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Epidemiological Shifts in Invasive Fungal Infections in Hematology Patients.

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Introduction

Invasive fungal infections (IFIs) are among the most feared complications in hematology, particularly affecting patients with hematologic malignancies and those undergoing hematopoietic stem cell transplantation (HSCT). Over the past two decades, the epidemiology of IFIs has undergone significant shifts, driven by changes in treatment protocols, prophylactic strategies, and diagnostic capabilities. Understanding these trends is essential for improving patient outcomes and guiding antifungal stewardship [1, 2].

Historically, *Candida* and *Aspergillus* species dominated the IFI landscape in hematology. *Candida albicans* was the leading cause of bloodstream infections, while *Aspergillus fumigatus* was the primary agent of invasive pulmonary aspergillosis [3, 4].

These infections were closely linked to prolonged neutropenia, central venous catheters, and broad-spectrum antibiotic use.However, the introduction of antifungal prophylaxis, especially fluconazole and mold-active agents like posaconazole, has altered the prevalence and spectrum of fungal pathogens [5, 6].

Recent studies reveal a growing incidence of non-*albicans Candida*, *Mucorales*, *Fusarium*, and *Pneumocystis jirovecii* infections. A multicenter cohort study from 2020–2023 found that *Aspergillus* still accounted for 58.4% of IFIs, but *Candida* (18.5%), *Pneumocystis* (15.4%), *Mucorales* (6.2%), and *Fusarium* (4.6%) were increasingly prevalent.While neutropenia remains a key risk factor, its relative importance has declined due to prophylactic strategies. In a Latin American study, 67.4% of patients with IFI had severe neutropenia, but corticosteroid use and active hematologic disease were more predictive of poor outcomes [7, 8].

Epidemiological patterns vary across regions and institutions. In low- and middle-income countries, *Candida* remains dominant due to limited access to mold-active prophylaxis. In contrast, high-income settings report more *Aspergillus*, *Mucorales*, and rare molds.Environmental factors, hospital infrastructure, and local antifungal policies influence pathogen prevalence. For example, construction activities near hematology wards have been linked to increased airborne mold exposure [9, 10].

Conclusion

Resistance among fungal pathogens is rising. Non-*albicans Candida* species such as *C. glabrata* and *C. krusei* exhibit reduced susceptibility to fluconazole. *Aspergillus fumigatus* resistance to azoles is increasingly reported, particularly in Europe and Asia.Liposomal amphotericin B and echinocandins remain critical options, but cost and toxicity limit their use in some settings.IFI-related mortality remains high, ranging from 30% to 50% depending on the pathogen and host factors. In a Tunisian cohort, mortality was 51.6% among IFI patients compared to 20.3% in non-IFI patients. Delayed diagnosis, inappropriate therapy, and comorbidities contribute to poor outcomes.Early intervention, guided by risk stratification and rapid diagnostics, is key to improving survival.

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