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REVIEW

Genetic aetiologies of acute liver failure

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Abstract

Acute liver failure (ALF) is a rare, rapidly evolving, clinical syndrome with devastating consequences where definitive treatment is by emergency liver transplantation. Establishing a diagnosis can be challenging and, historically, the cause of ALF was unidentified in up to half of children. However, recent technological and clinical advances in genomic medicine have led to an increasing proportion being diagnosed with monogenic aetiologies of ALF. The conditions encountered include a diverse group of inherited metabolic disorders each with prognostic and treatment implications. Often these disorders are clinically indistinguishable and may even mimic disorders of immune regulation or red cell disorders. Rapid genomic sequencing for children with ALF is, therefore, a key component in the diagnostic work up today. This review focuses on the monogenic aetiologies of ALF.

KEYWORDS

acute liver failure, hepatology, liver transplantation, mitochondria

1 | INTRODUCTION

Acute liver failure (ALF) is a sudden-onset, often lifethreatening, condition defined by coagulopathy, conjugated hyperbilirubinaemia and variable presence of encephalopathy.¹ The clinical phenotype of ALF reflects the nature and extent of liver damage, its rate of evolution against the adequacy of hepatic regeneration.² It is defined by the Paediatric Acute Liver Failure Study Group as a hepatic-based coagulopathy of a prothrombin time (PT) \geq 15 s or INR \geq 1.5 not corrected by vitamin K in the presence of clinical hepatic encephalopathy or a PT ≥ 20 s or INR ≥ 2.0 regardless of the presence or absence of clinical hepatic encephalopathy.³ It is an umbrella term of a common pathway resulting from a variety of insults including infectious, metabolic, immunological, toxic and vascular aetiologies. Arriving at a diagnosis can be challenging due to the rapidly progressive nature of the condition with significant morbidity and mortality.⁴ Historically, indeterminate cases represented the largest diagnostic category representing approximately half of cases.³ However, over the past decade, the proportion of children remaining undiagnosed has decreased owing to the incorporation of next generation sequencing in clinical practice.^{5,6} This review focuses on the monogenetic aetiologies of ALF.

2 | THE EVOLUTION OF THE DEFINITION OF ALF

The definition of ALF has been debated and its exact parameters subject to revision over the years. The term fulminant hepatic failure was originally defined by Trey et al. in 1970 as a potentially reversible, severe liver injury, with an onset of encephalopathy within 8 weeks of symptom appearance and in the absence of preexisting liver disease.⁷ Paediatricians adopted the definition with the caveat that encephalopathy may be difficult to recognise in young children.⁸ The designation used by O'Grady et al. recognised hyperacute, acute and subacute patterns of ALF dependent on the time interval between development of jaundice and onset of encephalopathy as a prognostic marker where hyperacute ALF, paradoxically, have the highest rates of survival.⁹ Despite the different designations, the clinical syndrome of ALF regardless of aetiology is that of a severe liver injury that evolves over days or weeks: prolonged INR, decline in mental function, peripheral vasodilation, features of the systemic inflammatory response and ultimately multiorgan failure.¹⁰ In children, ALF encompasses a broad group of conditions including monogenic diseases each with prognostic implications.

3 | DISORDERS OF AMINO ACID METABOLISM

Ornithine transcarbamylase deficiency is the most common urea cycle disorder caused by damaging variants in the OTC gene on chromosome Xp21.1. Affected males may become symptomatic within the first week of life with severe consequences including hyperammonaemia, ALF, coma and death. In a series of 37 affected patients, 29 (78%) experienced ALF including 6 females.¹¹ Female heterozygotes are however mostly asymptomatic $(>80\%)^{12}$ or affected by recurrent episodes of ALF¹³ which can occur during childhood or adulthood¹⁴ including during pregnancy.¹⁵ At present, liver transplantation (LT) continues to be the main treatment option for those with severe disease who survive the initial, metabolic decompensation.¹⁶ The decision for this could be guided by individual phenotype and residual OTC activity: ≤4.3% is associated with higher mortality rates and ≤16.0% is associated with a higher number of hyperammonaemic events.¹⁷ Using a yeast-based functional assay, missense OTC variants can be classified to neonatal and late-onset forms as a further tool to aid clinical decisionmaking.¹⁸ The clinical efficacy of hepatocyte transplantation for urea cycle disorders as a bridge to LT is eagerly anticipated.19,20

Citrullinaemia type 1 is caused by deficiency of arginosuccinate synthetase encoded by *ASS1*. Affected patients suffer from hyperammonaemia, encephalopathy and seizures and rarely ALF.^{21,22} Residual enzyme activity of $\leq 8.1\%$ has been reported to correlate with worse disease severity as well as cognitive outcome and may be used to inform decisions such as LT.²³ Both liver replacement and auxiliary transplantation, can be performed to treat frequent decompensations and ALF with good effect.^{24,25} In citrullinaemia type 2, pathogenic variants in *SLC25A13* result in deficiency of citrin—a mitochondrial aspartate glutamate carrier primarily expressed in the liver, heart and kidney.²⁶ Affected infants exhibit conjugated hyperbilirubinaemia which typically resolves by

1 year with treatment.²⁷ ALF is unusual but recognised and may necessitate LT.²⁸

Hyperornithinaemia, hyperammonaemia and homocitrullinuria syndrome (*SLC25A15*) is another urea cycle disorder implicated in ALF.²⁹

Tyrosinaemia type I is caused by variants in *FAH* encoding for the enzyme fumarylacetoacetate hydrolase responsible for the final step in the tyrosine catabolic pathway. Most patients with tyrosinaemia type I presenting with ALF are neonates or infants but can also be seen in adults who are non-adherent to treatment. Treatment with nitisinone blocks the catabolic pathway of tyrosine leading to the reduction in toxic intermediate metabolites and used alongside a low tyrosine and phenylalanine diet.³⁰ In patients affected by ALF, it is possible to rescue them, while nitisinone treatment takes effect, with critical care support. Then, 1 week has been suggested as a possible time-period given for this before LT should be offered if the patient is clinically stable.³¹

4 | DISORDERS OF CARBOHYDRATE METABOLISM

Galactose-1-phosphate uridylyltransferase deficiency caused by mutations in GALT is the cause of classic galactosaemia. Newborns present with jaundice, hepatomegaly, coagulopathy, poor feeding, hypoglycaemia and cataracts³² and is one of the main differential diagnoses for ALF in this age group.^{33,34} Urgent removal of galactose from the diet is necessary as soon as the diagnosis is suspected and, if positive, there is an initial slowing of liver dysfunction followed by a full recovery. Newborn screening provides an opportunity for diagnosis either before or just as the infant presents with ALF but should be performed in the first 1–3 days of life.^{35,36} Occurrence of long-term complications such as reduced cognitive ability, language impairment, decreased bone mass and hypergonadotrophic hypogonadism in women occur irrespective to the clinical severity of presentation/continued galactose-restricted diet.³⁷ Rarely, hereditary fructose intolerance due to aldolase, fructose-bisphosphate B deficiency (ALDOB) may present as neonatal infantile ALF in association with lactic acidosis and renal tubular defect.³⁸ The presence of fructose-containing infant formulas and in over-the-counter medications may be the precipitant.³⁹ In both conditions, elimination of galactose and fructose, respectively, from the diet restores liver function swiftly. Cytosolic phosphoenol carboxykinase (PCK1) has also been reported to cause transient ALF coinciding with a diarrhoea illness in a 9-month-old boy.⁴⁰ Avoidance of gluconeogenesis by use of glucose polymer emergency regimen prevented further

decompensations. Another interesting condition is glycogen storage disorder 1b characterised by liver and kidney dysfunction with neutropenia caused by pathogenic variants in *SLC37A4*. *SLC37A4* encodes a glucose-6-phosphate (G6P) transporter at the endoplasmic reticulum (ER) disrupting liver Golgi homeostasis (pH and morphology), glycosylation and coagulation factors levels.⁴¹ Carriers of variants in the gene experience liver dysfunction and coagulopathy.⁴²

Transaldolase 1 deficiency is an inherited metabolic disorder of the pentose phosphate pathway in which G6P is converted to ribose-5-phosphate through a series of reactions. Patients can present prenatally with intrauterine growth restriction and/or oligohydramnios; in the neonatal period, with dysmorphism, cardiovascular defects and liver dysfunction; or later in life with a milder phenotype.⁴³ While liver involvement is common, ALF as a presentation is rare and reported in one case report in a newborn with low birthweight and multi-organ failure including respiratory failure, hypotonia, cardiomegaly, cutis laxa and dysmorphism.⁴⁴ Urine polyol analysis followed by transaldolase enzyme activity measurement from cultured fibroblasts and sequencing of TALDO1 lead to the diagnosis. Other series collating the clinical features of this rare disorder describe chronic liver disease with variable degrees of fibrosis and even hepatocellular carcinoma.43,45-47

5 | DISORDERS OF FATTY ACID METABOLISM

Liver dysfunction in mitochondrial fatty acid oxidation defects (FAOD) is common often manifesting as hepatomegaly and steatosis with or without episodes of hypertransaminasaemia.48 Diagnosis is suggested by lack of ketone production with hypoglycaemia, and hyperammonaemia during fasting, typically in late infancy. Recurrent ALF leading to LT has been reported in acyl-CoA dehydrogenase long chain deficiency^{49,50} although there has not been any reports of patients confirmed to harbour biallelic mutations in ACADL. ALF has also been reported in carnitine transporter deficiency including those related to solute carrier family 22 member 5 (SLC22A5)⁵¹ in newborns presenting with cardiorespiratory distress, hypoglycaemia, hyperammonaemia, elevated serum creatine kinase and liver dysfunction progressing to ALF.⁵² The babies in general responded to carnitine supplementation along with low-fat/high-carbohydrate diet with frequent feedings and MCT supplementation. In the early onset electron transfer flavoprotein deficiency (ETFDH) or multiple acyl-CoA dehydrogenase deficiency disrupted electron transfer to the respiratory chain from fatty acid and amino acid oxidation can lead to liver dysfunction.⁵³ An infant presenting with respiratory distress in association with reduced conscious level, hypotonia, hypoglycaemia, lactic acidosis and hyperammonaemia succumbed to multi-organ failure. Individuals may be affected during pregnancy syndrome of haemolysis, elevated liver enzymes and low platelets (HELLP syndrome) due to FAOD in the foetus or in an undiagnosed, expectant mother.^{54,55} When considering FAOD altogether, *liver failure* was reported in 11–27% children but is rarely severe and does not require LT.^{56,57} Furthermore, acute presentations are considered historical today with effective newborn screening programs in place.

6 | DISORDERS OF ENERGY SUBSTRATE METABOLISM

The succinyl-coenzyme A ligase is a tricarboxylic acid cycle enzyme encoded by *SUCLG1* and *SUCLA2*. Its deficiency leads to encephalomyopathic mitochondrial depletion syndrome with methylmalonic aciduria. The most frequent clinical findings in those affected are hypotonia and psychomotor retardation with liver involvement only seen in patients with *SUCLG1* mutations.⁵⁸ Those affected by the severe infantile lactic acidosis phenotype may develop concurrent ALF with a poor outlook although LT has been carried out in one patient.^{5,59}

The pyruvate metabolism enzyme dihydrolipoamide dehydrogenase (DLD; or pyruvate dehydrogenase E3 subunit) oxidises lipoic acid to serve as an electron sink for the four mitochondrial keto-acid dehydrogenases including pyruvate dehydrogenase.⁶⁰ Biallelic pathogenic variants in *DLD* result in DLD deficiency of which the hepatic manifestation results in recurrent ALF triggered by physiological stress, infection and fasting.⁶¹ These patients generally spontaneously recover from episodes of hepatic cytolysis which can persist into adulthood. Some patients exhibit a milder disease course or combined hepatic and neurological symptoms with no clear genotype–phenotype correlations.^{62,63}

7 | MITOCHONDRIAL DISORDERS

Liver dysfunction in mitochondrial disorders is frequently encountered, but the severity is highly variable. Mitochondrial hepatopathies are estimated to affect approximately 10–22% of children with respiratory chain abnormalities.^{64,65} ALF affects a smaller proportion of these children or 1.5% when considering the full spectrum of children with ALF.⁴ However, this proportion increases to 20% among the neonatal age group.^{66,67} Organs vary by their

susceptibility to mitochondrial DNA (mtDNA) maintenance defects and the susceptibility of a given tissue for specific defects change with the age of the patient: the newborn liver with disruption to mtDNA maintenance and replication are most susceptible to ALF while isolated deficiencies in respiratory chain complex less so.⁶⁸

7.1 | Disorders of mtDNA maintenance and replication

The mtDNA polymerase responsible for replication of the mitochondrial genome is encoded by POLG. There is a continuum of overlapping phenotypes with a variable age of disease onset, degree of organ involvement and severity in those affected.⁶⁹ ALF caused by mutations in POLG as part of the myocerebrohepatopathy spectrum present in neonates with devastating clinical consequences. In older children, the diagnosis may only become apparent with Alpers-Huttenlocher syndrome in whom sodium valproate is commenced and is the precipitant of ALF.⁷⁰ LT in these children are usually contraindicated due to the high risk of death after $LT^{71,72}$ although it may be considered in those with later onset and milder disease.⁷³ Rarely, variants in *POLG2* encoding the polymerase gamma accessory subunit can lead to ALF in those with the early onset phenotype as reported in two infants who died.74,75 MtDNA replication is also maintained by TWNK encoding a helicase required for unwinding mtDNA. In its severe form, mtDNA depletion syndrome ensues with ALF and neurological abnormalities at birth.^{76,77}

DGUOK encoding the mitochondrial deoxyguanosine kinase phosphorylates purine nucleotides necessary for mtDNA replication. The mitochondrial inner membrane protein encoded by MPV17 is involved in maintaining membrane potential.⁷⁸ The hepatocerebral phenotypes are characterised by hypoglycaemia, lactic acidosis and failure to thrive associated with a rapidly progressive abnormal neurology (nystagmus, hypotonia and peripheral neuropathy).⁷⁹ The outcome for these patients are generally poor and the mortality rate for those presenting in the first 6 months of life can be as high as 70%.^{80,81} Interestingly, a recurrent homozygous variant encoding a p.Asn46Ser missense mutation, in DGUOK has been implicated in idiopathic noncirrhotic portal hypertension, rapidly progressive cirrhosis and as well as reversible liver failure.^{82,83} Select individuals with a missense genotype with a milder neurological phenotype may be considered for LT in DGUOK deficiency84-86 and MPV17 deficiency with one survivor being 17 years post LT.⁸¹

ALF has been reported in two patients thought to be deficient with mitochondrial ribonucleotide reductase small subunit (*RRM2B*), an enzyme that catalyses the

conversion of ribonucleoside diphosphates to deoxyribonucleoside diphosphates. Both patients were heterozygous for a frameshift mutation and reduction in respiratory chain complex activity and p53R2, gene product of *RRM2B*, were demonstrated in liver tissue.⁸⁷ One patient underwent LT following the third episode of ALF with normal neurocognitive development in the subsequent 4 years.

7.2 | Disorders of mitochondrial gene expression

tRNA 5-methylaminomethyl-2-thiouridylatemethyltransferase (TRMU) deficiency caused by biallelic pathogenic variants in *TRMU* result in the phenotypic spectrum of reversible ALF.⁸⁸ The enzyme carries out the post-translation modification (thiolation) of mitochondrial tRNAs and its deficiency causes impaired synthesis of mtDNA-encoded proteins with subsequent mitochondrial respiratory chain dysfunction.⁸⁹ Supportive therapy can help recover infants from ALF which can occur multiple times—hence, *transient, infantile liver failure*. Early supplementation with exogenous L-cysteine or *N*acetylcysteine may help as cysteine is the substrate for TRMU thiolation.⁹⁰ LT is required in those who do not recover and reported in 11/62 cases.⁸⁹

Reports of ALF secondary to deficiency in mitochondrial aminoacyl-tRNA synthetases (ARSs) are rarer, such as in the case of a newborn mitochondrial leucyl- or phenylalanyl-tRNA synthetase (*LARS2* and *FARS2*) deficiencies^{91–93}; linked to sodium valproate administration in a 6-year-old with tryptophanyl-tRNA synthetase (*WARS2*) deficiency.⁹⁴ All patients died with multi-organ involvement.

Mitochondrial protein translation is maintained by the actions of several regulatory factors along each step of translation initiation, elongation, termination and recycling of the ribosome.⁹⁵ *GFM1* encodes mitochondrial GTPase that catalyses ribosomal translation elongation. Disease associated with *GFM1* is usually devastating and lead to combined oxidative phosphorylation deficiency, with or without ALF and death in infancy.^{96–98} Similar phenotypes are reported in mitochondrial elongation factor Ts deficiency (*TSFM*) where affected individuals are born with intrauterine growth retardation and lactic acidosis progressing to ALF.^{99,100}

7.3 | Nuclear encoded disorder of oxidative phosphorylation

ALF is also seen in deficiencies of the oxidative phosphorylation complex subunits and assembly factors 586 WILEY JIMD caused by mtDNA depletion or defects of mtDNA translation. In a series of 157 patients with respiratory chain complex deficiencies, liver failure was a clinical feature in 20%.¹⁰¹ Complex I deficiency is the most frequent mitochondrial disorder accounting for up to 30% of cases.¹⁰² Liver disease is usually not a feature in complex I deficiency that arise from mutations in mtDNA, nuclear-encoded structural subunits or assembly factors. It has been demonstrated in the mouse liver that hepatocyte specific loss of complex I function confers no overt liver phenotype because hepatocytes use alternative electron donors for the electron transport chain.¹⁰³ One exception is the mitochondrial acyl-CoA dehydrogenase family member 9, an assembly factor of complex I, with ACAD activity. Its deficiency predominantly affects the muscular system; however, it has been reported to cause ALF in infants^{87,104,105} or 4% of those affected.¹⁰⁶ ALF has been reported in those with variants in BCS1L-a chaperone protein for complex III assembly—such as in a newborn with multisystemic disease who died¹⁰⁷ as well as in a 10 months old who underwent living related LT with normal neurology 2 years after transplantation.¹⁰⁸ Mutations in UQCRC2, another component of complex III, can also cause a similar hepatic picture.¹⁰⁹ Deficiency of cytochrome c oxidase, the terminal respiratory chain complex, manifests as a heterogeneous group of disorders¹¹⁰ with a rare case of fatal, neonatal

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7.4 | Mitochondrial membrane biogenesis and remodelling

onset ALF reported in mutations in SCO1.¹¹¹

3-Methylglutaconic aciduria, deafness, encephalopathy, Leigh-like (MEGDEL) syndrome caused by mutations in SERAC1 manifests as neonatal collapse characterised by hypoglycaemia, lactic acidosis, truncal hypotonia and encephalopathy with^{112,113} or without ALF.¹¹⁴ Increasingly, the phenotypic spectrum is recognised to be broad with cerebral, otologic, ophthalmologic, cardiac, endocrine, muscular abnormalities being reported.¹¹⁵ The liver dysfunction in those infants that survive may improve over the first year of life, but severe neurological disease with spasticity, refractory dystonia and psychomotor development arrest and/or regression subsequently ensues.^{113,116} SERAC1 encodes a protein located at the interface of mitochondria and ER involved in phosphatidylglycerol remodelling important for mitochondrial function and intracellular cholesterol trafficking-MEGDEL syndrome can be considered both a form of complex lipid and mitochondrial disorder.117

8 | DISORDERS OF VESICULAR TRAFFICKING

ALF secondary to NBAS deficiency is considered one of the archetypal, monogenic causes of ALF typically presenting as hyperacute ALF triggered by febrile illness. Association of NBAS with human disease was first reported in 2010 in a description of a group of patients from a remote region in northeastern Siberia known as the Yakut population. Affected patients with the c.5741G > A, p.Arg1914His substitution exhibited short stature, optic nerve atrophy and Pelger-Huët anomaly characterised by abnormal nuclear shape in neutrophils (SOPH syndrome).¹¹⁸ Subsequently, a distinct group of patients presenting with recurrent episodes of ALF but without the above features were described.^{119,120} We now understand that those harbouring variants in the coding region of the Sec39 domain (amino acids 722-1369) mainly experience ALF, while those with variants in the C-terminus including that seen in the Yakut population show a predominantly multisystemic phenotype without ALF.¹²¹ The difference in these phenotypes may be explained by whether NBAS, being a component of syntaxin 18, disrupts Golgi-to-ER retrograde transport¹²⁰ or even nonsense mediated decay.¹²² Variants in NBAS have also been encountered in relatively high frequency in patients with primary hemophagocytic lymphohistiocytosis (HLH) with a dysregulated lytic vesicle transport pathway being implicated in the pathophysiology.¹²³ The frequency of ALF may decrease with time¹²⁰ but LT can treat and prevent future episodes of ALF.⁵ Hepatocyte transplantation may also be effective in bridging the child to recovery or LT.¹²⁴

Rad50 interacting protein 1 (RINT1) is a protein associated with NBAS and Zeste White 10 (ZW10) forming the NBAS-RINT1-ZW10 (NRZ) complex, a multisubunit machinery in the ER involved in lipid droplet homeostasis and golgi-ER trafficking.¹²⁵ RINT1 deficiency also results in fever-triggered ALF starting in infancy/early childhood along with the skeletal features of vertebral and hip abnormalities.¹²⁶ Episodes of ALF associated with spastic paraparesis, ataxia and dysmorphism (anteverted nose, high-arched palate, wide forehead and lowset ears) was described more recently in three patients.¹²⁵

Disruptive mutations in SCYL1 have also been described in patients with early onset recurrent ALF, peripheral neuropathy and ataxia.¹²⁷ The protein is localised at the Golgi apparatus and involved in the retrograde trafficking of proteins by the membrane trafficking machinery mediated by coatomer (COPI)-coated vesicles.¹²⁸ Affected patients experience episodes of ALF triggered by febrile illness from infancy. Over time, the liver crises may subside but progress to liver fibrosis and

chronic liver disease warranting LT.¹²⁹ Neurological symptoms may develop in parallel with delayed motor milestones, cerebellar ataxia and sensory motor neuropathy along with subtle skeletal features of short stature, abnormal radiographic features of the hips and scoliosis.^{129,130}

Wolcott–Rallison syndrome due to mutations in *EIF2AK3* is characterised by neonatal diabetes mellitus, recurrent ALF and skeletal dysplasia. The eukaryotic translation initiation factor 2 alpha kinase 3 protein is located in the ER and functionally involved at a convergence point of different stress pathways known as the *integrated stress response* reducing the overload of proteins entering the ER of a stressed cell.¹³¹ Apoptosis ensues following a maladaptive protein-folding and secretory capacity at the ER. The increased physiological demands for this process during a febrile illness may be the trigger of ALF. Liver and pancreas transplantation may provide cure to the affected organs.^{132,133}

9 | ARSs DEFICIENCIES

ARSs are highly conserved, ubiquitously expressed enzymes essential to covalently linking a tRNA molecule to its cognate amino acid. Different amino acids have ARS enzymes encoded by one of 17 cytoplasmic ARSs, 17 mitochondrial ARSs and 3 bifunctional enzymes that act in both compartments. This emerging group of disease show considerable clinical variability with the neurological system most frequently affected.¹³⁴ Liver disease in the form of ALF has been reported in association with $LARS1^{135,136}$ and $IARS1^{137,138}$ encoding the cytoplasmic leucyl and isoleucyl-tRNA synthetases, respectively. Patients experience abnormal liver function within the first year of life which may progress to ALF at times of physiologic stress. Patients are also affected by intrauterine growth retardation, anaemia, neurodevelopmental delay, seizures and hypotonia and if they survive episodes of hepatic dysfunction may become less severe with age.¹³⁹ By contrast, other ARSs are reported to cause cholestatic and steatotic liver disease YARS1,¹⁴⁰ MARS1,¹⁴¹ FARS1¹⁴² encoding tyrosyl, methionyl and phenylalanyl synthetases, respectively.

10 | WILSON DISEASE

Wilson disease is an inherited disorder of copper metabolism caused by mutations in *ATP7B* encoding a transmembrane copper-transporting ATPase.¹⁴³ Pathological copper accumulation particularly in the liver and brain lead to the clinical manifestations although children are MD 📐 SIEM _WILEY_

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more likely to present with hepatic disease including ALF in up to approximately, 20–33% of cases.¹⁴⁴ ALF carries a high mortality rate without LT.¹⁴⁵ The phenotype of Wilson disease is diverse and it is not clear why some patients present with ALF while others do not. It may be related to the fact that most patients with Wilson disease presenting with ALF, in fact, have underlying cirrhosis¹⁴⁶ and they are manifesting acute on chronic liver failure.¹⁴⁷ Comparable genotypes were found between ALF and chronic liver disease Wilson disease patients implicating environmental factors more so than genotype in the precipitation of ALF.¹⁴⁸

11 | NIEMANN-PICK TYPE C

Niemann–Pick type C is a neurovisceral lysosomal lipid storage disorder caused by mutations in *NPC1* or *NPC2*. The mode of clinical presentation is highly variable from a neonatal rapidly fatal disorder to an adult onset chronic neurodegenerative disease.¹⁴⁹ ALF is seen in a small subset of patients with neonatal onset disease which is fatal.¹⁵⁰ LT is usually not an option in these infants given the poor neurological outlook.¹⁵¹ However, a recent report of successful LT and normal neurology 5 years after LT incorporating the use of miglustat, a glucosylceramide synthase inhibitor, post LT highlights the evolving treatment options based on individual mutations and new therapeutic drugs.¹⁵²

12 | ZELLWEGER SPECTRUM DISORDERS

Zellweger spectrum disorders are a heterogeneous group of disorders characterised by defective peroxisomes. Liver disease is an important feature in patients with Zellweger spectrum disorder and a frequent cause of death.¹⁵³ The disease is most severe in those presenting in neonates or infancy exhibiting dysmorphism, severe hypotonia, feeding difficulty, epileptic seizures and signs of liver dysfunction in the form of cholestasis and hepatomegaly which may rapidly progressive to ALF.¹⁵⁴ Neonatal ALF is fatal as demonstrated in mouse knock-out models of *Pex2*, *Pex5* and *Pex13* that die shortly after birth.^{155–157}

13 | CONGENITAL DISORDERS OF GLYCOSYLATION

Congenital disorders of glycosylation (CDG) are an expanding group of disorders with genetic defects in N-glycosylation, *O*-glycosylation, lipid glycosylation and

those that impact multiple glycosylation pathways.¹⁵⁸ Liver involvement within CDGs is common and seen in about 22–30% of cases although the nature and extent of disease is highly variable.¹⁵⁹ The spectrum can range from trivial elevation in transaminases, steatosis and hepatomegaly to chronic, liver disease and cirrhosis.^{160,161} However, cases presenting with true ALF are limited to a small number of isolated reports of mannose phosphate isomerase (MPI)-CDG (type 1b) or suspected CDG based on transferrin isoelectric focusing but without genetic confirmation.^{33,162} Even among the MPI-CDG characterised by a triad of digestive, hepatic and endocrine symptoms, liver disease is most frequently in the form of fibrosis and portal hypertension.¹⁶³

14 | DISORDERS OF IMMUNE REGULATION

ALF is a recognised complication of hyperinflammatory states caused by inborn errors of immunity. Persistent immune cell activation can be genetically determined such as in cases of familial HLH¹⁶⁴ which is accountable for 2-4% of all cases of ALF.^{3,165,166} Familial HLH cases caused by genetic defects in PRF1, UNC13D, STX11 or STXBP2 result in profoundly impaired NK-cell and CD8+ T-cell cytotoxic function.¹⁶⁷ Presentation is usually within 2 years of birth, including the neonatal period where infants are born in poor condition with hydrops fetalis.¹⁶⁸ Genetically confirmed cases with fatal outcomes have been implicated in *PRF1* (familial HLH2)^{169,170} and STXBP2 (familial HLH5).¹⁷¹ In a 5-year-old with X-linked lymphoproliferative disease (XIAP) with dysregulated inflammasome activity, ALF and bone marrow failure was successfully treated by liver and bone marrow transplantation.¹⁷² In a study looking at 30 children <24 months of age with ALF of indeterminate aetiology, 9 (30%) were found to have biallelic and 10 (33.3%) monoallelic variants in familial HLH genes including PFR1, UNC13D, RAB27A and LRBA although the pathogenicity of some of the reported variants were uncertain.¹ Treatment of ALF in the context of secondary HLH by LT is usually contraindicated as the recurrence risk is high (56%).¹⁷³

The liver injury pattern and inflammatory milieu that is observed in HLH shares similar characteristics to *indeterminate* ALF cases characterised with elevated ferritin, soluble interleukin 2 receptor (sIL2R) levels and low fibrinogen.¹⁷⁴ These patients are more likely to require LT (46%) compared to the group with known diagnoses (19%)¹⁷⁵ with high levels of sIL2R correlating with higher chance of death or LT.¹⁷⁶ Mechanistically, in mouse models of acute hepatitis with viral CD8 induction, perforin-mediated killing was demonstrated as a critical process.¹⁷⁷ These observations provide insight into the unique characterisation of children, previously healthy, affected with *indeterminate* ALF with high infiltrates of CD8+ T-cells in the liver compared to known causes¹⁷⁸ as well as in peripheral blood.¹⁷⁹ Immunosuppressive therapies are being investigated in the TRIUMPH trial of high dose methylprednisolone or equine anti-thymocyte globulin in the treatment of ALF (https://classic.clinicaltrials.gov/ct2/show/NCT04862221). The discovery of human leukocyte antigen alleles that are associated^{180,181} as well as protective¹⁸² are providing an insight to the genetic propensity to ALF in these children.

Monogenic autoinflammatory disorders have also been implicated in ALF marked by unprovoked episodic or chronic inflammatory symptoms driven by primary dysfunction of the innate immune system. Type 2 autoimmune hepatitis were found in haploinsufficiency of A20, caused by mutations in *TNFAIP3*¹⁸³ as well as *STAT1*,¹⁸⁴ *FOXP3*,¹⁸⁵ *AIRE*,¹⁸⁶ *ZNFX1*¹⁸⁷ and *ITCH*.¹⁸⁸

15 | RED CELL DISORDERS

Liver dysfunction can be seen in newborns with extreme haemolytic anaemia and conjugated hyperbilirubinaemia.¹⁸⁹ Hereditary haemolytic anaemias, particularly defects involving the red blood cell (RBC) cytoskeleton and deficiencies of the RBC enzyme can cause significant liver dysfunction leading to ALF. Red cell membrane disorders disrupt cell membrane stability resulting in irregular shape, increased fragility and membrane loss.¹⁹⁰ Spectrin, a cytoskeletal protein constituted in part by the β I-spectrin subunit (*SPTB*), when deficient can cause hydrops, severe nonimmune haemolytic anaemia progressive conjugated hyperbilirubinaemia and coagulopathy.¹⁹¹ Furthermore, pyruvate kinase deficiency caused by mutations in the PKLR gene resulting in similar neonatal phenotype of severe anaemia, conjugated hyperbilirubinaemia and coagulopathy.^{192,193} ALF has also been seen in a newborn with severe congenital anaemia, hydrops, persistent pulmonary hypertension and cleft palate subsequently diagnosed with biallelic variants in CDAN1-a congenital dyserythropoietic anaemia and a rare inborn error of erythropoiesis.¹⁹⁴ The liver pathology as ellucidated from liver histopathological specimens from autopsy allude to (a) haemolysis and hepatic sequestration of red cells as well as (b) bile ductule obstruction due to bilirubin overload and (c) hepatocyte loss due to shocked liver. Diagnosis in these infants can be challenging: abnormalities of erythrocyte morphology on blood smear are common in neonates; the requirement for transfusions makes

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TABLE 1 Monogenic aetiologies of acute liver failure, their reported presenting age groups and diagnostic investigations that may be considered prior to NGS.

considered prior to NGS.				
Disorder	Age group	Investigations		
Disorders of amino acid metabolism				
OTC	Male neonates (older in girls)	Blood ammonia, AA; urinary OA, purines/pyrimidines (orotic acid excretion)		
ASS1	Neonates to young children			
SLC25A13				
SLC25A15				
FAH		Blood succinylacetone; urinary OA, succinylacetone		
Disorders of carbohydrate metabolism				
GALT	Neonates	Blood galactose; galactose-1-phosphate in erythrocytes		
ALDOB	Neonates to infants	Urinary AA, sugar chromatogram		
PCK1		Blood ammonia, AA; urinary OA		
SLC37A4	Infants to adults	Glycoprotein isoelectrophoresis		
Disorders of fatty acid metabolism				
ACADVL	Infants to young children	Blood acylcarnitine analysis; urinary OA		
SLC22A5	Neonates	Blood acylcarnitine analysis; urinary OA; enzyme activity in fibroblasts		
ETFDH	Infant			
TALDO1	Neonates	Urinary/plasma polyols; enzyme activity in fibroblasts		
Disorders of energy substrate metabolism				
SUCLG1	Neonates to infants	Blood lactate; plasma AA; urine OA; muscle respiratory chain enzyme activity		
SUCLA2				
DLD		Blood lactate; plasma AA; urine OA; enzyme activity in fibroblasts		
Mitochondri				
POLG	Neonates to infants or older ^a	Blood lactate, pyruvate, AA; urinary lactate; muscle respiratory chain enzyme activity		
POLG2	Neonates			
TWNK				
DGUOK				
MPV17	Neonates to infants			
RRM2B	Infants to adolecents			
TRMU	Neonates and infants			
LARS2 FARS2				
FAR52 WARS2	Young child ^a			
GFM1	Neonates			
GFM1 TSFM	Neoliales			
ACAD9	Neonates to infants			
BCS1L	Neonates to mants			
UQCRC2				
SCO1	Neonates			
SERAC1	reonates			
Disorders of vesicular trafficking				
NBAS	Infants to young adults			
RINT1	Infants to young children			
SCYL1	,	Blood γ-glutamyl-transferase		

TABLE 1 (Continued)

(,			
Disorder	Age group	Investigations	
EIF2AK3		Blood glucose	
Aminoacyl-t	RNA synthetase deficiencies		
LARS1	Neonates to young children		
IARS1			
Wilson disea	ise		
ATP7B	Young children to young adults	Blood caeruloplasmin, copper; urine copper; Kayser–Fleischer rings	
Niemann–Pi	ick type C		
NPC1	Neonates	Blood chitotriosidase activity, white cell enzymology; filipin staining of skin fibroblasts	
Disorders of	immune regulation		
PRF1	Neonates to infants	Blood ferritin, triglycerides, fibrinogen, perforin, granule release assay, soluble CD25	
UNC13D			
STX11			
STXBP2			
ZNFX1	Infants to young children		
XIAP	Young child	Blood lymphocyte subpopulations, immunoglobulin G, A and M, XIAP, SAP	
TNFAIP3	Infants and young children		
STAT1		Blood autoantibody profile, signal transducer and activator of transcription 1 phosphorylation	
FOXP3	Young child	Blood lymphocyte subpopulations, immunoglobulin G, A and M	
AIRE	Infants and young children	Blood autoantibody profile	
ITCH	Infant		
Red cell diso	rders		
SPTB	Neonates	Peripheral blood/bone marrow smear	
PKLR			
CDAN1			

Note: The table lists previously reported monogenic aetiologies of ALF. The investigations column are conventional laboratory tests that may be considered prior to genetic testing which is increasingly performed at the outset in ALF to help make decisions regarding emergency liver transplantation. Abbreviations: AA, amino acid; ALF, acute liver failure; OA, organic acid; SAP, signalling lymphocytic activation molecule associated protein; XIAP, X-linked inhibitor of apoptosis protein.

^aSodium valproate administration was the precipitant of ALF.

biochemical testing unreliable¹⁸⁹ and it is difficult to clinically distinguish these infants from alternative aetiologies of neonatal ALF.

16 | UTILITY OF RAPID SEQUENCING IN ALF

Genome testing forms a fundamental component of the diagnostic work up in paediatric ALF today. In a clinical syndrome where a genetic aetiology is suspected in 20-37% of cases,^{5,6} molecular diagnostics by high throughput

sequencing is increasingly relied upon to guide patient management. In paediatric ALF, this is around the identification of candidates who are suitable for emergency, lifesaving, LT or, indeed, those that are not because: (a) an effective, alternative treatment is available (e.g., galactosaemia), (b) LT is deemed futile (e.g., multisystemic disorders with severe neurological outlook) or (c) they are expected to recover with supportive management (e.g., reversible ALF in TRUM deficiency). However, the application of genetic sequencing is dependent on the timeframe in which the results may become available: paediatric ALF pose unique challenges as patients can lose hepatic function within days and the clinical course is dynamic, unpredictable and rapidly progressive.^{3,33,175} Furthermore, often these patients are difficult to distinguish from one another in the critical care setting. Rapid exome or genome sequencing^{195–202} carried out in parallel with conventional diagnostic tests (Table 1) shows promise to enable timely, individualised, treatment decisions. Genome sequencing has shown superior diagnostic rates and cost-effectiveness^{196,203} which coupled with a virtual panel (i.e., a phenotype-driven panel) may provide the efficiency required for paediatric ALF.

17 | CONCLUSIONS

ALF is a rapidly evolving clinical syndrome with devastating consequences. Reaching a diagnosis is challenging but earlier, more precise diagnosis is now possible with the technological and clinical advances in genomics. Challenges still remain, for instance, with regards to the speed at which clinically relevant, variant information is made available. Nonetheless, clinicians are better placed than ever to make individualised treatment decisions in this clinical syndrome marred by diverse aetiologies.

AUTHOR CONTRIBUTIONS

RH and RT contributed to the conception and design of the article. RH drafted the initial version of the manuscript. RT critically reviewed the manuscript. Article guarantor: Robert Hegarty.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The authors do not have any conflicts of interest to declare.

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