

APPENDIX II: COG STEM CELL COMMITTEE CONSENSUS GUIDELINES FOR ESTABLISHING ORGAN STAGE AND OVERALL GRADE OF ACUTE GRAFT VERSUS HOST DISEASE (GVHD)

Reporting Requirements for Acute GVHD in COG Studies

In an attempt to standardize reporting of acute GVHD, the COG Stem Cell Transplantation Committee has adopted a modification of guidelines that were originally developed at the University of Michigan.

Table 1 outlines standard criteria for GVHD organ staging. However, confounding clinical syndromes (such as non-GVHD causes of hyperbilirubinemia) may make staging GVHD in a given organ difficult. In addition, timing of organ specific symptoms affects whether that symptom is more or less likely to be true GVHD. Please refer to *Tables 2 and 3* to assist you in deciding whether to attribute these clinical findings to GVHD, especially in situations where a biopsy is not possible. For additional help, please see the text which follows the tables. *Table 4* reviews the approach to assessing GVHD as acute, chronic, or the overlap between the two.

Finally, *engraftment syndrome* will be reported separately from the GVHD scoring presented below.

Engraftment Syndrome

A clinical syndrome of fever, rash, respiratory distress, and diarrhea has been described, just prior to engraftment in patients undergoing unrelated cord blood and mismatched transplantation. If, in the judgment of the local investigator, a patient experiences this syndrome, details of the event should be reported when requested in the study CRFs.

Modified Glucksberg Staging Criteria for Acute Graft versus Host Disease

Table 1 Organ Staging (See tables and text below for details)

Stage	Skin	Liver (bilirubin)	Gut (stool output/day)
0	No GVHD rash	< 2 mg/dL	Adult: < 500 mL/day Child: < 10 mL/kg/day
1	Maculopapular rash < 25% BSA	2-3 mg/dL	Adult: 500–999 mL/day Child: 10 -19.9 mL/kg/day Or persistent nausea, vomiting, or anorexia, with a positive upper GI biopsy.
2	Maculopapular rash 25 – 50% BSA	3.1-6 mg/dL	Adult: 1000-1500 mL/day Child: 20 – 30 mL/kg/day
3	Maculopapular rash > 50% BSA	6.1-15 mg/dL	Adult: > 1500 mL/day Child: > 30 mL/kg/day
4	Generalized erythroderma plus bullous formation and desquamation > 5% BSA	>15 mg/dL	Severe abdominal pain with or without ileus, or grossly bloody stool (regardless of stool volume).

For GI staging: The “adult” stool output values should be used for patients > 50 kg in weight. Use 3 day averages for GI staging based on stool output. If stool and urine are mixed, stool output is presumed to be 50% of total stool/urine mix (see Section 3.2).

For stage 4 GI: the term “severe abdominal pain” will be defined as:

- (a) Pain control requiring institution of opioid use, or an increase in on-going opioid use, PLUS
- (b) Pain that significantly impacts performance status, as determined by the treating MD.

If colon or rectal biopsy is +, but stool output is < 500 mL/day (< 10 mL/kg/day), then consider as GI stage 0.

There is no modification of liver staging for other causes of hyperbilirubinemia

Overall Clinical Grade (based on the highest stage obtained):

Grade 0: No stage 1-4 of any organ

Grade I: Stage 1-2 skin and no liver or gut involvement

Grade II: Stage 3 skin, or Stage 1 liver involvement, or Stage 1 GI

Grade III: Stage 0-3 skin, with Stage 2-3 liver, or Stage 2-3 GI

Grade IV: Stage 4 skin, liver or GI involvement

Table 2 Evaluating Liver GVHD in the Absence of Biopsy Confirmation (See Table 3.0 below)

Establishing liver GVHD with no skin or GI GVHD

No Skin/GI GVHD Day 0-35	Assume no liver GVHD, unless proven by biopsy	
No Skin/GI GVHD Day 36-100	If NO other etiology identified, NO improvement with stopping hepatotoxic medications/TPN: Stage as liver GVHD	If other etiology identified or improves with stopping hepatotoxic drugs/TPN: Do not stage as liver GVHD

Establishing liver GVHD with skin or GI GVHD and other cause of hyperbilirubinemia

Skin and/or GI GVHD present	Worsening bilirubin level (includes worsening just prior to onset of skin or GI tract GVHD) OR stable elevated bilirubin despite resolution of non-GVHD cause of increased bilirubin: Stage as liver GVHD	Stable or improving bilirubin after diagnosis of skin or GI GVHD, irrespective of treatment: Do not stage as liver GVHD
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Changing liver GVHD stage with other cause of hyperbilirubinemia

Skin and GI GVHD stable, improving, or absent	Liver GVHD staging is carried forward without increase in stage until other disease process resolves (e.g., if TTP is diagnosed in the presence of stage 2 liver GVHD, the liver GVHD stage 2 is carried forward despite rising bilirubin level until TTP is resolved. If there is no liver GVHD – stage 0 – and new onset TTP, the stage 0 is carried forward until TTP is resolved).
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Skin and/or GI GVHD worsening	<p>Liver GVHD is staged according to the Glucksberg criteria. The elevated bili is attributed to GVHD alone.</p> <p>Thus, when skin or GI GVHD is worsening, there is no downgrading of liver GVHD staging for other causes of hyperbilirubinemia. (e.g., if TTP is diagnosed in the presence of stage 2 liver GVHD and worsening skin or GI GVHD, the liver is staged according to the actual bilirubin level even if some of the rise in bilirubin is attributed to TTP).</p> <p>Similarly, even if there is no liver GVHD at onset of a new process, (such as TPN cholestasis), but skin or GI GVHD worsen during that process, then liver GVHD is diagnosed and staged according to the height of the bilirubin.</p> <p>There is one exception to this: the diagnosis of TTP, with high LDH and unconjugated bilirubin precludes the diagnosis and staging of new liver GVHD in the absence of a confirmatory liver biopsy.</p>
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Table 3 Evaluating GI GVHD in the Absence of Biopsy Confirmation (See Table 4.0 below)

Establishing GI GVHD with new onset diarrhea and no skin or liver GVHD

No Skin/liver GVHD Day 0 through engraftment	Assume no GI GVHD, unless proven by biopsy	
No Skin/liver GVHD Engraftment through day 100	NO other etiology of diarrhea identified: Stage as GI GVHD	Any other etiology of diarrhea identified: Do not stage as GI GVHD

Establishing GI GVHD with pre-existing diarrhea and skin or liver GVHD

Skin and/or liver GVHD present	Worsening diarrhea (includes worsening just prior to onset of skin or liver GVHD) OR persistent diarrhea despite resolution of non-GVHD cause: Stage as GI GVHD	Improving diarrhea after the diagnosis of skin or liver GVHD (irrespective of treatment) OR persistent diarrhea without resolution of underlying non-GVHD cause: Do not stage as GI GVHD
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Differentiating Acute GVHD, Chronic GVHD, and Overlap Syndrome

There is often confusion differentiating acute from chronic GVHD, especially in the setting of reduced intensity transplants, DLI and new prophylactic treatments. The NIH Working Group recently published new classifications for GVHD:

Table 4 Acute GVHD, Chronic GVHD, and Overlap Syndrome

Category	Time of Symptoms after HCT or DLI	Presence of Acute GVHD features	Presence of Chronic GVHD features
Acute GVHD			
Classic acute GVHD	≤100 d	Yes	No
Persistent, recurrent, or late-onset acute GVHD	>100 d	Yes	No
Chronic GVHD			
Classic chronic GVHD	No time limit	No	Yes
Overlap syndrome	No time limit	Yes	Yes

- Scoring of acute GVHD may need to occur past day 100. In particular, patients should continue to be scored for acute GVHD when classic acute GVHD symptoms (maculopapular rash, nausea, vomiting, anorexia, profuse diarrhea - particularly if bloody and ileus) persist past day 100 or if identical symptoms previously scored as acute GVHD resolve and then recur within 30 days during immunosuppression taper but past day 100.
- Those patients being scored as having acute GVHD should NOT have diagnostic or distinctive signs of chronic GVHD.
- **Patients with both acute and chronic symptoms should be diagnosed as having Overlap Syndrome and scored according to their chronic GVHD score.**

Further Explanation of Criteria presented in Tables 2 and 3

1.0 Assessment of Skin GVHD

1.1 Presence or Absence of Skin GVHD: Skin GVHD will be considered present if a rash characteristic of acute GVHD develops after allogeneic marrow transplantation involving more than 25% of the body surface not clearly attributable to causes such as drug administration or infection. The extent of the body surface area involved can be estimated by the “Rule of Nines”. In estimating the extent of skin GVHD, the area involved is calculated for individual anatomic areas, such as the arm or leg, and then the total is derived from a simple summation. Areas that are non-blanching should not be considered involved regardless of the overlying color of the rash (red, brown, etc). Limited distribution erythema (with the exception of palms and soles) in the absence of associated rash elsewhere on the body will not be considered GVHD.

2.0 Assessment of Liver GVHD

2.1 Assessing for the Presence or Absence of Liver GVHD

- A. Hyperbilirubinemia (total bilirubin \geq 2.0 mg/dL) in the **absence** of other signs of acute GVHD in the skin or GI tract:
 - i) Day 0-35: If hyperbilirubinemia alone is present with no other signs of acute GVHD in other organ systems, acute GVHD will not be diagnosed based solely on laboratory abnormalities.

Acute GVHD will be diagnosed if findings on histopathology studies of liver from a biopsy or autopsy are confirmatory.

- ii) Day 35-100: If hyperbilirubinemia (must be conjugated bilirubin) is not improving or is exacerbated (especially if serum alkaline phosphatase is increased), in the absence of acute GVHD in other organ systems, no other etiologies are identified, and does not improve with discontinuation of hepatotoxic drugs, acute GVHD will be diagnosed. However, it is distinctly unusual to develop ascites or a coagulopathy in the early stages of acute GVHD of the liver alone. In the absence of histopathology studies of liver from a biopsy or autopsy specimen, ascites or a coagulopathy secondary to liver dysfunction will be considered to indicate the presence of another disease process (e.g. veno-occlusive disease). Recommended non-invasive studies to define an etiology for hyperbilirubinemia are:
 - a. Imaging of liver (CT or ultrasound)
 - b. Hepatitis screen (only if ALT is elevated)
 - c. PT
 - d. Blood cultures
 - e. Review of medication list for potentially hepatotoxic drugs
 - f. Review of risk factors for viral liver infection (HSV, CMV, VZV, adenovirus, EBV, HBV, and HCV)
 - g. Hemolysis screen
- B. Pre-existing hyperbilirubinemia clearly attributed to an etiology other than acute GVHD in the presence of signs of acute GVHD in other organ systems.
- i) If pre-existing non-GVHD liver disease (documented clinically, by lab assessment, or by imaging studies) is stable or improving at the onset of signs of acute GVHD in other organs, then acute GVHD of the liver will not be considered to be present unless proven by liver biopsy or autopsy.
 - ii) If hyperbilirubinemia worsens several days before or at the time of onset of signs of acute GVHD in other organ systems, GVHD will be considered to be present unless histopathology studies of liver are available and negative on a biopsy during that time interval or autopsy results exclude GVHD.
 - iii) If hyperbilirubinemia persists and is not improving after resolution of a pre-existing non-GVHD liver disease process (e.g. localized infection of liver, systemic sepsis, biliary tract obstruction) when signs of acute GVHD are present in other organ systems or no other intervening cause has been diagnosed, then acute GVHD will be considered to be present in the absence of a new, clearly identifiable cause of non-GVHD liver disease or unless a liver biopsy or autopsy specimen is negative.
- C. Prior acute GVHD in liver with new onset of a disease process that exacerbates pre-existing or recently resolved hyperbilirubinemia:
- i) If an etiology other than acute GVHD is clearly identified as causing or exacerbating hyperbilirubinemia and acute liver GVHD has been diagnosed and has been stable, improving, or resolved, then the liver will not be restaged for acute GVHD until the resolution or stabilizing of the concurrent disease process (i.e., the liver stage prior to the onset of the new disease process will be carried forward until the new disease process resolves). Example: Acute GVHD of the liver and gut is diagnosed on day 20. Treatment of acute GVHD results in falling bilirubin levels

to liver stage 1. Sepsis or TTP develops with transient worsening of the hyperbilirubinemia. The liver stage is not increased, despite a higher bilirubin level, because the cause of worsening hyperbilirubinemia is attributed to sepsis or TTP.

ii) If an etiology other than acute GVHD is clearly identified as causing or exacerbating hyperbilirubinemia in the presence of already worsening acute liver GVHD **or** GVHD of the skin or GI tract is simultaneously worsening, then the liver GVHD will be staged according to the actual bilirubin level, even though another cause of hyperbilirubinemia is present.

3.0 Assessment of GVHD of the Gastrointestinal Tract

3.1 **Assessing for the Presence or Absence of GVHD of the Gastrointestinal Tract**

A. Diarrhea (≥ 500 mL/day in adults or > 10 mL/kg in pediatric patients) in the absence of other signs of acute GVHD in other organ systems

i) Day 0-engraftment: If diarrhea alone is present without other signs of acute GVHD in other organ systems, acute GVHD will not be considered present. Diarrhea will be attributed to acute GVHD if histopathology studies of gastrointestinal tract from a biopsy or autopsy are diagnostic.

ii) Engraftment-day 100: If diarrhea persists and is not improving, is exacerbated, or develops de novo in the absence of acute GVHD in other organ systems, histopathology studies of gut biopsies or from autopsy specimens are not available, and no other etiologies are clearly identified, acute GVHD will be considered to be the cause. A stool specimen should be examined to rule out infectious causes (e.g. rotavirus, adenovirus, and C. difficile toxin). It is recommended, if at all possible, that biopsies be obtained for diagnostic purposes.

B. Pre-existing diarrhea clearly attributed to an etiology other than acute GVHD in the presence of signs of acute GVHD in other organ systems:

i) If pre-existing diarrhea caused by a process other than GVHD has been documented clinically or by lab assessment and is stable or improving at the onset of signs of acute GVHD in the skin or liver, then acute GVHD of the intestine will not be considered to be present in the absence of biopsy confirmation or autopsy report.

ii) If diarrhea or gastrointestinal symptoms are already present, but worsen significantly at the time of onset of signs of acute GVHD in the skin or liver, GVHD will be considered present, unless biopsy or autopsy are negative.

iii) If diarrhea persists after resolution of a pre-existing disease process with signs of acute GVHD present in other organ systems, GVHD will be considered present, unless biopsy or autopsy are negative.

C. Prior or present acute GVHD in other organ systems with new onset of diarrhea:

If diarrhea is **clearly** attributable to an etiology other than acute GVHD (e.g., infection) and a history of acute GVHD exists or acute GVHD is present in other organ systems and is stable, then the gastrointestinal tract will not be evaluable for acute GVHD until the resolution or stabilizing of the other disease process (e.g., infection) in the absence of biopsy or autopsy confirmation.

- D. Persistent anorexia, nausea or vomiting in the absence of signs of acute GVHD in other organ systems:

Persistent anorexia, nausea or vomiting in the absence of other known causes of these symptoms will be considered stage 1 acute GVHD if confirmed by endoscopic biopsy.

If a biopsy is not possible (e.g. secondary to thrombocytopenia) but the clinical findings are compatible with acute GVHD, then the patient will be treated and recorded as having acute GVHD.

3.2 Staging of the Gastrointestinal Tract for the Severity of Acute GVHD

The severity of gastrointestinal tract GVHD will be staged according to modified Glucksberg criteria. To minimize errors caused by large day-to-day variation, diarrhea volume is measured as an average over 3 days and reported as the volume in milliliters per day. When urinary mixing is noted the stool volume will be considered half of the total volume unless nursing staff is able to give a better estimate from direct observation. Abdominal cramps are considered significant for staging if the severity results in a clinical intervention (e.g. analgesia, fasting, etc.). Blood in the stools is considered significant if the blood is visible or hematochezia/ melena is present and not clearly attributed to a cause other than GVHD (e.g. epistaxis/ hemorrhoids).