



**Universiteit
Leiden**
The Netherlands

Long-term follow-up of a trial comparing post-remission treatment with autologous or allogeneic bone marrow transplantation or intensive chemotherapy in younger acute myeloid leukemia patients

Baron, F.; Efficace, F.; Cannella, L.; Willemze, R.; Vignetti, M.; Muus, P.; ... ; Suci, S.

Citation

Baron, F., Efficace, F., Cannella, L., Willemze, R., Vignetti, M., Muus, P., ... Suci, S. (2020). Long-term follow-up of a trial comparing post-remission treatment with autologous or allogeneic bone marrow transplantation or intensive chemotherapy in younger acute myeloid leukemia patients, *105*(1), E13-E16. doi:10.3324/haematol.2019.221333

Version: Publisher's Version

License: [Creative Commons CC BY-NC 4.0 license](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc/4.0/)

Downloaded from: <https://hdl.handle.net/1887/3181566>

Note: To cite this publication please use the final published version (if applicable).

Long-term follow-up of a trial comparing post-remission treatment with autologous or allogeneic bone marrow transplantation or intensive chemotherapy in younger acute myeloid leukemia patients

Even though the optimal post-remission therapy for younger acute myeloid leukemia (AML) patients has remained controversial¹ only a few prospective trials have been comparing intensive chemotherapy to autologous (auto-) or allogeneic (allo-) bone marrow transplantation (BMT). In addition, most of these studies have been published with a relatively short follow-up.² Therefore, we herein report a very long-term follow-up evaluation of AML patients previously enrolled in the pivotal EORTC/GIMEMA AML-8A trial.³

From November 1986 to April 1993, 990 patients were registered in the EORTC/GIMEMA AML-8A trial which

prospectively compared the impact of three post-remission treatments on disease-free (DFS) and overall (OS) survival in younger (10-45 years of age) AML patients who reached a complete remission (CR) after induction chemotherapy (*Online Supplementary Figure 1*). Main inclusion criteria included previously untreated AML according to the French-American-British (FAB) classification system and 10 to 59 years of age at diagnosis (*NB*: some centers accepted to enter patients aged 46-59 years of age). Main exclusion criteria included AML occurring after a myeloproliferative disorder, and a prior history of myelodysplastic syndrome for more than six months. Thirty-six of the 990 patients were deemed ineligible because of inadequate diagnosis or because they met exclusion criteria. Further 13 patients could not be evaluated because of missing data. Thus, data from 941 patients were evaluated. The results were first reported in 1995 with a median follow-up of 3.3 years after registration.³ All patients received a remission-induction con-

Table 1. Patient characteristics, treatment applicability and outcomes according to the three treatments planned at the evaluation of ICT1.

	Allo-BMT (n=168)	Auto-BMT (n=128)	ICT2 (n=126)	P
Age at registration				
Median (range)	32 (13-45)	32.5 (15-59)	32 (15-59)	0.80*
11-25, n (%)	42 (25)	42 (33)	45 (36)	
26-45, n (%)	126 (75)	77 (60)	72 (57)	
46-59, n (%)	0	9 (7)	9 (7)	
White-cell count at registration x10 ⁹ /L				
Median (range)	14.8 (0.4-294)	14.7 (0.5-288)	13.8 (0.2-376)	0.98*
< 5, n (%)	37 (22)	39 (31)	33 (26)	
5-49, n (%)	98 (58)	54 (42)	59 (47)	
≥ 50, n (%)	33 (20)	35 (27)	34 (27)	
Cytogenetic risk, n (%)*	n=73	n=59	n=56	0.45**
Good	18 (25)	11 (19)	7 (13)	
Intermediate	25 (34)	24 (41)	17 (30)	
Poor	14 (19)	12 (20)	11 (20)	
Inconclusive	16 (22)	12 (20)	21 (38)	
# of cycles needed to reach a CR, n (%)				0.052*
1	132 (79)	111 (87)	111 (88)	
2	36 (21)	17 (13)	15 (12)	
Treatment given in CR1, n (%)				
Allo-BMT	144 (86)	2 (2)	1 (1)	
Auto-BMT	0	95 (74)	5 (4)	
ICT2	1 (1)	5 (4)	104 (83)	
Other	0	3 (2)	1 (1)	
None	23 (14)	23 (18)	15 (12)	
Median length of time between CR achievement and last treatment step (weeks)	15	14	10	<0.001*
Disease free-survival status, n (%)				
CR1	87 (52)	52 (41)	39 (31)	
Relapse	47 (28)	60 (47)	76 (60)	
Death without relapse	34 (20)	16 (13)	11 (9)	
Patients given a salvage auto-BMT, n (%)	0	2 (2)	13 (10)	
Patients given a salvage allo-BMT, n (%)	2 (1)	1 (1)	2 (2)	

*Kruskal-Wallis test; **Yates' χ^2 test. ICT: intensive consolidation chemotherapy; allo-BMT: autologous bone marrow transplantation; auto-BMT: allogeneic bone marrow transplantation; CR: complete remission; CR1: first complete remission. ICT: intensive consolidation chemotherapy.

sisting of one or two (in case of partial response after the first course) courses of chemotherapy combining cytarabine (200 mg/m² given as a continuous intravenous (iv) infusion on days 1 through day 7) and daunorubicine (45 mg/m² given iv on days 1, 2 and 3). CR was reached by 623 patients (66%) after one or two courses of induction and 576 of these patients received the first course of intensive consolidation chemotherapy (ICT1) combining intermediate-dose cytarabine (1000 mg/m² during the first year of the study and then 500 mg/m², given iv in two hours every 12 hours on day 1 through day 6), and amsacrine (given iv at a dose of 120 mg/m² on days 5, 6, and 7). After ICT1, patients alive in first complete remission (CR1) who had an human leukocyte antigen

(HLA)-compatible donor, and considered suitable to receive an allo-BMT, were included in the allo-BMT arm. Patients alive in CR1 without a HLA-compatible donor, and considered eligible to receive an auto-BMT, were randomized between auto-BMT and a second course of intensive consolidation chemotherapy (ICT2). The distributions of OS, DFS from CR and OS from CR1 were estimated using the Kaplan-Meier method and the treatment groups were compared using the log-rank test. The Cox model was used to estimate the treatment hazard ratios along with the 95% confidence interval (CI). The relapse incidence as well as the incidence of death in CR were calculated using cumulative incidence functions and the groups were compared using the Gray test.

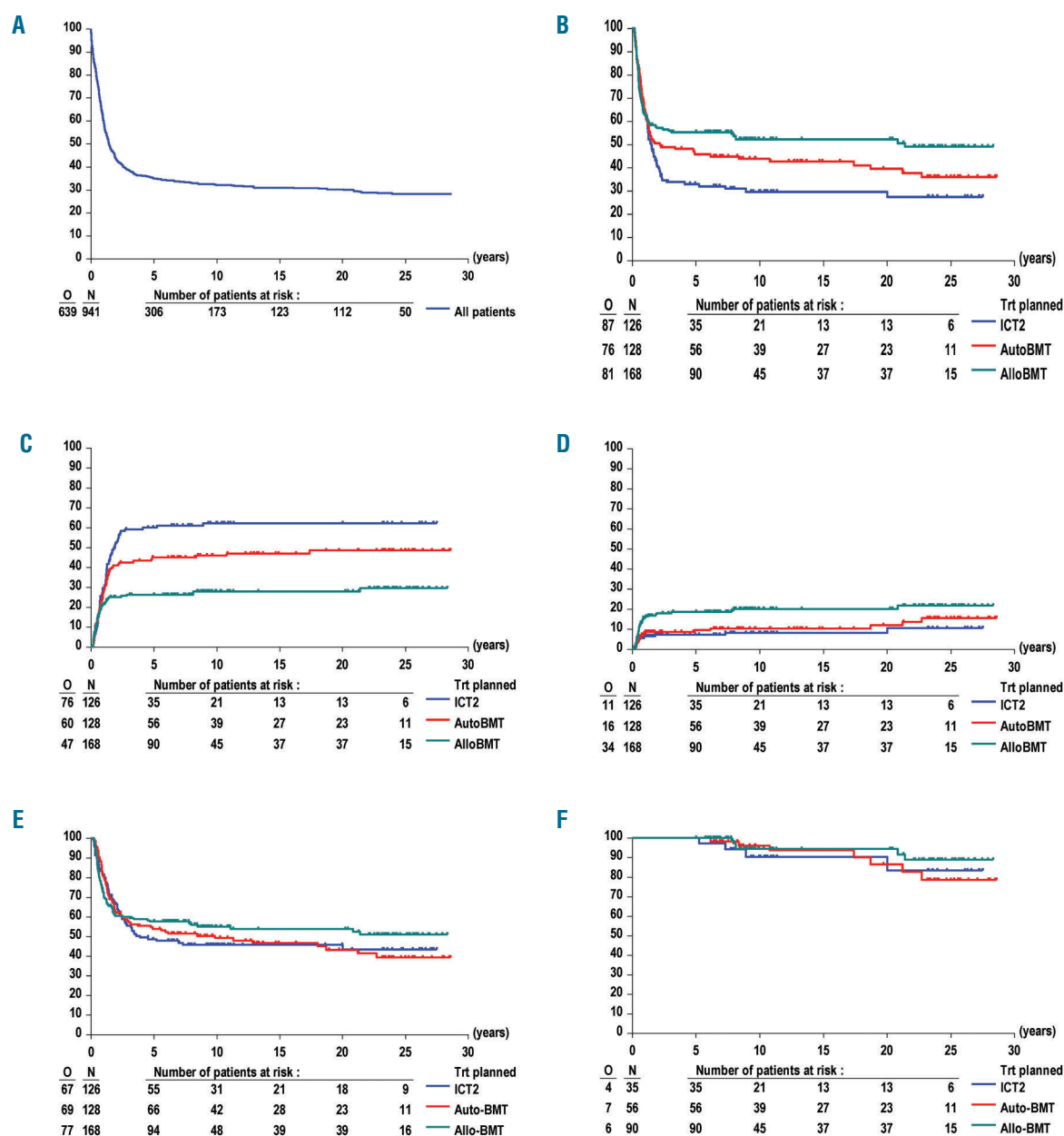


Figure 1. Outcomes based on intent-to-treatment analyses. (A) OS from inclusion in the whole population. (B) DFS from CR according to treatment group. (C) Cumulative incidence of relapse from CR according to treatment group. (D) Cumulative incidence death in CR from CR according to treatment group. (E) OS from CR according to treatment group. (F) DFS in patients alive in first CR 5 years after the achievement of CR, according to treatment group. OS: overall survival; DFS: disease-free survival; CR: complete remission.

In the current report, the median follow-up from inclusion was 11.1 years (95% CI 10-13 years; range 0-28 years). For the whole population (n=941), the 5-, 10- and 15-year OS rates from inclusion were 35%, 32% and 31%, respectively (Figure 1A). A total of 623 patients (66%) achieved a CR after one (n=508) or two (n=116) course(s) of induction chemotherapy. Out of 576 patients who completed ICT1, 168 were allocated to the allo-BMT arm, while 254 patients were randomized to auto-BMT (n=128) or ICT2 (n=126). The outcomes of these three treatment groups (n=422) are reported below.

As observed in the initial report,³ DFS from CR was longer after allo-BMT than auto-BMT and was also longer after auto-BMT than after ICT2 (Figure 1B; $P=0.015$). Specifically, the five-year DFS from CR was 55% in the allo-BMT group, 46% in the auto-BMT group and 33% in the ICT2 group. At 10-year from inclusion, DFS from CR were 52%, 44% and 30% in the allo-BMT, auto-BMT and ICT2 patients, respectively. Restricting the analyses to patients < 46 years of age at registration (before the start of the induction treatment), the 10-year DFS from CR was 52%, 47% and 30% in the allo-BMT, auto-BMT and ICT2 patients, respectively ($P=0.016$) (Online Supplementary Figure 2A). Interestingly, subgroup analyses suggested that the advantage of allo-BMT was mainly observed in patients lacking good-risk cytogenetic features (Online Supplementary Figure 2B) and not in those with good-risk features (Online Supplementary Figure 2C).

In the 422 patient group, the 10-year relapse incidence from CR was lower in the allo-BMT group (28%) than in the auto-BMT (47%) and in the ICT2 group (62%) (Figure 1C; $P=0.001$), while the 10-year incidence of death in CR was higher in the allo-BMT (20%) than in the auto-BMT (10%) and in the ICT2 group (8%) (Figure 1D; $P=0.019$). In contrast to what was observed for DFS from CR, OS from CR was not significantly impacted by the treatment group (Figure 1E, $P=0.61$). Specifically, the 10-year OS from CR rate was 55% in the allo-BMT group, 49% in the auto-BMT group, and 46% in the ICT2 group. This might have been due to higher rates of salvage auto- or allo-BMT in the ICT2 group (12%) than in the auto-BMT (3%) and allo-BMT (1%) group (Table 1), given that both strategies proved to be effective in selected patients with relapsed AML.^{4,5} As depicted in Figure 1F and the Online Supplementary Figure 2D, relatively few events occurred beyond five years after the study inclusion. Specifically, among the patients alive, still in first CR five years after the achievement of CR, the 10-year DFS rate and 10-year relapse incidence from CR1 were 94% and 3% in the allo-BMT group (n=90), 96% and 5% in the auto-BMT patients (n=56) and 90% and 7% in the ICT2 patients (n=36), respectively. Several deaths occurring approximately 20 years after the achievement of CR were not due to AML.

The comparison of the results of the two randomized groups showed that the patients randomized to the auto-BMT arm had a longer DFS from randomization than the patients in the ICT2 group (HR=0.78; 95% CI: 0.57-1.07, $P=0.12$) due to a lower incidence of relapse (HR=0.71; 95% CI: 0.51-1.00, $P=0.050$). In contrast, OS from randomization was comparable in the auto-BMT and ICT2 groups (HR=0.97; 95% CI: 0.69-1.36, $P=0.9$). This also might be explained by the relatively high incidence of salvage auto-BMT in the ICT2 group (10% versus 2% in the auto-BMT patients) (Table 1).

Previous studies have noted that non relapse fatalities due in part to complications of chronic graft-versus-host disease (GvHD) may occur well beyond five years post transplantation,⁶ while late relapses have been reported

especially in patients not offered an allogeneic transplantation.⁷ These observations prompted us to perform a long-term follow-up of the pivotal EORTC/GIMEMA AML-8A trial comparing three post-remission strategies.

A first novel finding was that our initial observations hold true after a long-term follow up, with a benefit in terms of DFS from CR in the allo-BMT patients in comparison to the auto-BMT and further to the ICT2 patients. These results are in concordance with those observed by Vallenga *et al.* who reported better five-year relapse free survival with autologous peripheral blood stem cell (PBSC) transplantation than with intensive chemotherapy in AML patients, in first CR after 2 cycles of intensive chemotherapy, who did not have a HLA-identical sibling donor.⁸

A second important result from the current analysis is that among AML patients in CR five years after the study inclusion, the probability to remain alive and disease free five years later was >90%, and was quite similar in the three post-remission treatment groups. The long-term analyses of the health related quality of life (HRQOL) of the patients is planned in a further study (the SPARTA platform).

It should be noted that, in the AML arena, many advances have been made in each group since the EORTC/GIMEMA AML-8A study was designed. These include, for example, GvHD prophylaxis (they had shorter OS than those receiving cyclosporine A plus methotrexate for GvHD prophylaxis), better conditioning regimens for each auto-BMT and allo-BMT⁹, the demonstration of the importance of high-dose cytarabine-based consolidation chemotherapy in patients with core-binding factor leukemia and important advances in the supportive care.¹⁰ Also the dose of the intercalating agent used in the remission induction chemotherapy (3 x 45 mg/m² of daunorubicin) was suboptimal according to more recent studies. Finally, autologous transplantation is nowadays performed with PBSC instead of with BM as a stem cell source although one large registry and one phase III study did not show better DFS with auto-PBSC than with auto-BMT.^{11,12}

In summary, this long-term follow-up of the EORTC/GIMEMA AML-8A study confirms a longer DFS with allo-BMT or auto-BMT when compared to ICT2 in younger AML patients in CR1. Further, this long-term follow-up study revealed that the vast majority of patients alive in CR1 at five years remain disease-free survivors five years later. Although indications of allogeneic hematopoietic stem cell transplantation are nowadays largely driven by the cytogenetic/molecular AML profile^{10,13} and the presence or absence of minimal residual disease at transplantation,¹⁴ long-term results of the AML-8A study demonstrate that auto-BMT remained superior to ICT2 in younger AML patients not candidate for an allo-HSCT. These results suggest that new prospective trials comparing autologous hematopoietic stem cell transplantation to additional intensive chemotherapy should be carried out. These studies could include patients with favorable European Leukemia Net classification risk with minimal residual disease (MRD) negative levels.¹⁵

Frédéric Baron,¹ Fabio Efficace,² Laura Cannella,² Roel Willemze,³ Marco Vignetti,² Petra Muus,^{4,5} Jean-Pierre Marie,⁶ Dario Ferrero,⁷ Paola Fazi,² Edoardo La Sala,² Jean-Henri Bourhis,⁸ Francesco Fabbiano,⁹ Alberto Bosi,¹⁰ Marco Sborgia,¹¹ Giovanni Martinelli,¹² Sebastian Wittnebel,¹³ Silvia Trisolini,¹⁴ Maria Concetta Petti,¹⁴

Constantijn J.M. Halkes,³ Walter J.F.M. van der Velden,⁴ Theo de Witte,⁴ Sergio Amadori,¹⁵ Robert A Zittoun⁶ and Stefan Suciu¹⁶

¹GIGA-13 and CHU, University of Liège, Liège, Belgium; ²Gruppo Italiano Malattie Ematologiche Dell'Adulto GIMEMA, Rome, Rome, Italy; ³Leiden University Medical Center, Leiden, the Netherlands; ⁴Radboud University Medical Center, Nijmegen, the Netherlands; ⁵Currently: King's College Hospital, London, UK; ⁶Hôtel-Dieu Hospital, Paris, France; ⁷Department of Medicine and Experimental Oncology, Torino, Italy; ⁸Gustave Roussy cancer campus Grand Paris, Villejuif, France; ⁹Ospedali Riuniti "Villa Sofia-Cervello", Palermo, Italy; ¹⁰University of Florence, Firenze, Italy; ¹¹Ospedale Civile, Pescara, Italy; ¹²Istituto Scientifico Romagnolo per lo Studio e la Cura dei Tumori (IRST) IRCCS, Meldola, Italy; ¹³Jules Bordet Institute, Brussels, Belgium; ¹⁴Universita La Sapienza, Rome, Italy; ¹⁵University Tor Vergata, Rome, Italy and ¹⁶EORTC Headquarters, Brussels, Belgium

Acknowledgments: the authors thank all the EORTC Leukemia Group members and the clinicians and patients who participated in this study, and the EORTC Headquarters data managers (Liv Meert and Gabriel Solbu).

Funding: this publication was supported by a donation from the "Fondation contre le cancer" from "Belgium" through the EORTC Cancer Research Fund. FB is senior research associate of the Fund for Scientific Research (FRS-FNRS) Belgium.

*Correspondence: FREDERIC BARON
f.baron@uliege.be
doi:10.3324/haematol.2019.221333*

Information on authorship, contributions, and financial & other disclosures was provided by the authors and is available with the online version of this article at www.haematologica.org.

References

1. Cornelissen JJ, Blaise D. Hematopoietic stem cell transplantation for patients with AML in first complete remission. *Blood*. 2016;127(1):62-70.
2. Cornelissen JJ, van Putten WL, Verdonck LF, et al. Results of a HOVON/SAKK donor versus no-donor analysis of myeloablative HLA-identical sibling stem cell transplantation in first remission acute myeloid leukemia in young and middle-aged adults: benefits for whom? *Blood*. 2007;109(9):3658-3666.
3. Zittoun RA, Mandelli F, Willemze R, et al. Autologous or allogeneic bone marrow transplantation compared with intensive chemotherapy in acute myelogenous leukemia. *N Engl J Med*. 1995;332(4):217-223.
4. Christophe M, Labopin M, Gorin NC, et al. Allogeneic stem cell transplantation following relapse post autologous stem cell transplantation in adult patients with acute myeloid leukemia: A retrospective analysis of 537 patients from the Acute Leukemia Working Party of the EBMT. *Am J Hematol*. 2018;93(12):1532-1542.
5. Chantry AD, Snowden JA, Craddock C, et al. Long-term outcomes of myeloablation and autologous transplantation of relapsed acute myeloid leukemia in second remission: a British Society of Blood and Marrow Transplantation registry study. *Biol Blood Marrow Transplant*. 2006;12(12):1310-1317.
6. Wingard JR, Majhail NS, Brazauskas R, et al. Long-term survival and late deaths after allogeneic hematopoietic cell transplantation. *J Clin Oncol*. 2011;29(16):2230-2239.
7. Beguin Y, Sautois B, Forget P, Bury J, Fillet G. Long term follow-up of patients with acute myelogenous leukemia who received the daunorubicin, vincristine, and cytosine arabinoside regimen. *Cancer*. 1997;79(7):1351-1354.
8. Vellenga E, van Putten W, Ossenkoppele GJ, et al. Autologous peripheral blood stem cell transplantation for acute myeloid leukemia. *Blood*. 2011;118(23):6037-6042.
9. Gorin NC, Labopin M, Blaise D, et al. Optimizing the pretransplant regimen for autologous stem cell transplantation in acute myelogenous leukemia: Better outcomes with busulfan and melphalan compared with busulfan and cyclophosphamide in high risk patients autografted in first complete remission: A study from the acute leukemia working party of the EBMT. *Am J Hematol*. 2018;93(7):859-866.
10. Dohner H, Estey E, Grimwade D, et al. Diagnosis and management of AML in adults: 2017 ELN recommendations from an international expert panel. *Blood*. 2017;129(4):424-447.
11. Gorin NC, Labopin M, Blaise D, et al. Higher incidence of relapse with peripheral blood rather than marrow as a source of stem cells in adults with acute myelocytic leukemia autografted during the first remission. *J Clin Oncol*. 2009;27(24):3987-3993.
12. Hengeveld M, Suciu S, Chelgoum Y, et al. High numbers of mobilized CD34+ cells collected in AML in first remission are associated with high relapse risk irrespective of treatment with autologous peripheral blood SCT or autologous BMT. *Bone Marrow Transplant*. 2015;50(3):341-347.
13. Versluis J, In 't Hout FE, Devillier R, et al. Comparative value of post-remission treatment in cytogenetically normal AML subclassified by NPM1 and FLT3-ITD allelic ratio. *Leukemia*. 2017;31(1):26-33.
14. Schuurhuis GJ, Heuser M, Freeman S, et al. Minimal/measurable residual disease in AML: a consensus document from the European LeukemiaNet MRD Working Party. *Blood*. 2018;131(12):1275-1291.
15. Gorin NC, Labopin M, Pabst T, et al. Unrelated matched versus autologous transplantation in adult patients with good and intermediate risk acute myelogenous leukemia in first molecular remission. *Am J Hematol*. 2017;92(12):1318-1323.