

University of Groningen

Transplantation of high risk donor livers

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DOI:
[10.33612/diss.133940024](https://doi.org/10.33612/diss.133940024)

IMPORTANT NOTE: You are advised to consult the publisher's version (publisher's PDF) if you wish to cite from it. Please check the document version below.

Document Version
Publisher's PDF, also known as Version of record

Publication date:
2020

[Link to publication in University of Groningen/UMCG research database](#)

Citation for published version (APA):

de Vries, Y. (2020). *Transplantation of high risk donor livers: Machine perfusion studies to improve and predict post transplant hepatobiliary function*. [Thesis fully internal (DIV), University of Groningen]. University of Groningen. <https://doi.org/10.33612/diss.133940024>

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Ex Situ Normothermic
Machine Perfusion of
Donor Livers Using a
Hemoglobin-Based
Oxygen Carrier:
A Viable Alternative
to Red Blood Cells

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Transpl Int. 2018 Nov;31(11):1281-1282.

Dear Editors,

With interest we have read the systematic review by Eshmuminov et al. regarding porcine and human liver normothermic machine perfusion (NMP) (1). The authors focused on studies using red blood cells (RBC) as oxygen carrier in the perfusion fluid and excluded studies using perfusion solutions based on artificial oxygen carriers. In their review, the authors state "*We excluded studies using artificial oxygen carriers. Results of studies with synthetic hemoglobin based oxygen carriers (HBOC) were disappointing, even with stopping of the ongoing clinical trials by FDA due to safety reasons*". We found this paragraph misleading as it suggests that studies on liver NMP using an HBOC have provided disappointing results. This, however, is not true. The German review article quoted by Eshmuminov et al. to support their statement does not mention the use of HBOC for *ex situ* NMP (2). Potential side-effects, such as described after *in vivo* clinical transfusion, are less likely to occur when an HBOC-based perfusion solution is used for *ex situ* NMP of donor livers, because the donor liver is extensively flushed prior to implantation. Moreover, although HBOC may not be as effective as RBC in treating severe anaemia in clinical trials, post-marketing experience in South Africa has recently resulted in FDA-approved clinical application for life-threatening anaemia in patients unable or unwilling to undergo RBC transfusion (3,4).

Several groups have reported experience with an HBOC-201 (HbO₂ Therapeutics) based perfusion fluid for *ex situ* liver machine perfusion, all of which showed favourable results (5-7). Fontes et al. were the first to report on the use of an HBOC-based perfusion fluid in machine perfusion (5). Subnormothermic machine perfusion was compared to static cold storage in a porcine liver transplantation model (5). The machine perfusion group had a higher survival rate, better graft function and decreased reactive oxygen species (ROS) formation after reperfusion. Both Laing et al. from Birmingham and our group have reported a pre-clinical study on the efficacy of NMP with an HBOC-based perfusion solution using discarded human livers (6,7). Laing et al. described improved vascular flow and decreased ROS formation after NMP with HBOC, compared to NMP with RBC (6). We reported improved vascular flow, increased hepatic ATP concentration, and increased bile production during NMP using an HBOC-based perfusion fluid, compared to NMP with RBC (7).

Based on aforementioned studies and some unique properties of HBOC, such as the availability and the ability to be used at low temperatures, a clinical trial has been initiated in our center to investigate viability of high risk donor livers using *ex situ* machine perfusion (www.trialregister.nl; NTR5972). Thus far, six extended criteria donor livers that were initially declined for transplantation nationwide were successfully transplanted after dual hypothermic machine perfusion, followed by controlled oxygenated rewarming and subsequent NMP, each phase using the same HBOC-201-based perfusion solution. All recipients are alive and clinically well, with 100% graft survival. Altogether, we strongly believe that HBOC-based perfusion solutions are a viable alternative to RBC for *ex situ* machine perfusion of the liver.

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