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EC PHARMACOLOGY AND TOXICOLOGY
Perspective

Balancing Augmented Renal Clearance and Renal Immaturity in Gentamicin Dosing for Premature Neonates: Challenges and Solutions

Khalid A Alfaifi[1]*, Sultan Alzahrani[2], Abdurahman Alzahrani[3], Khalid Alnemari[4], Faisal K[5], Yousef K[6], Sama K[7], Sajwa A[8], Faisal B[7], Mohammad A Alfaifi[9] and Ahmad S[10]

[1]Medical Services Directorate, Pharmacy Department, Collaborative Researcher with King Abdulaziz University, Faculty of Medicine, Department of Medical Pharmacology, Jeddah, Saudi Arabia

[2]Consultant in Emergency Medicine, Medical Services Directorate, Taif, Saudi Arabia

[3]Department of Pharmacy, Medical Services Directorate, Riyadh, Saudi Arabia

[4]Department of Pharmacy, Medical Services Directorate, Taif, Saudi Arabia

[5]College of Pharmacy, Taif University, Taif, Saudi Arabia

[6]Prince Sultan College of Health Sciences, Dhahran, Saudi Arabia

[7]College of Medicine, Taif University, Taif, Saudi Arabia

[8]College of Pharmacy, King Khalid University, Abha, Saudi Arabia

[9]Nursing College, King Saud University, Riyadh, Saudi Arabia

[10]Pharmacy Department, Khamis Mushait Maternity and Children Hospital, Khamis Mushait, Saudi Arabia

***Corresponding Author:** Khalid A Alfaifi, Medical Services Directorate, Pharmacy Department, Collaborative Researcher with King Abdulaziz University, Faculty of Medicine, Department of Medical Pharmacology, Jeddah, Saudi Arabia.

Received: July 02, 2025; **Published:** July 14, 2025

Abstract

Gentamicin, a widely used aminoglycoside for neonatal infections, presents a unique challenge in premature neonates due to the interplay between augmented renal clearance (ARC) and renal immaturity. ARC accelerates drug elimination, risking subtherapeutic levels, whereas immature renal function slows clearance, increasing the potential for toxicity. This review examines the underlying mechanisms, clinical implications, and strategies for optimizing gentamicin dosing through pharmacokinetic/pharmacodynamic (PK/PD) modeling and therapeutic drug monitoring (TDM). The integration of artificial intelligence (AI) and physiologically based pharmacokinetic (PBPK) models offers promising avenues for individualized neonatal therapy.

Keywords: *Augmented Renal Clearance (ARC); Renal Immaturity; Premature Neonates; Gentamicin Dosing; Therapeutic Drug Monitoring (TDM)*

Introduction

Gentamicin is an essential antibiotic in neonatal intensive care units (NICUs) due to its potent activity against gram-negative pathogens. However, its narrow therapeutic index makes dosing in neonates particularly challenging. Premature neonates exhibit immature renal function, characterized by reduced glomerular filtration rate (GFR), tubular secretion, and reabsorption [1]. Simultaneously, certain clinical conditions, such as sepsis or systemic inflammation, can trigger ARC, further complicating drug clearance [2]. The coexistence of these opposing renal states necessitates precise and personalized dosing strategies to optimize therapeutic outcomes while minimizing risks.

Methodology

This review was conducted following a structured literature search across multiple biomedical databases. The databases searched included PubMed, Embase, and Scopus. The search was limited to English-language articles published between January 2010 and December 2024.

The following keywords and MeSH terms were used in combination: "Gentamicin", "Premature Neonates", "Augmented Renal Clearance", "Renal Immaturity", "Pharmacokinetics", "Therapeutic Drug Monitoring", and "AI-based PK Models".

Inclusion criteria:

- Peer-reviewed articles.
- Studies involving preterm or premature neonates.
- Studies focused on renal function and drug dosing of gentamicin.
- Articles discussing pharmacokinetics, TDM, ARC, or AI-based modeling.

Exclusion criteria:

- Studies on adults or older pediatric populations.
- Case reports, editorials, and conference abstracts without full data.
- Non-English studies.

A total of 42 studies were initially retrieved. After title and abstract screening, 26 studies met the inclusion criteria and were included in this review. The screening process followed PRISMA guidelines.

Mechanisms of augmented renal clearance and renal immaturity

Augmented renal clearance (ARC)

ARC refers to an increased renal drug clearance rate, often leading to subtherapeutic plasma concentrations. In neonates, ARC may arise due to several physiological adaptations:

- Enhanced renal perfusion: Critically ill neonates recovering from conditions such as sepsis may experience increased cardiac output and renal blood flow, accelerating GFR [3].
- Increased urine output: Conditions such as polyuria or fluid shifts can contribute to rapid drug elimination [4].
- Immature tubular function: While tubular secretion and reabsorption are underdeveloped, ARC primarily affects drugs eliminated via glomerular filtration, such as gentamicin [5].

Renal immaturity in neonates

Renal function in neonates is inherently immature, affecting drug clearance dynamics:

- Reduced GFR: Premature neonates exhibit significantly lower GFR due to incomplete nephron development [6].
- Delayed maturation of tubular secretion and reabsorption: This limitation affects the neonate's ability to efficiently excrete certain drugs [7].
- Variability in renal function: Renal clearance varies depending on gestational and postnatal age, making standardized dosing difficult [8].

Clinical implications

The duality of ARC and renal immaturity presents a significant challenge:

- Risk of subtherapeutic drug levels (ARC): Rapid gentamicin clearance can result in insufficient peak plasma concentrations, reducing antimicrobial efficacy [9].
- Risk of drug accumulation and toxicity (Renal immaturity): Impaired clearance in preterm neonates can lead to excessive drug accumulation, heightening nephrotoxicity and ototoxicity risks [10].

Neonates may transition between these states depending on their clinical condition, necessitating continuous therapeutic drug monitoring (TDM) to ensure optimal dosing [11].

Challenges in gentamicin dosing

Pharmacokinetic variability in neonates

Neonates have a larger volume of distribution (Vd) due to increased total body water, necessitating higher initial doses to achieve therapeutic peak levels [12]. However, clearance rates fluctuate significantly due to renal immaturity and ARC.

Narrow therapeutic window

Gentamicin's efficacy requires peak plasma levels of 6 - 12 µg/mL, while toxicity risks increase when trough levels exceed 2 µg/mL.

Dynamic changes in renal function

Renal function evolves rapidly within the first weeks of life, requiring frequent dose adjustments based on TDM results [13].

Strategies for optimizing gentamicin dosing

Therapeutic drug monitoring (TDM)

Early TDM assessments, performed after the first dose, provide critical insights into peak and trough drug levels.

Routine TDM enables adjustments in dosing intervals to account for evolving renal function and ARC status.

PK/PD modeling

Population-specific PK/PD models allow clinicians to estimate drug levels based on gestational age, weight, and renal function.

Dynamic PK/PD models incorporating real-time patient data enhance dosing accuracy [14].

AI and PBPK-based approaches

AI-driven dosing algorithms, combined with physiologically based pharmacokinetic (PBPK) models, can optimize individualized therapy [15].

These models utilize patient-specific parameters, such as serum creatinine and urine output, to predict drug clearance [16].

Hybrid dosing regimens

A hybrid approach, incorporating higher initial doses for neonates exhibiting ARC and extended dosing intervals for those with renal immaturity, may balance efficacy and safety [17].

Future directions

- Integration of AI in NICUs: Real-time AI-based monitoring systems could enhance neonatal dosing precision, reducing reliance on traditional population models [18].
- Big data applications: Combining electronic health records (EHR) with predictive modeling may improve dosing accuracy and patient outcomes [19].
- Collaborative multicenter research: Large-scale, multicenter studies are needed to validate AI-driven PK/PD models and PBPK frameworks for neonatal drug dosing [20].

Conclusion

The interplay between ARC and renal immaturity presents a significant challenge in optimizing gentamicin dosing for premature neonates. Most commonly, renal immaturity leads to slower drug clearance, increasing the risk of toxicity, whereas ARC occasionally accelerates elimination, necessitating individualized therapeutic approaches. Advances in TDM, PK/PD modeling, and AI-driven decision-making hold the key to achieving personalized neonatal therapy, ensuring both efficacy and safety.

Author Contributions

Khalid A. Alfaifi conceived the study and wrote the initial draft. Sultan Alzahrani and Abdurahman Alzahrani contributed to clinical review. Khalid Alnemari, Faisal B, and Yousef K participated in data collection and analysis. Sama K, Sajwa A, and Faisal K contributed to pharmacological insights. Mohammad A. Alfaifi and Ahmad S assisted in manuscript revisions. All authors reviewed and approved the final manuscript.

Clinical Trial Registration

Not applicable. This study did not involve a clinical trial.

Ethical Approval

Not applicable.

Funding Support

Not applicable.

Consent to Publish and/or Participate

Not applicable.

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Volume 13 Issue 7 July 2025