were malignant. We found that the mean value of each feature for benign tumor (non-cancerous) is lower when compared to each corresponding feature for malignant tumor (cancerous), suggesting that malignant tumor spread to the other parts of the body (Fig. 2, 3, and 4). Based on these features, we were able to differentiate between benign and malignant tumors (Table 2). Cancer cells have the ability to spread to other parts of the body through the blood and lymphatic systems[27].

Medical researchers and physicians usually identify geometrical features and textural features by viewing biopsy images. Multiple classifiers algorithms are applied on medical datasets to perform predictive analysis about patients and their medical diagnosis[32,33,34,35,36,37]. For example, one analysis using a combination of mammograms and ML approaches has led to an accurate diagnosis of breast cancer[38]. Analyses using histopathological images and automatic grading systems have been applied to successfully determine the Gleason grade of breast cancer, and prostate cancer[39,40]. In addition, several previously published methods have shown the potential of ML methods for automatic breast cancer and prostate cancer detection and grading on digital histopathology images[38,41,42,43,44,45].

CONCLUSION

Breast cancer is one of the leading causes of mortality among women worldwide and it is important to develop novel approaches to screen, diagnose, and treat breast cancer. This paper presents a novel computer-aided diagnosis system for the prediction, diagnosis, and classification of breast cancer using ML. In particular, we discussed the concepts of ML and outlined its application in the classification of breast cancer. Using ML approaches, our findings revealed that among the 569 patients involved in this study, 63% were diagnosed with benign tumors and 37% were diagnosed with malignant tumors. The features including radius, texture, perimeter, area, compactness, concavity, and concave points of the cell

image allow us to differentiate between benign and malignant breast cancer. Other features including smoothness, symmetry, and fractual dimension of the cell image do not indicate a particular preference of one diagnosis over the other. Some benign tumors may progress to malignant tumors. We believe that ML will soon become much more commonplace in many clinical and hospital settings. Our results based on the ML can be translated into tools for future clinical treatment decision-making.

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Data Availability Statement:

The breast cancer dataset that support the findings in this paper were made available in Kaggle (https://www.kaggle.com/uciml/breast-cancer-wisconsin-data).

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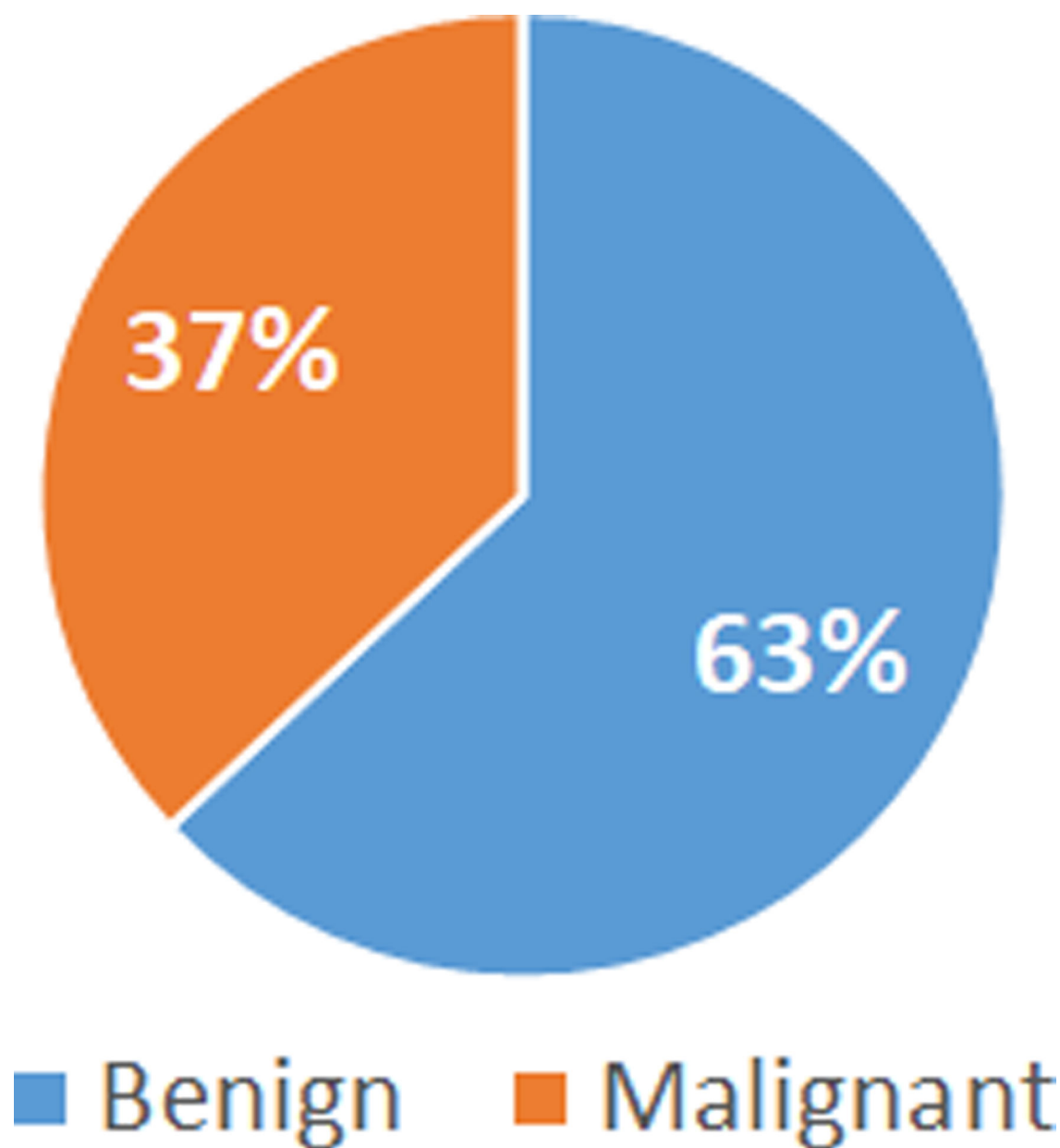
Figure 1:
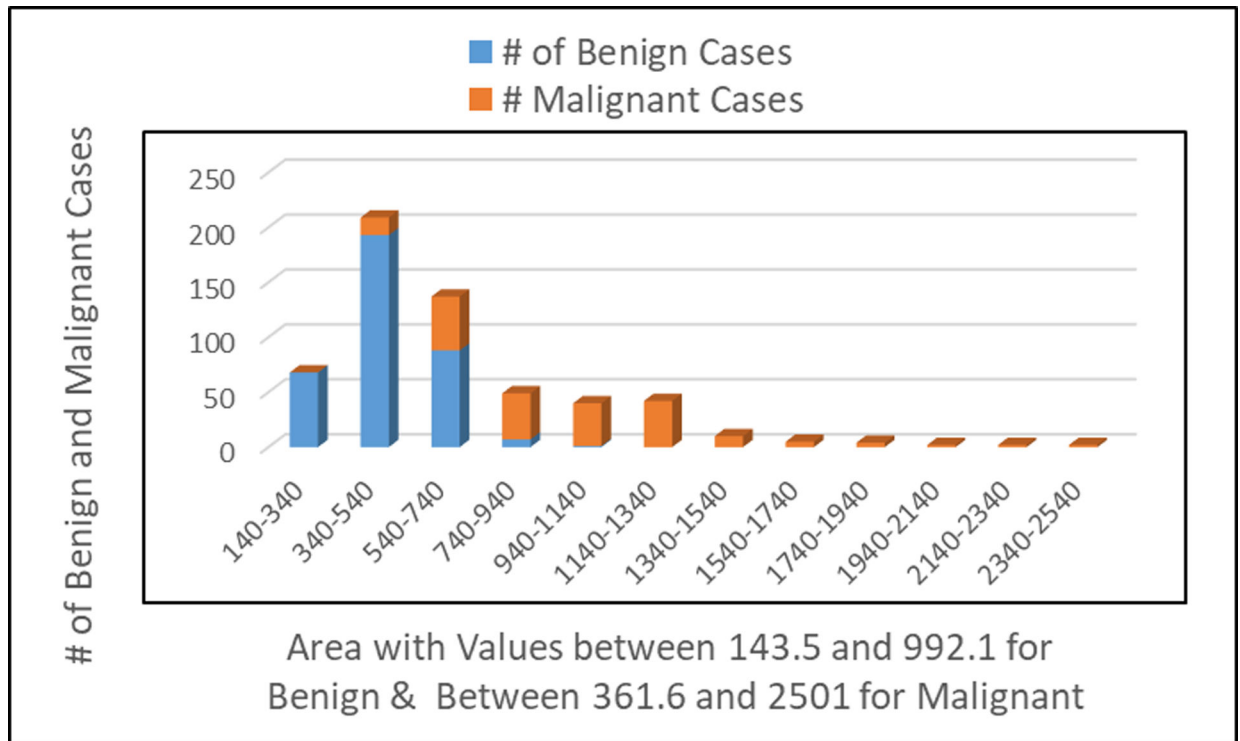Percentage of benign and malignant identified among 569 patients with breast cancer

Figure 2:
Number of patients observed with benign and malignant tumors in relationship to the area of the cell image
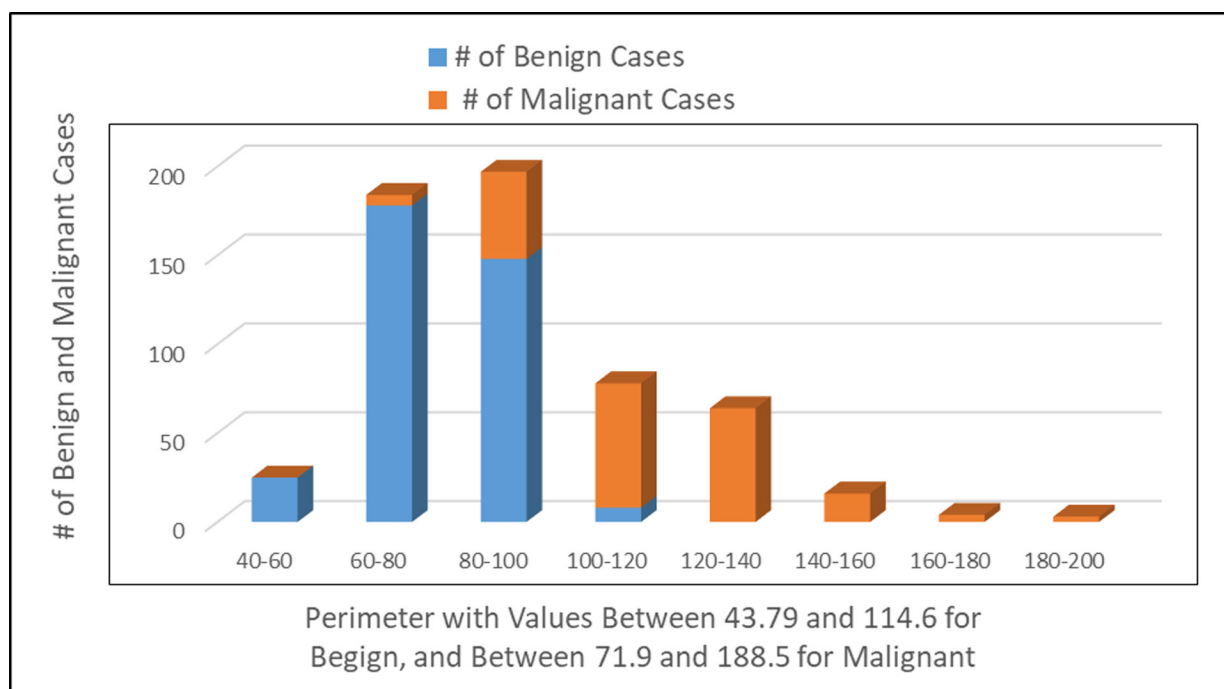
Figure 3:
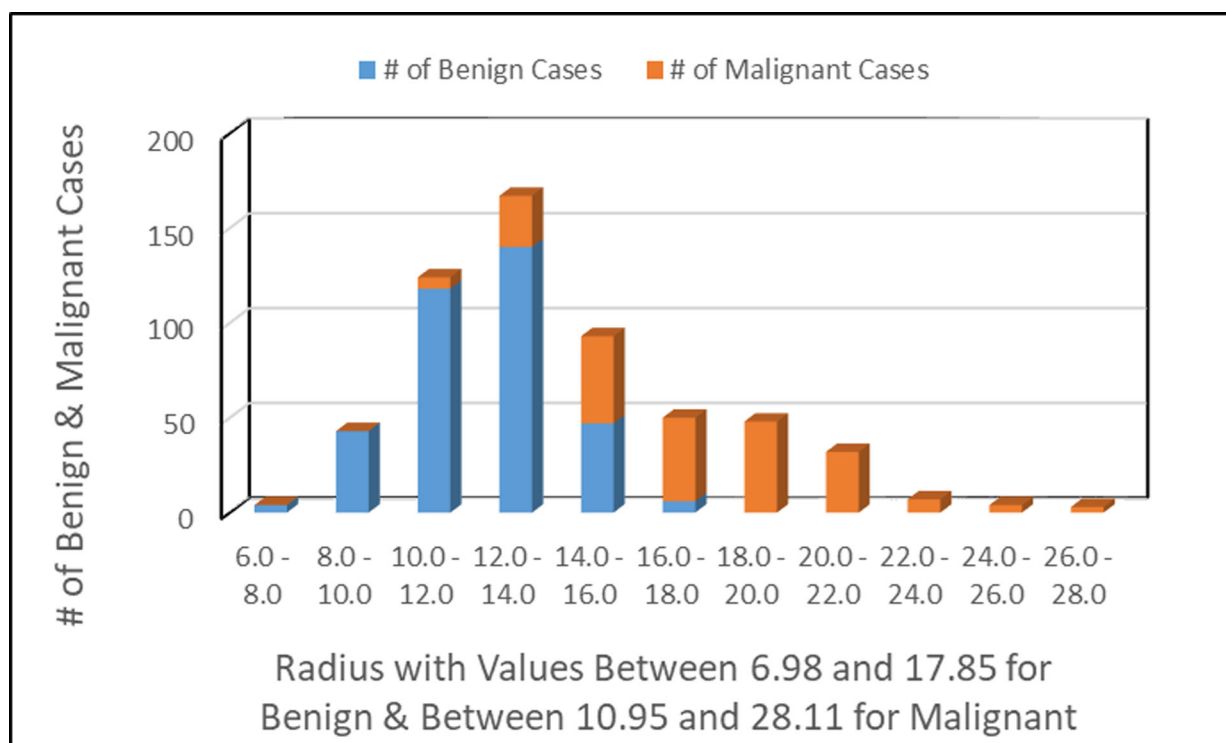Number of patients observed with benign and malignant tumors in relationship to the perimeter of the cell image.

Figure 4:
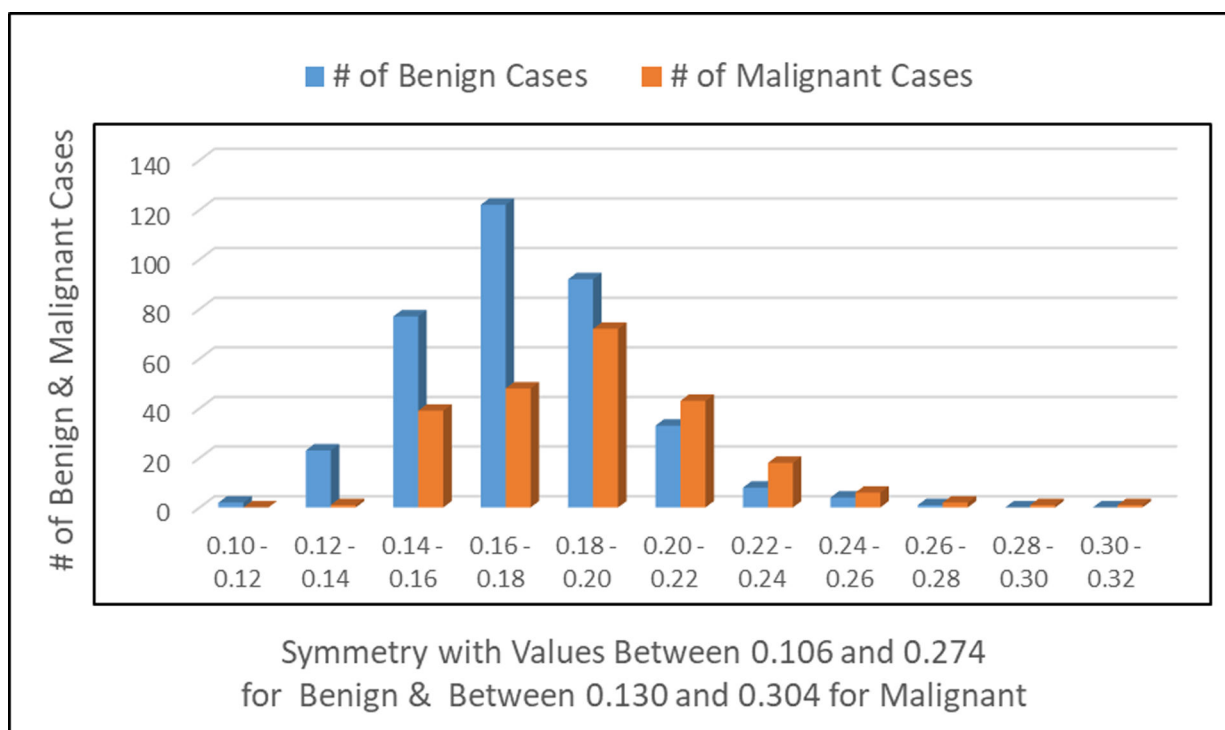Number of patients observed with benign and malignant tumors in relationship to the radius of the cell image.

Figure 5:
Number of patients observed with benign and malignant tumors in relationship to the symmetry of the cell image.
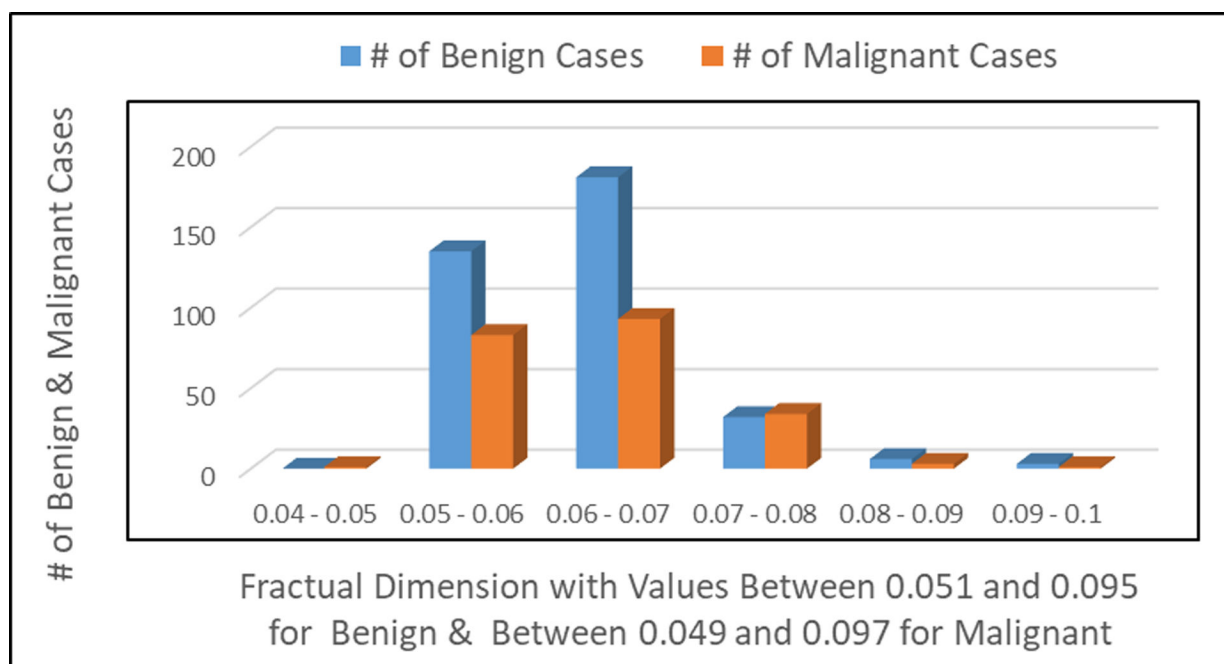
Figure 6:
Number of patients observed with benign and malignant tumors in relationship to the fractual dimension of the cell image.
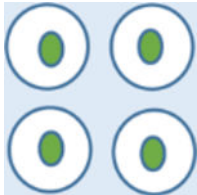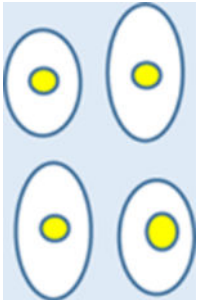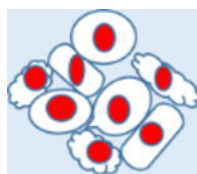
Table 1:

Values of geometrical features and textural features between benign and malignant tumors from a digitized image of a fine needle aspirate (FNA) of a breast mass showing mean values plus and minus standard error values.

FEATURES	BREAST CANCER	
	BENIGN	**MALIGNANT**
Radius Mean	12.146 ± 0.284	17.463 ± 0.609
Texture Mean	17.914 ± 1.220	21.604 ± 1.210
Perimeter Mean	78.075 ± 2.000	115.365 ± 4.323
Area Mean	462.790 ± 21.135	978.376 ± 72.672
Smoothness	0.092 ± 0.007	0.103 ± 0.006
Compactness	0.080 ± 0.0214	0.145 ± 0.0322
Concavity	0.046 ± 0.0259	0.161 ± 0.0418
Concave Points	0.025 ± 0.009	0.088 ± 0.015
Symmetry	0.174 ± 0.020	0.193 ± 0.020
Fractal Dimension	0.063 ± 0.003	0.063 ± 0.004

Table 2:

Characteristics of normal cells, benign, and malignant tumors

Characteristics	Normal Cells	Benign Tumor cells	Malignant Tumor Cells
Cell Morphology	Normal cell shape	Like normal with slight expansion	Varied in shape and size with large nucleus.
Growth Condition	Grow normally and well-regulated	Grow slowly	Grow rapidly
Spread	Grow in one location	Do not invade surrounding cells, do not invade other parts of the body	Metastasize to other organs through the blood vessels.
Chromosomes	Diploid	Diploid	Aneuploidy
Adherence	Tight	Tight	Loose
Systemic Effects	No	Rare	Yes
Cancer	No	Non-cancerous	Cancerous, spread of tumors to the other parts of the body