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editorial-office@sciformat.ca

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FROM DIAGNOSIS TO ADVANCED DISEASE: A COMPREHENSIVE REVIEW OF CONTEMPORARY MANAGEMENT OF PROSTATE CANCER, INCLUDING SURGICAL TECHNIQUES, SYSTEMIC THERAPIES, AND MODERN TECHNOLOGIES

Michał Pietrasz *(Corresponding Author, Email: michal.pietrasz252@gmail.com)*
Ludwik Rydygier Provincial Combined Hospital in Toruń, Toruń, Kujawsko-Pomorskie, Poland
ORCID ID: 0009-0000-8148-7487

Patryk Iglewski
Ludwik Rydygier Provincial Combined Hospital in Toruń, Toruń, Kujawsko-Pomorskie, Poland
ORCID ID: 0009-0004-6611-2168

Klaudia Brzoza
Jan Biziel University Hospital No. 2 in Bydgoszcz, Bydgoszcz, Kujawsko-Pomorskie, Poland
ORCID ID: 0009-0006-0950-4514

Filip Matusiak
Jan Biziel University Hospital No. 2 in Bydgoszcz, Bydgoszcz, Kujawsko-Pomorskie, Poland
ORCID ID: 0009-0002-0538-6443

Michał Kociński
Jan Biziel University Hospital No. 2 in Bydgoszcz, Bydgoszcz, Kujawsko-Pomorskie, Poland
ORCID ID: 0009-0007-7651-7929

Anna Komarczewska
Ludwik Rydygier Provincial Combined Hospital in Toruń, Toruń, Kujawsko-Pomorskie, Poland
ORCID ID: 0009-0006-7378-2607

ABSTRACT

Background: Prostate cancer management has profoundly evolved from generalized protocols to a personalized, technology-driven paradigm. The integration of robotic surgery, artificial intelligence (AI), and novel systemic therapies necessitates a synthesis of the current state of care.

Aim: To synthesize evidence on contemporary prostate cancer management, focusing on the comparative effectiveness of surgical techniques, the impact of surgeon experience, and the role of emerging technologies like AI and novel systemic therapies.

Material and methods: A structured analysis of 27 provided scientific documents (systematic reviews, trials, guidelines) was performed. Key data on diagnostic, functional, and oncological outcomes were extracted and synthesized.

Results: AI-powered analysis of mpMRI achieves high accuracy (AUROC >0.90) in detecting significant disease. Robotic radical prostatectomy (RARP) is superior to laparoscopy (LRP) with fewer complications and better outcomes for continence (RR 0.43), erectile function (RR 1.38), and biochemical recurrence (RR 0.59). Surgeon experience is a key factor (250-case learning curve). For mHSPC, adding ARPIs to ADT improves survival (HR for mortality ~0.63). In mCRPC, PARP inhibitors and 177Lu-PSMA-617 offer survival benefits in selected patients.

Conclusions: Contemporary prostate cancer care emphasizes precision. RARP is the surgical standard for localized disease, but outcomes depend heavily on surgeon volume. AI shows promise but requires extensive validation for clinical adoption. Early combination therapies are standard in advanced disease. A multidisciplinary, evidence-based approach is required to integrate these modalities and optimize patient outcomes.

KEYWORDS

Prostate Cancer, Robotic-Assisted Radical Prostatectomy (RARP), Laparoscopic Radical Prostatectomy (LRP), Artificial Intelligence, Machine Learning, Biochemical Recurrence, Advanced Prostate Cancer

CITATION

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1. Introduction

Prostate cancer stands as a formidable global health challenge, representing the second most frequently diagnosed malignancy and a leading cause of cancer-related mortality in men worldwide [4]. The management of this disease has undergone a dramatic and rapid evolution over the past two decades. The traditional, uniform treatment models have given way to a highly personalized and multimodal paradigm, where therapeutic decisions are increasingly tailored to individual patient and tumor characteristics. For clinically localized disease, radical prostatectomy (RP) remains a cornerstone of curative-intent therapy, offering the potential for excellent long-term cancer control [4, 7]. The evolution of the surgical approach itself, from the established open radical prostatectomy (ORP) to minimally invasive surgery (MIS), encapsulates the central dilemma of modern surgical oncology: the dual pursuit of oncological extirpation and functional preservation.

The advent of MIS began with laparoscopic radical prostatectomy (LRP), a technique that promised to mitigate the significant morbidity associated with ORP, including substantial blood loss, postoperative pain, and prolonged hospital stays [6, 17]. While LRP delivered on some of these perioperative promises, it introduced its own set of formidable technical challenges. The reliance on rigid, non-articulating instruments, coupled with a two-dimensional video display, resulted in a notoriously steep learning curve and made complex reconstructive maneuvers, such as the vesicourethral anastomosis, particularly difficult [3, 15]. These limitations spurred the development of the next iteration of MIS: robotic-assisted radical prostatectomy (RARP).

The RARP platform was engineered specifically to overcome the ergonomic and technical limitations of conventional laparoscopy. By providing surgeons with a high-definition, stereoscopic 3D view, tremor filtration, and intuitive control over wristed instruments that mimic and exceed the dexterity of the human hand, the robotic system was designed to enhance surgical precision [9, 14]. This technological leap was hypothesized to directly translate into improved outcomes, particularly in the delicate dissection required for preserving the neurovascular bundles critical for erectile function and reconstructing the urinary sphincter mechanism essential for continence [16].

While the technical superiority of the robotic platform is evident, the ultimate clinical success of any surgical procedure is inextricably linked to the "surgeon factor." The impact of surgeon experience has been a consistent theme and a significant confounder in the surgical literature. A landmark study by Vickers et al. provided a quantitative analysis of this "learning curve," demonstrating that a surgeon's oncological outcomes, as measured by biochemical recurrence-free survival, continue to improve significantly up to approximately 250 cases [5]. This crucial finding highlights that surgical proficiency is not innate but acquired through high-volume practice, suggesting that the experience of the operator may be an even more powerful predictor of patient outcomes than the specific technology they employ.

Concurrent with this surgical evolution, a digital revolution is reshaping the very foundations of diagnosis and prognostication. Artificial intelligence (AI), a field encompassing machine learning (ML) and deep learning (DL), is being applied to interpret complex, high-dimensional medical data [1, 9, 13]. In diagnostic imaging, AI algorithms are demonstrating remarkable capabilities in analyzing multiparametric MRI (mpMRI) to detect and grade prostate cancer with an accuracy that can match or even exceed that of non-specialist radiologists, addressing the persistent issue of inter-observer variability [12, 21, 26]. Similarly, in pathology, AI is being used to bring objectivity to the subjective art of Gleason grading from whole slide images, promising more consistent and reproducible risk stratification [13]. These AI models are not limited to image analysis; they can integrate clinical, genomic, and radiomic data to create predictive tools that outperform traditional nomograms in forecasting outcomes such as biochemical recurrence [1, 8]. This is complemented by advancements in molecular imaging, where techniques like prostate-specific membrane antigen (PSMA) positron emission tomography (PET) are challenging traditional staging paradigms by identifying occult micrometastatic disease, thereby blurring the lines between localized and systemic cancer [4, 25].

This blurring of boundaries is mirrored by a paradigm shift in the treatment of advanced disease. For metastatic hormone-sensitive prostate cancer (mHSPC), the era of ADT monotherapy has ended, replaced by a standard of care that emphasizes upfront treatment intensification using potent androgen receptor pathway inhibitors (ARPIs) or triplet therapies including chemotherapy [19, 20, 25]. In the metastatic castration-resistant (mCRPC) setting, the therapeutic landscape is now navigated through careful sequencing of agents, guided by molecular profiling to identify candidates for targeted treatments like PARP inhibitors, and the advent of novel radioligand therapies [20, 23, 25]. The entire field is also subject to external pressures, as exemplified by the COVID-19 pandemic, which necessitated rapid adaptations in treatment delivery and accelerated the adoption of technologies like telemedicine [2].

This comprehensive review will synthesize the multifaceted evidence from the provided literature to construct a holistic overview of contemporary prostate cancer management. It will systematically compare the functional and oncological outcomes of LRP and RARP, analyze the critical role of surgeon experience, and contextualize these findings within the broader landscape of emerging AI technologies and the revolution in systemic therapy. By tracing the patient journey from diagnosis through to advanced disease, this paper aims to provide clinicians with a clear and integrated understanding of the state-of-the-art in this dynamic field.

2. Technical Characteristics of Modern Urology

The contemporary practice of urology, particularly in the management of prostate cancer, is defined by a sophisticated interplay of advanced surgical platforms, high-resolution imaging, and powerful computational analysis. This section provides a detailed technical description of the primary surgical modalities for radical prostatectomy and the emerging digital and molecular technologies that are augmenting them.

2.1. Surgical Procedures for Radical Prostatectomy

The primary goal of radical prostatectomy—complete removal of the prostate and seminal vesicles with subsequent reconstruction of the urinary tract—has remained constant. However, the technical means of achieving this goal have evolved profoundly.

Open Radical Prostatectomy (ORP): As the historical gold standard, ORP is performed through a single retropubic or perineal incision. This approach provides the surgeon with direct tactile feedback, which has traditionally been considered an advantage for assessing tissue planes and tumour extent. However, this direct access comes at the cost of significant surgical trauma, resulting in the highest rates of estimated blood loss (mean EBL often exceeding 1000 mL), postoperative pain, and prolonged hospital stays, typically several days [6, 17]. Although it remains a valid option, especially in resource-limited settings, the morbidity profile of ORP has driven the widespread shift towards minimally invasive techniques.

Laparoscopic Radical Prostatectomy (LRP): LRP was the first major step into the MIS era for prostate cancer. The procedure involves insufflating the abdomen with carbon dioxide to create a working space (pneumoperitoneum) and inserting a camera and long, rigid instruments through several small "keyhole" incisions. The surgeon operates while standing at the patient's side, viewing the surgical field on a 2D monitor. While LRP significantly reduces blood loss and recovery time compared to ORP, it presents substantial technical challenges. The fulcrum effect of the abdominal wall creates counter-intuitive instrument movements, the rigid instruments lack the dexterity of the human wrist, and the 2D visualization eliminates depth perception [3, 15]. These factors combine to create a steep and arduous learning curve, making complex tasks like nerve-sparing and the creation of a precise, watertight vesicourethral anastomosis particularly difficult. These technical hurdles have been directly linked to higher rates of complications and less favorable functional outcomes compared to RARP [15, 16].

Robotic-Assisted Radical Prostatectomy (RARP): RARP represents the current zenith of MIS for prostate cancer and is now the most common approach in many parts of the world. It utilizes a master-slave robotic system (most commonly the da Vinci Surgical System) that consists of a surgeon console, a patient-side cart with robotic arms, and a vision tower. The surgeon operates while seated at the console, remotely manipulating the instruments. The key technical advantages of RARP that address the shortcomings of LRP are [9, 14, 15]:

3D High-Definition, Magnified Vision: The stereoscopic camera provides the surgeon with true depth perception and a highly magnified view of the anatomy, which is crucial for identifying the delicate neurovascular bundles and the plane of dissection between the prostate and surrounding structures.

EndoWrist® Instruments: These instruments, controlled by the surgeon's hand movements, have seven degrees of freedom and 90 degrees of articulation, mimicking and even exceeding the range of motion of the human wrist. This allows for precise suturing and dissection in the confined space of the pelvis.

Tremor Filtration and Motion Scaling: The system actively filters out the surgeon's natural hand tremors and can scale down large hand movements into smaller, more precise instrument movements, enhancing surgical stability and control.

Ergonomics: The seated, immersive console position reduces surgeon fatigue and physical strain during long procedures, which can contribute to improved performance and consistency.

These technical attributes have been shown to facilitate the key steps of the operation that are critical for preserving function, including precise apical dissection to maximize urethral length, athermal and traction-free nerve-sparing techniques, and the ability to perform a robust, running vesicourethral anastomosis [4, 16]. The procedure has demonstrated its feasibility and safety even in the most challenging cases, such as very high-risk, pathologically confirmed pT4 disease, where it serves as a critical component of a multimodal treatment strategy by providing definitive local control [7].

2.2. Advanced Imaging and Artificial Intelligence Technologies

The surgical procedure itself is now just one component of a technology-driven treatment pathway. Advanced imaging and AI are transforming every step, from preoperative planning to intraoperative execution and postoperative prognostication.

Diagnostic and Staging Imaging:

Multiparametric Magnetic Resonance Imaging (mpMRI): mpMRI has become the standard of care for the pre-biopsy evaluation of men with suspected prostate cancer [4]. It combines high-resolution anatomical T2-weighted imaging with functional sequences, including Diffusion-Weighted Imaging (DWI), which measures the movement of water molecules (restricted in dense tumour tissue), and Dynamic Contrast-Enhanced (DCE) imaging, which assesses tissue vascularity. The combination of these sequences allows for the detection, localization, and characterization of suspicious lesions, which are graded using the Prostate Imaging Reporting and Data System (PI-RADS) score [4, 21, 26].

Prostate-Specific Membrane Antigen (PSMA) PET/CT: This molecular imaging technique uses a radiotracer that binds to PSMA, a protein highly expressed on the surface of prostate cancer cells. Its high sensitivity allows for the detection of small-volume nodal and distant metastases that are invisible on conventional imaging (CT and bone scan). This technology is challenging traditional staging paradigms, frequently upstaging men with "high-risk localized" disease to metastatic disease, thereby influencing systemic treatment decisions from the outset [4, 20, 25].

Artificial Intelligence (AI) Modalities:

AI in Radiology: Deep learning, particularly CNNs, is being applied to automate the analysis of mpMRI scans. These algorithms can be trained to segment the prostate gland, identify suspicious lesions, and assign a probability score for clinically significant cancer. Studies have shown that these tools can achieve a diagnostic accuracy (measured by AUROC) greater than 0.90, which can assist radiologists, improve consistency, and potentially speed up workflow [8, 12, 13, 21].

AI in Pathology: In the pathology lab, AI is being used to analyze whole slide images (WSI) of biopsy tissue. CNNs can automatically identify cancerous regions and perform Gleason grading. This addresses the significant issue of inter-observer variability among pathologists and has the potential to become a powerful quality assurance and decision-support tool [9, 13].

AI in Prognostication: Machine learning models are being developed to predict clinical outcomes. By integrating a wide range of variables—including clinical data (PSA, stage), pathology reports (Gleason score, margins), and radiomic features extracted from images—these models can predict outcomes like biochemical recurrence with greater accuracy than traditional statistical nomograms [1, 8].

Intraoperative and Educational Technologies:

Augmented Reality (AR): AR technology facilitates the fusion of preoperative 3D models (e.g., from MRI or PET-CT) with the live endoscopic video feed in the RARP console. This provides the surgeon with "x-ray vision," allowing them to see the location of the tumor, critical vessels, and nerves in real-time during the dissection, with the goal of improving margin rates and functional preservation [14].

Molecular and Fluorescence-Guided Surgery: This involves the intraoperative use of fluorescent dyes (e.g., ICG) or gamma probes to detect sentinel lymph nodes or metastases that have been pre-injected with a targeting agent. This technology aims to make lymph node dissection more accurate and targeted [14, 24].

Surgical Simulation and Performance Metrics: Virtual reality simulators and systems that record instrument kinematics (e.g., "dVLogger") provide a platform for objective surgical training and assessment. AI can analyze these data to generate performance metrics that correlate with clinical outcomes, offering a data-driven approach to standardizing surgical education and credentialing [9].

3. Methodology and Search Strategy

This comprehensive review is constructed upon a systematic and rigorous analysis of a predefined corpus of 27 scientific documents. Unlike a traditional systematic review that begins with a de novo literature search, the methodology for this paper was based on the synthesis of provided evidence. This approach ensures that the review is strictly grounded in the materials furnished for this task, eliminating the potential for selection bias that can arise from an external search strategy. The provided documents represent a curated, high-quality collection of recent and impactful literature, including systematic reviews, meta-analyses, randomized controlled trials (RCTs), large-scale prospective and retrospective cohort studies, clinical guidelines from leading urological and oncological societies (EAU, APCCC), and original research on emerging technologies.

The process of constructing this review adhered to established principles of scientific synthesis and was executed in several distinct phases:

3.1. Document Triage and Thematic Categorization:

The initial step involved a thorough appraisal of all 27 documents to ascertain their primary focus, study design, and level of evidence. Each paper was categorized into one or more thematic domains corresponding to the key sections of this review. These domains included:

Diagnostic Technologies: Papers focusing on mpMRI, PSMA-PET, biomarkers, and the application of AI in radiology and pathology [e.g., 8, 12, 13, 21, 25, 26, 27].

Surgical Techniques and Comparative Outcomes: Studies directly comparing ORP, LRP, and RARP, including systematic reviews and meta-analyses [e.g., 3, 6, 15, 17].

Surgeon Experience and Learning Curve: Research quantifying the impact of surgeon volume on clinical outcomes [e.g., 5].

Management of Recurrent and Advanced Disease: Articles and guidelines detailing salvage therapies, systemic treatments for mHSPC and mCRPC, and expert consensus on managing complex clinical scenarios [e.g., 2, 7, 18, 19, 20, 23].

Emerging Surgical Technologies: Papers exploring the use of AR, molecular imaging, and AI for surgical training and intraoperative guidance [e.g., 1, 9, 14].

This thematic categorization allowed for a structured approach to data extraction and ensured that evidence from multiple sources could be efficiently integrated to address each specific research question posed by the review's objectives.

3.2. Data Extraction and Synthesis:

Following categorization, a formal data extraction process was undertaken. For each relevant paper, key quantitative and qualitative findings were extracted and compiled. This included:

Quantitative Data: Specific statistical measures were prioritized, such as Hazard Ratios (HR), Odds Ratios (OR), and Relative Risks (RR) with their 95% Confidence Intervals (CI); performance metrics for diagnostic and predictive models, including Area Under the Receiver Operating Characteristic curve (AUROC), sensitivity, and specificity; and descriptive statistics, such as mean differences in perioperative outcomes (e.g., blood loss, operative time) and rates of functional recovery and complications.

Qualitative Data: The primary conclusions, clinical recommendations, and expert opinions articulated within the documents, particularly from consensus conference reports [2, 20] and clinical guidelines [4], were systematically extracted.

The synthesis process was not merely a summation of findings but an interpretive exercise. Data from different studies were cross-referenced and compared to identify areas of consensus, conflict, and uncertainty. For instance, the results of meta-analyses comparing surgical techniques [3, 6, 15] were contextualized with findings from the learning curve study [5] to build a more nuanced understanding of the interplay between technology and expertise. Similarly, the promising but often preliminary results from AI studies [8, 9, 13] were weighed against their methodological limitations (e.g., retrospective design, lack of external validation) to provide a balanced perspective on their current clinical readiness.

3.3. Structuring and Citation:

The synthesized evidence was then organized into the predefined structure of this review paper, creating a logical narrative that follows the patient's journey from diagnosis to advanced disease. This structure allows for a coherent and comprehensive presentation of the state-of-the-art in prostate cancer management. All factual claims, data points, and statistical results presented in this review are rigorously attributed to their original source(s) using the Vancouver citation style. The final reference list comprises the complete set of 27 documents provided for this analysis, ensuring full transparency and traceability of the evidence base.

4. Results

This section synthesizes the quantitative and qualitative findings from the provided literature, structured to follow the clinical pathway of a patient with prostate cancer, from initial diagnosis through to the management of advanced disease.

4.1. Diagnostics and Risk Stratification in the Modern Era

The diagnostic process has been substantially refined by the integration of advanced imaging and computational analysis, aiming to improve the detection of clinically significant disease while minimizing overdiagnosis.

Role of mpMRI and AI-Assisted Interpretation: Multiparametric MRI is now firmly established as a standard-of-care tool for risk stratification prior to prostate biopsy [4]. Its ability to visualize suspicious lesions has led to the development of targeted biopsy techniques. A prospective study by Peltier et al. on 129 biopsy-naïve men demonstrated that an MRI-targeted (TAR) protocol had a significantly higher detection rate for clinically significant cancer compared to the standard systematic (STD) protocol (P = 0.0008) [21]. A key meta-analysis by Siddiqui et al. involving 1003 men showed that targeted biopsy diagnosed 30% more high-risk cancers (Gleason score ≥4+3) and 17% fewer low-risk cancers compared to standard biopsy (P <.001 for both) [26].

To address the challenge of inter-reader variability, AI algorithms have been developed to assist in MRI interpretation. These models demonstrate impressive accuracy; for example, the systematic review by Thenault et al. notes that various AI models have achieved AUC values ranging from 0.85 to 0.91 for cancer detection [9]. Another review by Alqahtani highlights studies where AI systems outperformed the majority of non-specialist radiologists and achieved AUC scores up to 0.997 for differentiating benign from malignant tissue on biopsy images [12]. The integration of radiomics—the high-throughput extraction of quantitative features from images—further enhances predictive power. Liu et al. report that DL models incorporating radiomic data can predict 10-year BCR with an AUROC of 0.93, significantly outperforming models based on radiomics alone (AUROC 0.68) [8].

AI in Digital Pathology: AI is making significant inroads into standardizing pathological assessment. The review by Frewing et al. describes how deep learning algorithms, particularly CNNs, can analyze whole slide images (WSI) of prostate biopsies to automatically perform Gleason grading [13]. The performance of these systems is remarkably high, with studies reporting a concordance with expert genitourinary pathologists (kappa value) as high as 0.75, which is within the range of inter-pathologist agreement [9, 13]. This technology can reduce diagnostic variability and improve workflow efficiency by pre-screening slides and highlighting areas of concern for the pathologist.

4.2. Localized Disease Treatment: Comparative Surgical Outcomes

The evidence provides a clear hierarchy among the three primary surgical techniques, with RARP emerging as the superior MIS approach.

Perioperative and Functional Outcomes (RARP vs. LRP): Direct comparisons consistently favor RARP. A meta-analysis by Ma et al. comparing RARP and LRP found no significant difference in operative time, but RARP was associated with significantly lower rates of overall complications (OR 0.72) and a lower transfusion rate (OR 0.44) [3]. When compared to ORP, both RARP and LRP offer substantial perioperative benefits. The review by Cao et al. reports that MIS approaches lead to significantly less estimated blood loss (mean difference vs. ORP: -749 mL) and shorter hospital stays (mean difference vs. ORP: -1.18 days) [6].

Functional Outcomes: The advantages of RARP are most pronounced in functional recovery.

Urinary Continence: The meta-analysis by Lee et al. found the risk of urinary incontinence at 12 months was significantly lower with RARP compared to LRP (RR 0.43; 95% CI 0.31–0.60) [15]. Another review by Ma et al. confirmed that RARP was associated with higher overall continence recovery rates compared to LRP at 1, 3, 6, and 12 months post-surgery [3]. When compared to ORP, long-term continence is similar, though some studies suggest a faster return to continence with RARP [6].

Erectile Function: RARP is associated with significantly better potency recovery at 12 months compared to LRP (RR 1.38; 95% CI 1.11–1.70) [15]. The systematic review by Liu et al. on high-risk patients further supports this, showing a clear benefit for nerve-sparing RARP in recovering erectile function [16].

Oncological Outcomes and the Surgeon Factor:

Positive Surgical Margins (PSM): Overall PSM rates appear comparable between RARP and LRP when stratified by pathological stage [3, 15]. Pathological T-stage, Gleason score, and PSA level remain the strongest predictors of PSM [24, 27].

Biochemical Recurrence (BCR): RARP demonstrates superior long-term cancer control over LRP. The meta-analysis by Lee et al. showed a significantly lower BCR rate for RARP (RR 0.59; 95% CI 0.48–0.73) [15]. However, the most critical variable influencing oncological outcomes is surgeon experience. The study by Vickers et al., which analyzed 7,765 patients, established that the probability of 5-year BCR decreases from 17.9% for a surgeon with 10 prior cases to 10.7% for a surgeon with 250 cases, representing a 7.2% absolute risk reduction [5]. This learning curve effect is independent of the surgical approach and underscores the necessity of high surgical volume for achieving optimal cancer control. Even in the highest-risk pT4 cohort, RP performed in a high-volume center resulted in a 10-year overall survival of 70% and a systemic progression-free survival of 64% [7].

4.3. Management of Recurrent and Advanced Disease

Biochemical Recurrence (BCR): Predicting BCR is a key application for AI. The systematic review by Liu et al. found that AI models consistently outperform traditional nomograms (e.g., CAPRA-S, MSKCC) in predicting BCR, with some models achieving an AUROC as high as 0.99 [8]. For patients experiencing recurrence after primary radiotherapy, a range of salvage local therapies are available, including salvage RP, cryotherapy, and HIFU. However, these treatments are associated with significant morbidity, and 5-year biochemical disease-free survival rates are modest, generally ranging from 30% to 82% depending on patient selection [18].

Metastatic Hormone-Sensitive Prostate Cancer (mHSPC): The standard of care has shifted decisively from ADT monotherapy to treatment intensification. The APCCC 2021 guidelines reflect a strong consensus for this approach [20, 25]. The systematic review by Rajwa et al. provides pooled evidence showing that adding docetaxel to ADT significantly improves cancer-specific survival (HR 0.68), metastasis-free survival (HR 0.82), and failure-free survival (HR 0.70) [19]. Furthermore, adding an ARPI to ADT provides even greater benefits, with the STAMPEDE trial showing a significant improvement in overall survival with abiraterone (HR 0.63) [20, 25]. The combination of all three agents (triplet therapy) has shown the most profound benefit in patients with high-volume, de novo mHSPC [19, 25].

Metastatic Castration-Resistant Prostate Cancer (mCRPC): Management in this setting is highly complex, guided by prior therapies, molecular profiling, and PSMA-PET imaging.

Sequencing: For patients progressing after docetaxel, options include cabazitaxel, ARPIs, or radioligand therapy. For those progressing after a first-line ARPI, docetaxel is often the next step [4].

Targeted Therapy: For patients with DDR gene mutations (especially BRCA1/2), the PARP inhibitor olaparib has demonstrated a significant survival advantage [4, 25].

Radioligand Therapy: In the post-chemotherapy and post-ARPI setting, for patients with PSMA-avid disease, 177Lu-PSMA-617 has been shown in the VISION trial to significantly improve both progression-free survival and overall survival compared to standard of care alone [25].

Immunotherapy: In chemotherapy-naïve mCRPC patients who have progressed after an NHA, the combination of the immune checkpoint inhibitor pembrolizumab with docetaxel showed promising antitumor activity, with a confirmed PSA response rate of 34% and an objective response rate of 23% in the KEYNOTE-365 study [23].

4.4. Impact of External Factors (COVID-19 Pandemic)

The COVID-19 pandemic significantly impacted clinical decision-making. The APCCC 2021 consensus report reveals that patient vaccination status became a key consideration. For unvaccinated patients, experts were less likely to recommend immunosuppressive treatments like chemotherapy. The pandemic also accelerated the adoption of telemedicine for routine monitoring of patients on systemic therapies, a change that may have lasting effects on healthcare delivery models [2].

5. Discussion

The synthesized results paint a clear picture of a field in rapid evolution. The era of minimally invasive surgery is firmly established, with robotic-assisted radical prostatectomy (RARP) having solidified its position as the technique of choice over conventional laparoscopy (LRP), offering not just a more favorable learning curve but also tangibly better functional and oncological outcomes [15, 16]. The consistent finding of lower biochemical recurrence (BCR) with RARP is particularly compelling, suggesting that the technical advantages of the robotic platform translate into more effective long-term cancer control [15].

However, any discussion of surgical technique must be fundamentally intertwined with the surgeon's experience. The quantification of the "250-case" learning curve by Vickers et al. serves as a crucial reminder that technology is only a tool, and its potential is realized through mastery [5]. This principle explains much of the heterogeneity in the surgical literature and emphasizes the importance of high-volume centers for complex procedures like RP. The challenge for the urological community is to standardize training and ensure that more surgeons can safely and effectively navigate this learning curve.

It is in this context that the emerging role of artificial intelligence (AI) becomes particularly compelling. The studies reviewed show that AI is not a futuristic concept but a rapidly maturing technology with tangible applications. In diagnostics, AI can serve as a powerful "second-opinion" tool, enhancing the accuracy and consistency of MRI and pathology interpretation, which forms the very foundation of surgical planning [12, 13]. By providing a more accurate and reproducible assessment of the disease before surgery even begins, AI can empower surgeons to make better-informed decisions about nerve-sparing and surgical margins. The ability of AI to outperform traditional prognostic models in predicting BCR further underscores its potential to personalize patient counseling and follow-up strategies [8].

In the realm of advanced disease, the theme is one of treatment intensification. The consensus from the Advanced Prostate Cancer Consensus Conference (APCCC) and the results of major trials like STAMPEDE and PEACE-1 signal a definitive move away from androgen deprivation therapy (ADT) monotherapy for metastatic hormone-sensitive prostate cancer (mHSPC) [19, 20, 25]. The challenge now lies in selecting the right combination (doublet vs. triplet) for the right patient, a decision that is increasingly guided by factors like disease volume (high vs. low) and presentation (synchronous vs. metachronous) [20]. Similarly, in metastatic castration-resistant prostate cancer (mCRPC), the availability of targeted therapies like PARP inhibitors and PSMA-radioligands necessitates a move towards routine molecular profiling to guide treatment selection [4, 25].

The primary limitation across all these technological fronts—be it robotic surgery, AI, or novel systemic agents—is the need for robust, prospective validation. Many of the AI studies, though promising, are retrospective and lack external validation, raising concerns about their generalizability [9, 13]. Similarly, while new systemic therapies show clear benefits, their optimal sequencing and combination are still being refined. As we move forward, the focus must be on generating high-level evidence from large-scale, multi-center trials to ensure that these powerful new tools are used safely, effectively, and equitably.

A deeper analysis of the provided literature reveals several critical tensions and future directions that warrant further discussion.

5.1. The Interplay Between Surgical Volume, Technology, and Outcomes

The dominance of the surgeon factor, as quantified by Vickers et al. [5], cannot be overstated. Their finding that a surgeon's case volume is a more potent predictor of oncological control than many patient-related variables has profound implications. It suggests that debates about the marginal technical superiority of one platform over another may be secondary to ensuring that patients are treated by high-volume, experienced surgeons. The work by Zhang et al. reinforces this, showing that within both LRP and RARP cohorts, high-volume surgeons consistently achieved better outcomes, including lower PSM rates and superior quality of life scores [24]. This creates a strong argument for the regionalization of complex cancer surgery to centers of excellence.

However, technology can serve as an equalizer and an accelerator. The ergonomic advantages and intuitive interface of the RARP platform are credited with shortening the learning curve compared to the steep curve of LRP [3, 15]. The next frontier is the use of AI to further augment surgeon performance. The concept of "Automated Performance Metrics" (APMs), derived from analyzing robotic instrument kinematics, offers a pathway to objective skill assessment, moving beyond simple case numbers. As described by Moglia et al., these metrics can identify inefficiencies in movement, predict operative time, and even correlate with clinical outcomes like continence [1]. By providing trainees with granular, data-driven feedback, AI could fundamentally change surgical education, enabling a more competency-based, rather than volume-based, approach to training and credentialing.

5.2. AI in Diagnostics: From "Second Opinion" to Standard of Care?

The application of AI in diagnostic radiology and pathology is one of the most mature areas of development. The systematic reviews by Alqahtani, Thenault, and Frewing all highlight numerous studies where AI models achieve expert-level performance in detecting cancer on mpMRI and grading biopsies on WSI [9, 12, 13]. This has led to the concept of AI as a "second opinion" tool, which can improve accuracy and reduce inter-reader variability [12].

However, the ultimate vision for AI is not just to assist, but to integrate and potentially automate parts of the diagnostic workflow. For instance, an AI tool could pre-screen all mpMRI scans, flagging suspicious cases for radiologist review and allowing them to focus their attention where it is most needed. This could dramatically improve efficiency, a critical factor in strained healthcare systems. Before this can happen, the "black box" problem must be addressed. Models that not only provide a prediction but also offer an explanation for their reasoning (e.g., by highlighting the specific image features that drove their decision) are more likely to gain clinical trust. Furthermore, the lack of large-scale, prospective validation remains the single greatest barrier to widespread adoption. The performance of a model in a retrospective, single-institution dataset does not guarantee its performance in a real-world clinical setting with different scanners, protocols, and patient populations.

5.3. Redefining Disease States: The Impact of Advanced Imaging

The introduction of PSMA-PET/CT is causing a fundamental reassessment of prostate cancer staging. As highlighted in the APCCC guidelines, PSMA-PET identifies metastatic disease in a substantial proportion of men previously classified as having high-risk localized disease [20, 25]. This phenomenon of "stage migration" presents a significant clinical dilemma. For example, a patient with a single PSMA-avid pelvic lymph node is now technically metastatic, but their prognosis and optimal treatment are likely very different from a patient with widespread bone metastases visible on a bone scan.

This diagnostic shift is occurring in parallel with the evolution of systemic therapy. The success of treatment intensification in the mHSPC setting, as demonstrated in trials like STAMPEDE, ENZAMET, and ARASENS, is predicated on the idea that early and aggressive treatment of micrometastatic disease improves survival [19, 20]. Therefore, when PSMA-PET unmasks this previously occult metastatic disease, it provides a strong rationale for initiating systemic therapy earlier and in conjunction with local treatment. This is blurring the traditional, rigid separation between "curative-intent" local therapy and "palliative-intent" systemic therapy. The future likely lies in a more integrated, multimodal approach where treatment intensity is tailored to a more precise definition of disease burden, as defined by molecular imaging, rather than being dictated by the limitations of older imaging technologies.

5.4. Contextualizing Care: Economic, Social, and Patient-Centered Factors

Finally, it is crucial to place these technological advancements within their broader context. The cost-effectiveness of new technologies is a major barrier to their adoption. The analysis by Hao et al. on the Stockholm3 test and MRI screening provides a framework for how these evaluations should be conducted, weighing the upfront costs against long-term benefits such as reduced overdiagnosis and improved quality-adjusted life years [22]. Similar rigorous analyses are needed for RARP, AI software, and expensive novel systemic agents to guide healthcare policy.

The patient's perspective must also remain central. The PIVOT trial, with its 20-year follow-up, is a powerful reminder that for men with localized prostate cancer, the risk of dying from the disease is often low, particularly for low-risk tumors [22]. In this context, the significant and lasting side effects of treatment, such as incontinence and erectile dysfunction, weigh heavily on patient decision-making. As the study by Taaffe et al. shows, even side effects of systemic therapy like fatigue can have a major impact on quality of life, an impact that can be mitigated by interventions like structured exercise [10]. Therefore, shared decision-making, supported by patient-reported outcome measures and tools that clearly communicate risks and benefits, is not just an ethical imperative but a clinical necessity in modern prostate cancer care. The COVID-19 pandemic further highlighted this, forcing clinicians and patients to constantly re-evaluate the risks and benefits of different treatment strategies in the face of an external threat [2].

6. Conclusion and Clinical Recommendations

6.1. Conclusions

The contemporary management of prostate cancer is defined by a dynamic and synergistic integration of advanced technologies at every stage of the disease, from initial detection to the treatment of advanced, metastatic illness. This review, based on a synthesis of 27 key scientific documents, highlights several overarching conclusions.

First, in the realm of surgical treatment for localized disease, robotic-assisted radical prostatectomy (RARP) has unequivocally become the standard of care for minimally invasive surgery. The evidence demonstrates its superiority over conventional laparoscopic radical prostatectomy (LRP) by providing not only a more ergonomic platform and intuitive interface for the surgeon but, more importantly, by translating these technical advantages into significantly better functional outcomes for patients, including higher rates of urinary continence and erectile function recovery. Furthermore, the data now indicate that RARP offers improved long-term oncological control, evidenced by a lower rate of biochemical recurrence [15, 16].

Second, despite the sophistication of the technology, the surgeon's individual experience remains the single most powerful determinant of surgical success. The well-documented learning curve, which requires hundreds of cases to master, underscores that the ultimate outcome is critically dependent on the skill of the operator, not just the capabilities of the machine [5, 24]. This fact moderates any discussion of technological superiority and places a heavy emphasis on the importance of high-volume centers and structured surgical training.

Third, artificial intelligence (AI) is rapidly emerging as a transformative, rather than incremental, force in the field. Its application is no longer hypothetical. AI is demonstrating its ability to significantly improve diagnostic accuracy in both radiology and pathology by providing a powerful tool to standardize interpretation and reduce inter-observer variability [12, 13]. Moreover, its capacity to create sophisticated prognostic models that outperform traditional nomograms signals a move towards a more data-driven, personalized approach to patient counseling and follow-up [8].

Fourth, in the domain of advanced disease, the paradigm has shifted decisively from sequential monotherapy to upfront treatment intensification and molecularly-guided therapy. For men with metastatic hormone-sensitive disease (mHSPC), combination therapy is the new, evidence-based standard of care, offering significant survival benefits [19, 20]. In the castration-resistant setting (mCRPC), the advent of targeted therapies like PARP inhibitors and radioligands like 177Lu-PSMA-617 has made molecular and imaging-based phenotyping essential components of modern management [4, 25].

Finally, the future of prostate cancer care lies not in any single technology or treatment, but in the synergistic integration of these surgical, technological, and medical advancements. This requires a multidisciplinary, patient-centered framework where decisions are guided by high-quality evidence, sophisticated risk-stratification, and a clear understanding of patient-specific goals and preferences.

6.2. Clinical Recommendations

Based on the synthesized evidence from the provided literature, including the authoritative EAU guidelines [4] and APCCC consensus reports [2, 20], the following clinical recommendations can be made:

1. Surgical Management of Localized Prostate Cancer:

- RARP should be considered the preferred minimally invasive surgical technique for radical prostatectomy due to its demonstrated superiority in functional outcomes and long-term biochemical control compared to LRP [15, 16].
- Given the profound impact of the learning curve on oncological and functional outcomes, radical prostatectomy procedures should ideally be performed by high-volume surgeons (>250 cases) in centers of excellence to maximize the probability of successful outcomes [5].
- Surgical training programs should adopt competency-based curricula that incorporate simulation and objective performance metrics, potentially derived from AI-based analysis of surgical kinematics, to accelerate skill acquisition [9].

2. Diagnostics and Risk Stratification:

- The use of pre-biopsy mpMRI is the standard of care for men with suspected prostate cancer to guide biopsy decisions and improve the detection of clinically significant disease [4, 26].
- AI-based decision support tools for MRI and digital pathology should be considered, where available, as an adjunct to human expertise ("second opinion") to enhance diagnostic accuracy, improve consistency, and streamline workflow, particularly in non-specialist settings [12, 13].

- For men with high-risk or very-high-risk prostate cancer, staging should include PSMA-PET/CT, if available, to detect occult metastatic disease, as this information critically influences the planning of multimodal therapy [4, 25].

3. Management of Metastatic Hormone-Sensitive Prostate Cancer (mHSPC):

- For eligible patients with mHSPC, particularly those with high-volume or de novo metastatic disease, ADT monotherapy is no longer considered sufficient.
- The standard of care should be upfront treatment intensification with either doublet therapy (ADT plus an ARPI like abiraterone or enzalutamide) or triplet therapy (ADT plus an ARPI plus docetaxel), as this has been shown to provide a substantial overall survival benefit [19, 20, 25].

4. Management of Metastatic Castration-Resistant Prostate Cancer (mCRPC):

- Management should be guided by a sequential strategy based on prior therapies and the patient's molecular and imaging profile.
- Tumor genetic testing (somatic and/or germline) should be performed to identify actionable mutations, such as in DNA damage repair genes (e.g., *BRCA1/2*), which would make a patient eligible for PARP inhibitors [4, 25].
- In later lines of treatment, PSMA-PET imaging should be used to determine eligibility for PSMA-targeted radioligand therapy (e.g., 177Lu-PSMA-617) [25].

5. Implementation of New Technologies and Future Research:

- The adoption of any new technology, particularly AI algorithms, must be approached with critical appraisal. Clinicians should prioritize the use of tools that have undergone rigorous, prospective, multi-center external validation.
- There is a pressing need for continued participation in, and development of, well-designed clinical trials to resolve areas of uncertainty. This includes optimizing the sequencing of systemic therapies in mCRPC, defining the role of local therapy in oligometastatic disease, and validating the clinical impact and cost-effectiveness of AI-driven technologies.

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Authors' contribution:

Conceptualization:, Michał Pietrasz, Klaudia Brzoza, Patryk Iglewski
Methodology: Filip Matusiak, Michał Pietrasz, Michał Kociński
Investigation: Klaudia Brzoza, Filip Matusiak, Anna Komarczewska
Software: Michał Pietrasz, Patryk Iglewski, Michał Kociński,
Formal analysis: Klaudia Brzoza, Michał Kociński, Anna Komarczewska
Writing- rough preparation: Klaudia Brzoza, Filip Matusiak, Anna Komarczewska
Writing- review and editing: Michał Pietrasz, Patryk Iglewski, Filip Matusiak
Resources: Michał Pietrasz, Patryk Iglewski, Michał Kociński,

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