

Evidence to support inclusion of pharmacogenetic biomarkers in randomised controlled trials

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1 *Literature Review*

2 **Evidence to support inclusion of pharmacogenetic** 3 **biomarkers in randomised controlled trials**

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16 **Abstract:** Pharmacogenetics and biomarkers are becoming normalised as important technologies to
17 improve drug efficacy rates, reduce the incidence of adverse drug reactions, and make informed
18 choices for targeted therapies. However, their wider clinical implementation has been limited by a
19 lack of robust evidence. Suitable evidence is required before a biomarker's clinical use, and also before
20 its use in a clinical trial. We have undertaken a review of five pharmacogenetic biomarker-guided
21 randomised controlled trials (RCTs) and evaluated the evidence used by these trials to justify
22 biomarker inclusion. We assessed and quantified the evidence cited in published rationale papers, or
23 where these were not available, obtained protocols from trial authors. Very different levels of evidence
24 were provided by the trials. We used these observations to write recommendations for future
25 justifications of biomarker use in RCTs and encourage regulatory authorities to write clear guidelines.

26

27 **Keywords:** Pharmacogenetics, biomarker, adverse drug reactions, RCT, evidence
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29 **1. Introduction**

30 The growing field of pharmacogenetics, which studies the effect of genetic biomarkers on the
31 likelihood of treatment response or adverse drug reactions (ADRs) [1], offers an important opportunity
32 to increase the chances of drug benefit and/or reduce the risk of harm [2-5]. A biomarker is defined as
33 "a characteristic that is objectively measured and evaluated as an indicator of normal biological
34 processes, pathogenic processes, or pharmacologic responses to a therapeutic intervention" [6]. Both
35 germline and somatic genetic biomarkers are being used increasingly to personalise treatments across
36 a wide range of disease areas, including cancer [7,8], thromboembolic disease [9], and autoimmune
37 disease [10], as well as to diagnose disease and provide patient prognosis.

38 Many drugs are withdrawn from the market due to lack of efficacy and/or ADRs [11-13], and the
39 latter are a major cause of hospital admissions, morbidity, and mortality [14,15]. ADRs are associated
40 with high cost in terms of both time and resources, as well as the negative effects on patient health.
41 There is therefore great potential for genetic biomarker testing to improve the efficacy, safety and cost-
42 effectiveness of medicines. Reviews of economic evaluations of medicines with actionable
43 pharmacogenetic information found the majority of tests to be cost-effective or even cost-saving [16,17].
44 For example, screening for the *HLA-B*57:01* allele has significantly reduced the incidence of severe
45 ADRs associated with abacavir [18], and has been recommended as a cost-effective intervention [19].

46 Although it should not be assumed that all pharmacogenetic testing will be cost-effective [20],
47 reductions in the cost of testing and efficiency improvements may see the implementation of more
48 pharmacogenetic tests into clinical practice.

49 While the US Food and Drug Administration (FDA) lists over 200 drugs with pharmacogenetic
50 information included in their labels [21], their wider clinical implementation has been limited [22-26].
51 There are many reasons for this, including the lack of robust evidence of clinical utility [27,28]. Prior to
52 the approval and implementation of biomarker tests in clinical practice, evidence is required of the
53 test's clinical utility [29-32] and the gold-standard approach to do this according to guidelines is the
54 randomised controlled trial (RCT) [33-35]. A lack of well-designed trials has been cited as one of the
55 main obstacles contributing to the delay in translation of pharmacogenetic discoveries into clinic
56 [28,30,36,37]. Several biomarker-guided trial ('BM trial') designs have been proposed for this purpose
57 [38-40], and our previously developed online tool, www.bigted.org, provides information about each
58 to guide those designing such a trial [39]. However, before embarking on a BM trial, it is important that
59 robust evidence of the biomarker's utility and validity is available to justify its inclusion in the trial's
60 design [41] – without this, there is a risk of wasting money and time on an inappropriate biomarker.
61 Nonetheless, the nature and extent of evidence required, and how it should be compiled, is unclear.
62 More guidance exists on the evidence required for interventions to be included in a trial than for
63 biomarker inclusion, although an integral biomarker assay is just as important a component of the trial
64 [41,42].

65 With this in mind, we undertook a literature review with the aim of reviewing sources of evidence
66 used to justify five previously published pharmacogenetic BM trials. These were chosen to represent
67 different pharmacogenetic biomarker applications. We explored the nature and extent of previous
68 evidence on the association of the included biomarkers with treatment response that had been used to
69 justify their inclusion. We were not concerned with the findings of the trials, instead focusing purely
70 on the evidence cited to justify the inclusion of biomarker(s) within their design. Indeed, we
71 acknowledge that other trials will have been conducted since the publication of the trials included in
72 our review which will have added to the evidence base on the use of the drugs under study. In light of
73 our findings, we also reflected on and provided recommendations on how such evidence should be
74 compiled by those planning future BM trials.

75 2. Details of included trials

76 To allow us to explore in detail the evidence compiled for each trial, we limited our review to five
77 recently published BM trials. These were chosen carefully to ensure that they were representative of
78 the available trials and spanned a range of different biomarker applications. We felt it important to not
79 only include trials using biomarkers in a way that has been well-characterised (e.g. for targeted
80 therapies), but also those incorporating biomarkers for less well-characterised purposes (e.g. improving
81 medication adherence). The five chosen trials used biomarkers for prevention of ADRs [10], improving
82 efficacy [9], choosing targeted therapies [43], improving medication adherence [44,45], and improving
83 quality of life [46]. Summary details of each trial are provided in Table 1. The first trial (TPMT: AZA
84 Response to Genotyping and Enzyme Testing, TARGET, 2011) explored whether *TPMT* genotyping
85 helped prevent ADRs associated with azathioprine [10,47]. A second trial (European Pharmacogenetics
86 of Anticoagulant Therapy, EU-PACT, 2013) tested whether a genotype-guided approach to calculating
87 therapeutic dose of the anticoagulant, warfarin, led to improved efficacy and reduced the incidence of
88 ADRs [9]. The third trial (SHIVA, 2015) explored the utility of an approach that used genotyping to
89 match patients to molecularly targeted therapies [43]. A fourth trial (Genotype-guided statin therapy,
90 GGST statin trial, 2018) explored whether using genotype testing improved medication adherence and
91 subsequently statin efficacy [44,45,48]. The final trial (NCT02664350) investigated the use of genotyping
92 to reduce pain associated with cancer [46].

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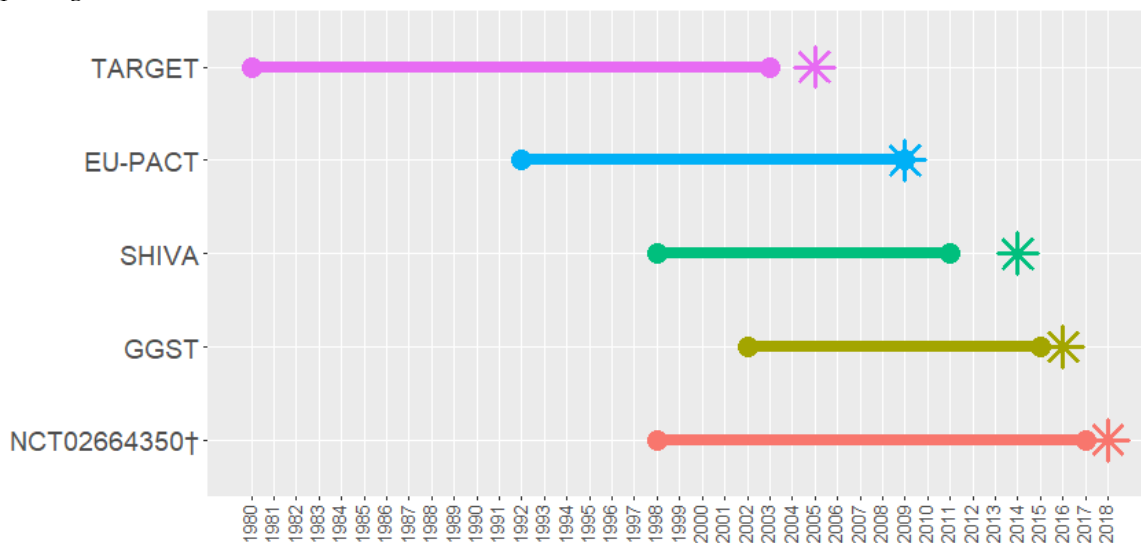
Table 1- details of selected trials. Start year denotes year the first patient was recruited. BM trial (biomarker-guided trial) design is the design as selected by using the BiGTeD online resource [39].

Registration number	Trial name	Start year	Year of results publication	Paper references taken from	BM trial design	Biomarker	Drug of interest	Sample size (n randomised)	Age of participants	Sex of participants	Ethnicity of participants	Study location
ISRCTN30748308	TARGET (protocol) [10,47]	2005	2011	2005 protocol obtained from authors	Biomarker strategy design (without biomarker assessment in control arm)	TPMT	Azathioprine	333	Mean 43.2 (control)	50.6%/49.4% F/M (control)	92.2% white, 4.8% South Asian, 0.6% Black, 2.4% mixed/other (control)	UK
									Mean 41.0 (genotyped)	50.3%/49.7% F/M (genotyped)	89.8% white, 7.2% South Asian, 3.0% Black, 0% mixed/other (genotyped)	
NCT01119300	EU-PACT [49]	2011	2013	2009 paper 10.2217/pgs.09.125	Biomarker strategy design (without biomarker assessment in control arm)	CYP2C9*2	Warfarin	455	Mean 66.9 (control)	42.1%/57.9% F/M (control)	98.7% white, 0.9% Black, 0.4% Asian (control)	UK, Sweden
					CYP2C9*3	Mean 67.8 (genotyped)			35.8%/64.2% F/M (genotyped)	98.2% white, 1.3% Black, 0.4% Asian (genotyped)		
					VKORC1							
NCT01771458	SHIVA [43] (protocol)	2012	2015	2014 protocol obtained from authors	Enrichment design	Hormone receptors pathway PI3K/AKT/mTOR pathway RAF/MEK pathway	Targeted chemotherapy agent, based on genotyping	195	Median 63 (control)	72%/28% F/M (control)	Not reported	France
									Median 61 (genotyped)	61%/39% F/M (genotyped)		
NCT01894230	GGST statin trial [44]	2013	2018	2016 paper 10.2217/pgs-2016-0065	Biomarker strategy design (with biomarker)	SLCO1B1*5	Any statin	159	Mean 62.5 (control)	65.8%/34.2% F/M (control)	80.3% white, 14.5% Black, 5.3% other (control)	USA

					assessment in control arm)				Mean 62.7 (genotyped)	49.4%/50.6% F/M (genotyped)	79.5% white, 16.9% Black, 3.6% other (genotyped)	
NCT02664350	n/a [46]	2016	Results not yet published	2018 paper 10.1016/j.ct.2018.03.001	Biomarker strategy design (without biomarker assessment in control arm)	CYP2D6	Opioids	200 (forecast)	Not available	Not available	Not available	USA

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For each trial, we identified each piece of evidence referenced in the introduction section of a protocol or design paper associated with the trial, and extracted details of the publication year (Figure 1), study design, drug of interest, biomarker used, sample size, country of origin, and the age, sex and ethnicity of participants for each trial. For trials that did not have a published protocol or design paper, we used protocols obtained from contacting the authors (TARGET), or from the results paper supplementary information (SHIVA). Full details of data extracted are found in Table 1. Figures were made using RStudio (version 1.1.453, RStudio Team, Boston MA) [50], particularly the ‘formattable’ package [51], and LucidChart [52].



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Figure 1 - Timings of publications cited by each trial. Star icons indicate the date of publication of the paper or protocol references were extracted from. †results not yet published

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115 3. TARGET

116 TARGET (ISRCTN30748308) began recruitment in 2005 and investigated the use of TPMT
117 genotyping to prevent adverse reactions to azathioprine in patients with inflammatory disease [10,53].
118 The trial randomised inflammatory disease patients (in gastroenterology and rheumatology) 1:1 to
119 genotyping or non-genotyping arms. In the genotyping arm, clinicians were made aware of each
120 patient’s TPMT status and the implications of this on dosing prior to commencing azathioprine
121 treatment. Patients in the non-genotyping arm received standard azathioprine dosing.

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123 TARGET used a biomarker strategy design without biomarker assessment in the control arm [39],
 124 Evidence used to justify use of the genotype test spanned the longest time frame of all trials, from 1980
 125 to 2003 (Figure 2 **Error! Reference source not found.**). The oldest evidence cited by the trial was a 1980
 126 observational cohort study that proposed a monogenic inheritance pattern for the activity of the TPMT
 127 enzyme [54]. Also cited was a 1989 case-control study that compared TPMT enzyme activity in patients
 128 who had adverse reactions to thiopurines to a control group that had suffered no reaction [55]. The
 129 study showed that patients who had the adverse reaction had extremely low TPMT activity. In total,
 130 11 observational studies were cited, consisting of 9 cohort studies [54,56-63], 1 case control study [55],
 131 and 1 study of enzymatic assay use in the UK [64]. A 2001 systematic review of pharmacogenetics in
 132 reducing ADRs was cited, although this review was not specific to azathioprine or TPMT.
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 135 Figure 2 – Evidence cited by the TARGET trial to justify inclusion of the TPMT biomarker, relative to
 136 the publication of the 2005 protocol [47].

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 138 The most recent evidence was an expert opinion by Seidman, 2003 [65]. A 2002 Canadian cost-
 139 effectiveness analysis [66], a 2000 case study [67], and a 1997 questionnaire of UK clinicians were also
 140 cited [68]. The authors also cited a 2000 guideline from the British Society of Rheumatology, which
 141 could not be located online.
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143 **4. EU-PACT**

144 The EU-PACT study (NCT01119300) was a large, single-blind, randomised European trial of
 145 genotype-guided dosing of warfarin [9,49,69-71]. Patients in this trial were randomised 1:1 to genotype-
 146 guided or control groups, stratified by centre and treatment indication. Those in the genotype-guided
 147 group were genotyped for CYP2C9 and VKORC1 and dosed according to an algorithm that included
 148 both genetic and clinical factors. The control group received a standard dosing regimen guided by
 149 clinical factors only.
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151 This trial also used a biomarker strategy design without biomarker assessment in the control arm
 152 [39]. The published protocol cited mostly observational studies as evidence (Figure 3). These ranged
 153 from a 1992 retrospective cohort study [72] to several 2009 studies [73-75]. This includes a 2009 genome-
 154 wide association study (GWAS) that showed the implications of specific CYP2C9, VKORC1, and
 155 CYP4F2 genes on warfarin dosing. Also cited were editorials [76,77], cost-effectiveness analyses [78,79],
 156 and a literature review of economic evaluations [80]. No previous RCTs were cited.



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 158 Figure 3 – Evidence cited by the EU-PACT trial to justify inclusion of the CYP2C9 and VKORC1
 159 biomarkers, relative to the publication of the 2009 published protocol [49].

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161 **5. SHIVA**

162 The SHIVA trial (NCT01771458) was a French proof-of-concept histology-agnostic phase II trial
 163 using an enrichment design [39] that recruited patients with any metastatic solid cancer to receive
 164 treatment with targeted agents [43,81,82]. After analysis of their tumour, patients with mutations that
 165 matched an available drug were randomised 1:1 to receive targeted treatment or to physician’s choice
 166 treatment.

167 The total evidence cited in the protocol ranged from 1998 to 2011 (Figure 4). Three RCTs were cited
 168 [83-85]. Two of these were trials of gefinitib in lung cancer [83,84]. Another RCT cited was an
 169 investigation of trastuzumab in HER2+ breast cancer patients, a combination that was investigated in
 170 SHIVA [85]. Two observational studies were cited [86,87], along with a contemporaneous editorial
 171 commenting on the validity of one of these studies [88].

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174 Figure 4 – Evidence cited by the SHIVA trial to justify inclusion of the biomarkers, relative to the
 175 publication of the 2014 protocol (included in Supplementary of a 2015 paper [43]).
 176 RCT = randomised controlled trial

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178 The paper reporting on the results of this trial included an ‘Evidence before this study’ box [43].
 179 This detailed a literature search performed prior to the start of the trial, which identified several
 180 observational cohort studies [87,89-92] and RCTs [93-95].

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182 **6. GGST statin trial**

183 The *SLCO1B1* genotype guided statin therapy (GGST) trial (NCT01894230) investigated the utility
 184 of using genotyping to increase adherence to statins and promote lower cholesterol in patients with
 185 cardiovascular disease and a history of statin-induced side effects [44,45,48]. Patients were genotyped
 186 and then randomised 1:1 to receive genotype information to guide their care, or to usual care alone.
 187 The primary outcome in this trial was medication adherence, as assessed by a standard questionnaire.
 188 The aim of the trial was to improve adherence by showing patients that treatment includes an
 189 assessment of the risks (real and perceived) of statin-induced side-effects [44]. The trial used a
 190 biomarker strategy with biomarker assessment in the control arm design [39].

191 This trial cited a large number of references ranging from 2002 to 2015 (Figure 5). Five sets of
 192 guidelines from four separate bodies were cited [96-100], alongside an epidemiology report from the
 193 American Heart Association [101]. Seven literature reviews were cited [102-108], alongside two
 194 editorials [109,110]. This trial also cited the largest number of observational studies, a total of eleven
 195 (consisting of 1 case control study [111], 9 cohort studies [112-120], and 1 cohort/meta-analysis study
 196 [121]). In contrast to the large amount of observational study evidence, the trial only cited one RCT
 197 [122]. Two further references were sub-studies of larger RCTs [123,124]. A 2013 Cochrane review was
 198 also cited [125].



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Figure 5 – Evidence cited by the GGST statin trial to justify inclusion of the SLCO1B1 biomarker, relative to the publication of the 2016 rationale and design paper [44]. ‘Mixed’ refers to papers that used a mixture of two or more of the other publication types. RCT = randomised controlled trial
SR/MAs = systematic reviews/meta-analyses

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The authors cited one systematic review [126] and three meta-analyses [127-129]. The systematic review [126] assessed the quality of included studies using ISPOR guidelines [130], and one meta-analysis [129] evaluated quality using the Newcastle-Ottawa scale [131]. The other two meta-analyses were published by the Cholesterol Treatment Trialists’ Collaborators (CTTC) group [127,128], a group established in 1994 to perform meta-analyses of long-term and large-scale trials of lipid intervention therapies [132].

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The meta-analyses by the CTTC group were both done on the same large data set of n=174,149 participants from 27 RCTs [127,128]. Each RCT had to have a recruitment target of >1000 participants, and have a minimum 2 year treatment duration. The meta-analyses collated individual participant data (IPD). These meta-analyses did not assess the quality of the included studies.

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216 **7. Precision Medicine Guided Treatment for Cancer Pain**

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This trial (NCT02664350) used a biomarker strategy design without biomarker assessment in the control arm, and recruited patients with solid tumours and metastases to investigate CYP2D6-guided dosing of opioids to manage pain [46]. Patients with pain scores of ≥ 4 (on a scale of 1-10) were randomised 1:1 to genotype-guided or conventional pain management strategies. This trial did not assign treatments to patients, but provided recommendations to clinicians based on CYP2D6 genotyping. Patients with poor metabolizer, intermediate metabolizer, or ultra-rapid metabolizer phenotypes were recommended different opioids to those with an extensive (‘normal’) metabolizer phenotype. Those in the control group did not receive CYP2D6-guided recommendations. Pain questionnaires were completed at baseline, 2, 4, 6, and 8 weeks. The trial is completed but results have not yet been published.

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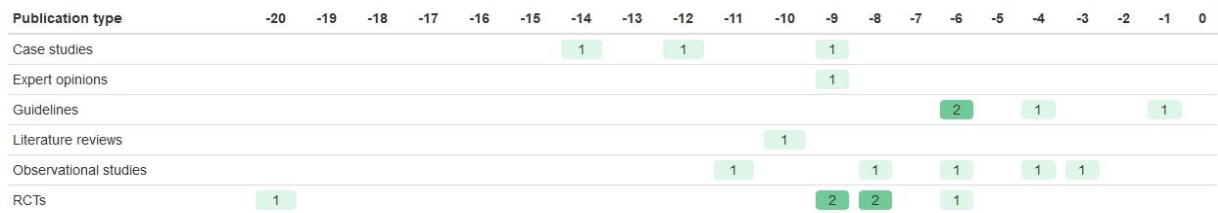
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The authors cited evidence ranging from 1998 to 2017 (Figure 6). The oldest evidence was a 1998 RCT [133], cited alongside 5 other RCTs [134-138]. The newest evidence was 2017 guidelines on adult cancer pain from the National Comprehensive Cancer Network [139]. Interestingly, the trial cited three case studies; one in a patient with the poor metabolizer phenotype [140], and two with patients with the ultra-rapid metabolizer phenotype [141,142].



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Figure 6 – Evidence cited by the NCT02664350 trial to justify inclusion of the CYP2D6 biomarker, relative to the publication of the 2018 design and rationale paper [46].

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8. Discussion

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The trials in our review all used different approaches to gathering evidence for justifying biomarker inclusion, and there does not appear to be a standard approach to doing so. Of the trials examined, all cited evidence from within 3 years of their publication (Figure 1). The oldest evidence compared to trial start date was cited by the TARGET trial, which cited work from 25 years prior to its 2005 start date [54].

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The evidence types used included systematic reviews/meta-analyses, RCTs, qualitative research, guidelines, recommendations, editorials, and case studies. The traditional ‘evidence pyramid’ is often used to rank evidence types, with meta-analyses and systematic reviews at the top, and case studies and *in vitro* evidence near the base [143]. However, this has seen some modification in recent years, notably the viewing of evidence through the ‘lens’ of systematic reviews and meta-analyses, ensuring that the quality of included studies is evaluated [144]. In this iteration, a meta-analysis based on weak evidence suffering from bias is not automatically seen as superior evidence to a well-conducted observational study.

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To explore the type and extent of evidence compiled to justify including biomarkers in previous BM trials, we have referred to the references in the trial design paper or protocol. This represents a relatively straightforward method of assessing the evidence for a biomarker’s inclusion in a trial, however has some inherent limitations. First, this method will not necessarily capture the entire evidence base upon which inclusion of the biomarker was justified, since the authors may not have provided a complete and accurate snapshot of the evidence they explored and used. Second, journal rules on the amount of references in a paper and word count restrictions could mean that the references included do not represent the totality of evidence used. Similar restrictions on references and word counts may limit the representation of the literature in protocols.

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8.1 Recommendations

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While the ideal level of evidence is a well-conducted meta-analysis/systematic review of good quality RCTs, including a rigorous assessment of their quality, this is not always available or feasible. In particular, where a biomarker is very new, there may be limited previous evidence to underpin its use. This evidence may take the form of case series or previous case studies. If this is the only evidence available, then this may be the ‘best’ evidence to justify including the biomarker in a trial. It would be important to consider, in such circumstances, whether the proposed RCT would be premature and that the science should first of all be allowed to mature.

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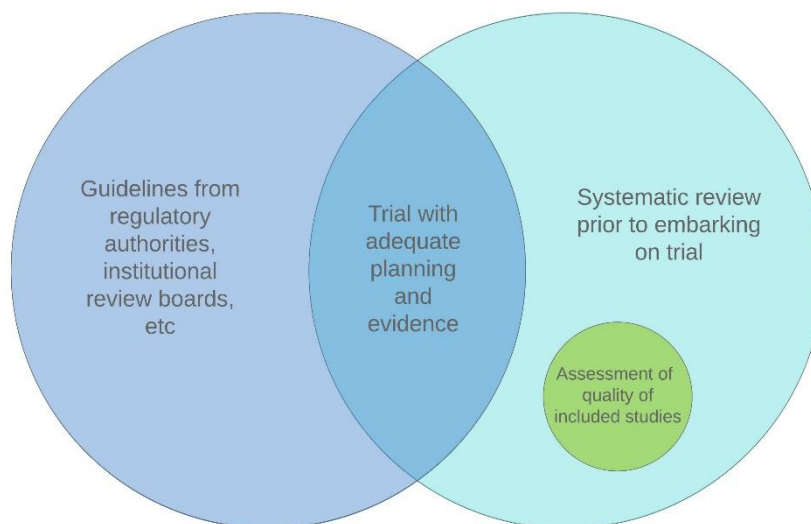
It may be that different standards of evidence may be necessary for different biomarker types [25,145]. For example, evidence standards could be based on risk, with biomarkers for lower risk applications requiring less evidence and regulatory oversight than those for high risk applications [145]. Recommendations could also be based on the disease being treated, similar to how orphan drugs for rare diseases are given accelerated approvals [146,147]. Biomarkers used for more serious

274 indications could be allowed to proceed to trial with less or lower quality evidence than biomarkers for
 275 less serious conditions. Novelty of the biomarker will also influence the extent of evidence available –
 276 for example a biomarker first utilised in 1980 is likely to have accumulated much more evidence than
 277 one first described in 2015.

278 Further, some conditions have existing diagnostic or treatment guidance algorithms that do not
 279 use biomarkers but have good clinical utility. In these scenarios, adding a biomarker to the algorithm
 280 might provide a low value of information compared to a biomarker used in a condition where a good
 281 clinical algorithm is not available. Therefore, authors might consider prioritizing the development of
 282 biomarkers for conditions that do not have sufficient clinical prediction methods for diagnosis or
 283 guiding treatment.

284 It is also important to ensure that genetic biomarkers are not subject to higher evidentiary
 285 requirements than other types of biomarkers. This ‘genetic exceptionalism’ and the higher burden of
 286 evidence for genetic tests has been shown to be a barrier to implementation [4,25,30,148]. Finally,
 287 biomarkers that are integral to a trial’s conduct require more evidence than biomarkers used on an
 288 exploratory basis [41].

289 With these factors in mind, our recommendations for all biomarker-guided trials consist of two
 290 essentials (Figure 7).



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292 Figure 7 – our recommendations for evidence gathering prior to the start of a biomarker-guided trial,
 293 based on the findings of this review.

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295 - Systematic review before embarking on a trial

296 We would recommend an initial systematic review is undertaken prior to the start of any trial. The
 297 Lancet journal now requires all research papers to include a ‘Research in Context’ panel that shows the
 298 evidence available prior to the study, and how the authors searched for this information [149]. This is
 299 an important step that should be considered by all journals and particularly any source funding a
 300 clinical trial. The search should be supplemented with evidence from other sources such as clinical
 301 guidelines and pilot data.

302 Regardless of the type of evidence identified in the systematic review, we recommend that the
303 quality of that evidence is assessed when justifying including the biomarker, and we suggest that
304 design-specific tools are used for this purpose (e.g. the Cochrane Collaboration's Risk of Bias tool for
305 RCTs) [150]. Several study type-specific methods for doing this are available [131,150-154] and have
306 been reviewed by Zeng, et al. (2015) [155]. We additionally recommend the quality of pharmacogenetic
307 studies is assessed using the guidelines proposed by Jorgensen and Williamson (2008) [156].

308 When synthesising evidence already existing from previous studies, it is also important to consider
309 the age and ethnicities of the populations of the previous studies compared to the proposed trial's
310 population to ensure that the evidence is relevant. Many studies (94% in one review [157]) imply
311 generalisability of results without acknowledging the differential effects of race and ethnicity.
312 Differences in cancer incidence, stage at discovery [158], and mortality [159] have been found to be
313 functions of race or ethnicity and it is imperative that trialists consider the ethnicity of the proposed
314 trial population and to keep this in mind when evaluating the evidence relating to biomarker validity.
315 Notably, a 2016 review found that 81% of participants in genome-wide association studies were white
316 [160], and several studies have shown that non-white people are less likely to be clinical trial
317 participants [157,161,162] and are less likely to access genetic testing services [163]. It is important,
318 therefore, in a drive to reduce such inequalities, that the clinical utility of ethno-specific biomarkers are
319 tested in trials recruiting participants from relevant ethnic backgrounds. Similar considerations should
320 be given to other factors known to contribute to health inequalities, including age, gender, and socio-
321 economic position. These factors are summarized by the PROGRESS-Plus acronym recommended by
322 the Cochrane Public Health Group [164].

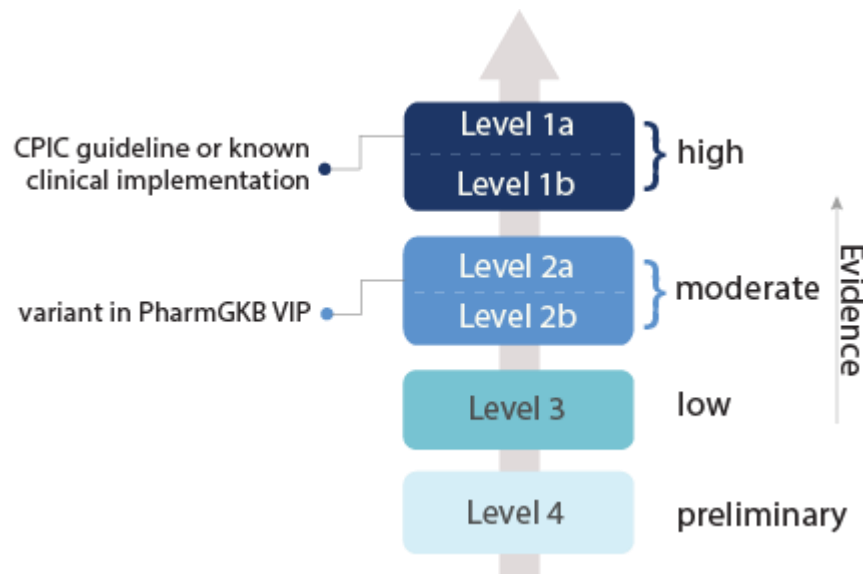
323 Further, if the systematic review reveals a sufficient number of previous RCTs or observational
324 studies, authors should consider conducting a meta-analysis to assess the current evidence
325 quantitatively. This would help ascertain whether there was sufficient uncertainty surrounding the
326 current evidence to justify the planned RCT. An example of where this could have been implemented
327 is in the fifth trial we examined [46]. Authors can also utilise funnel plots to examine any potential bias
328 in the publication of included studies [165], and explore any heterogeneity between studies.

329 - Guidelines are required

330 Given the lack of standardisation across BM trials in terms of how inclusion of biomarkers are
331 justified, we recommend that guidelines are developed to aid researchers in compiling and presenting
332 evidence to justify their inclusions. This will not only ensure that sufficient evidence exists prior to
333 embarking on a BM trial, thus avoiding waste of resources, but will also serve as a useful guide to those
334 planning a BM trial and provide transparency in the trial report.

335 The Clinical Pharmacogenetics Implementation Consortium (CPIC) provides guidelines for the
336 implementation of pharmacogenetics [166]. The guidelines provide a grading of the level of evidence
337 given in support of the biomarker's implementation ('high', 'moderate' or 'weak') [167]. The CPIC
338 levels are based on PharmGKB criteria (Figure 8), where the evidence for a gene-drug association is
339 rated on a six-point scale between 1A (guidelines endorsed by a medical society or major health system)
340 to 4 (in vitro, case study, or nonsignificant study evidence) [29]. This scale is based on 'clinical
341 annotations' obtained from PubMed, produced by combining and summarising associations from
342 several publications. These clinical annotations are then given a 'level of evidence' score based on
343 replication of the association, P-value, and odds ratio. The score is determined by PharmGKB curators
344 [29].

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Figure 8 – Guidelines of the Clinical Pharmacogenetics Implementation Consortium (CPIC) for the grading of biomarker evidence, based on the PharmGKB evidence criteria [29,168].

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Whilst these guidelines are for implementation of biomarkers into clinical practice in a patient who has a known genotype, a similar approach could be developed for justification of use in a RCT. We located one paper that discussed the incorporation of biomarkers into early phase clinical trials [41], but we recommend that this needs to contribute to the formation of formal guidelines for BM trials similar to CPIC guidelines for biomarker implementation.

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Finally, the conclusions and recommendations above are based on the assumption that a BM trial is indeed required. It is possible that when compiling the evidence to justify inclusion of a biomarker in a trial that it is so overwhelmingly in favour of the biomarker's clinical utility that it may be unethical to restrict its use to a randomised trial. This loss of clinical equipoise is something important to consider and indeed clinical implementation may be recommended and accepted without the need for a BM trial in such cases.

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Supplementary Materials: Table S1 shows all the extracted data from the five trials we reviewed.

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9. References

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