

# **Artificial intelligence-based radiomics models in endometrial cancer: A systematic review**

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## **To cite this version:**

Lise Lecointre. Artificial intelligence-based radiomics models in endometrial cancer: A systematic review. Journal of Surgical Oncology, 2021, 24;S0748-7983(21)005, 10.1016/j.ejso.2021.06.023. hal-03398184ff

## **HAL Id: hal-03398184 <https://hal.science/hal-03398184v1>**

Submitted on 5 Jan 2024

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Version of Record: <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0748798321005886> Manuscript\_b97b939e3784f741650ad3dd36561c17

- 1 **Title: Artificial Intelligence-based radiomics models in endometrial cancer: A systematic**  2 **review**  3 4 **Journal:** European Journal of Surgical Oncology 5 **Article type:** Systematic review 6 7 **Authors:** Lise Lecointre<sup>1,2,3</sup>, Jérémy Dana<sup>3,4</sup>, Massimo Lodi<sup>1</sup>, Chérif Akladios<sup>1</sup>, Benoît  $\mathsf{B}$  Gallix<sup>2,3,5</sup> 9 10 **Affiliations:**   $11$ <sup>1</sup> Department of Gynecologic Surgery, Hôpitaux Universitaires de Strasbourg, Strasbourg, 12 France. <sup>2</sup>13 I-Cube UMR 7357 - Laboratoire des sciences de l'ingénieur, de l'informatique et de 14 l'imagerie, Université de Strasbourg, Strasbourg, France <sup>3</sup>15 Institut hospitalo-universitaire (IHU), Institute for Minimally Invasive Hybrid Image-Guided 16 Surgery, Université de Strasbourg, Strasbourg, France 17 <sup>4</sup> Inserm U1110, Institut de Recherche sur les Maladies Virales et Hépatiques, Strasbourg, 18 France <sup>5</sup> 19 Department of Diagnostic Radiology, McGill University, Montreal, Canada 20 21 Corresponding author 22 Lise Lecointre MD 23 Work address: 1 avenue Molière, 67200 Strasbourg 24 Email: lise.lecointre@chru-strasbourg.fr
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26 **Abstract** 

27 *Background.* Radiological preoperative assessment of endometrial cancer (EC) is in some 28 cases not precise enough and its performances improvement could lead to a clinical benefit. 29 Radiomics is a recent field of application of artificial intelligence (AI) in radiology.

30 *Aims.* To investigate the contribution of radiomics on the radiological preoperative 31 assessment of patients with EC; and to establish a simple and reproducible AI Quality Score 32 applicable to Machine Learning and Deep Learning studies.

33 *Methods.* We conducted a systematic review of current literature including original articles 34 that studied EC through imaging-based AI techniques. Then, we developed a novel Simplified 35 and Reproducible AI Quality score (SRQS) based on 10 items which ranged to 0 to 20 points 36 in total which focused on clinical relevance, data collection, model design and statistical 37 analysis. SRQS cut-off was defined at 10/20.

38 *Results.* We included 17 articles which studied different radiological parameters such as 39 deep myometrial invasion, lympho-vascular space invasion, lymph nodes involvement, etc. 40 One article was prospective, and the others were retrospective. The predominant technique 41 was magnetic resonance imaging. Two studies developed Deep Learning models, while the 42 others machine learning ones. We evaluated each article with SRQS by 2 independent 43 readers. Finally, we kept only 7 high-quality articles with clinical impact. SRQS was highly 44 reproducible (Kappa = 0.95 IC 95% [0.907-0.988]).

45 *Conclusion.* There is currently insufficient evidence on the benefit of radiomics in EC. 46 Nevertheless, this field is promising for future clinical practice. Quality should be a priority 47 when developing these new technologies.

48 **Keywords**: endometrial carcinoma, imaging, radiomics, machine learning, deep learning, 49 artificial intelligence**.** 

#### 50 **Introduction**

51 Endometrial cancer (EC) is the first diagnosed gynecological cancer in the United 52 States, accounting approximately 61,880 new cases and 12,160 deaths in 2019 [1]. Incidence 53 appears to be increasing due to the population aging and the rise in obesity rates, two main 54 risk factors of EC [1]. The radiological preoperative assessment (pelvic magnetic resonance 55 imaging and endometrial biopsy) aims to stage the disease and evaluate the risk of 56 recurrence, and therefore to determine the appropriate therapeutic management, in 57 particular for lymph node staging during initial surgery.

58 However, this preoperative radiological assessment is not precise enough. 59 Radiological staging may underestimate disease extension and provide inaccurate 60 assessment of lymph node status. Moreover, most of the prognostic elements of the 61 International Federation of Gynecology and Obstetrics (FIGO) classification can only be 62 obtained after final histological examination of surgical specimens.

63 Therefore, surgery remains a key element in the management of endometrial cancer. 64 Its two main objectives are on one hand to perform ablation of the primitive tumor, and on 65 the other to precisely stage the disease and evaluate its prognosis factors. While the first 66 objective may be obtained with a "simple" hysterectomy, the latter requires much more 67 extensive intervention, including a complete omentectomy, pelvic lymphadenectomy and 68 lumbo-aortic lymphadenectomy [2, 3], whose therapeutic benefit remains controversial. 69 Patients with endometrial carcinoma are fragile and performing aggressive surgery may lead 70 to severe complications of critical concern in obese, older and fragile patients. There is 71 therefore a need of maximizing pre-operative diagnostic performances. A better selection of 72 patients undergoing surgery would result in reducing overtreatment risk, morbidity and 73 mortality through personalized care.

74 Radiological assessment may benefit from a tumor characterization using radiomics. 75 They are reproducible and quantitative image features allowing the non-invasive 76 characterization of the tumor heterogeneity [4]. Artificial intelligence in radiology is a recent 77 discipline allowing high-throughput extraction of digital medical imaging data to obtain 78 predictive and/or prognostic information about patients and their pathologies by describing 79 tumor heterogeneity and indirectly molecular and genetic characteristics of the tumor. It 80 could allow prediction of diagnosis, treatment response and prognosis. This new field of 81 research is gaining momentum in oncology as its applications are wide and promising, 82 especially for clinical decision-making and personalized treatment [5]. There is a strong 83 correlation between radiomic data and clinical outcomes. This concept has already proven 84 its effectiveness in the preoperative prediction of different solid tumors [6], including lung, 85 breast and colorectal cancers [7, 8].

86 The approach of AI differs from the conventional radiological method as it is an 87 automatic, reproducible and quantitative analysis of images that can go beyond the human 88 eye. AI algorithms can be trained to analyze either pre-determined parameters (*i.e.,* machine 89 learning), such as tumor size, tumor shape, lymph nodes, etc., or without human supervision 90 (*i.e.,* deep learning) with a free analysis chain that may not be clearly explainable for human 91 intelligence. An example of free analysis chain is the artificial neural network, which is 92 basically circuits of functions that take images as input and produce analysis on the output. 93 Neural network can be more or less complex, according to the objective and the input type. 94 A neural network is called "deep" when it is formed of "hidden layers" in which the 95 information flows. The more hidden layers are present, the deeper the network is, the more 96 complex it is. Such a model is powerful enough to adjust perfectly to a specific training 97 dataset with a risk of resulting in poor performances on new information, which is called

98 "overfitting". Therefore, different techniques of internal and external validation aim to avoid 99 this problem which tampers applicability of the algorithm. "Deep learning" refers to the use 100 of these deep neural networks.

101 Artificial Intelligence in Radiology is a promising field that may lead to a better 102 preoperative radiological assessment of patients with EC, and some literature have already 103 been published. However, because of its novelty, complexity and rapid evolution, assessing 104 the quality of this literature can be challenging. Therefore, our main objective was to study 105 the contribution of radiomics on the preoperative radiological assessment of patients with 106 EC through a systematic review. Our second objective was to establish a simple and 107 reproducible AI Quality Score applicable to Radiomics and Deep Learning studies.

108

#### 110 **Methods**

#### 111 *Literature Search Approach*

112 Medline (Pubmed) was searched on October 10, 2020, by two independent reviewers (LL, 113 JD) using the following keywords: endometrial carcinoma, imaging, radiomics, machine 114 learning, deep learning, artificial intelligence. Original articles were considered if they 115 studied endometrial carcinoma through imaging-based AI techniques. Non-English articles, 116 editorials or review articles were not included. Inclusion of studies was made in consensus.

117

#### 118 *Data extraction*

119 Data extracted included first author name, year of publication, main objective, study design 120 (retrospective or prospective, mono or multicentric), imaging technique used, sample size 121 (training, validation and testing), model type (Machine learning or Deep Learning), classifier 122 and diagnostic performance metrics.

123

#### 124 *Quality assessment using a Simplified and Reproducible AI Quality Score (SRQS)*

125 Assessing radiology research on artificial intelligence (AI) may be complex. Scores have been 126 proposed to evaluate the quality of AI studies. The Radiomics Quality Score (RQS) proposed 127 by Lambin *et al.* intended to provide guidance and evaluation criteria to readers [5]. 128 However, this score presents some limitations. It is complex to be used in routine, doesn't 129 apply to Deep Learning Research, and doesn't include clinical relevance. Based on published 130 guidelines for radiomics to ensure standardization, reproducibility and high-quality of 131 research articles [9, 10], we modified the RQS into a simplified and reproducible score fitted 132 to Radiomics and Deep Learning studies. This score (SRQS), based on 10 items and ranging 133 from 0 to 20 points, was designed to focus on essential steps and discriminate robust AI 134 research articles (Figure 1). Points were awarded based on the presence of each of following 135 criteria. First, this score acknowledges the clinical impact and relevance of the study (2 136 points). In a second step, specific details of data acquisition are evaluated: 5 points are 137 granted if it was prospective, 2 points if image acquisition was performed according to an 138 up-to-date and standardized imaging protocol, 2 points if the segmentation was performed 139 automatically, and 2 points if the authors considered the pathological diagnosis as the gold 140 standard. Thirdly, the score focuses on the AI model design, i.e., training and testing details. 141 Specific criteria in the training section are proposed to echo each other between Radiomics 142 and Deep Learning with an allocation of 3 points if the following criteria were present. 143 Regarding Radiomics, the model should be IBSI-compliant (Image Biomarker Standardization 144 Initiative [11]). Extraction and selection (correlation and redundance) of features and 145 classifiers should be detailed. Regarding Deep Learning, neural network architecture 146 (number of hidden layers, nodes, activation functions…), initialization of model parameters 147 (random or transfer learning from a pre-trained network) and training approach (data 148 augmentation, hyperparameters) should be detailed. As mentioned, testing a model, 149 preferably using an independent and external dataset, is mandatory to ensure its 150 generalization. The absence of a test cohort was sanctioned in our score with the withdrawal 151 of 5 points because it is the major step in the development of an AI model. Diagnostic 152 performance of the model should be evaluated using reliable performance metrics such as 153 the area under the curve, sensitivity or specificity to be granted 2 points.

154 Each article was evaluated by two independent readers using this score. The threshold of the 155 SRQS for sufficient quality was set at 10/20. We also evaluated the reliability of our 156 simplified RQS by performing a Cohen's Kappa test.

157 **Results** 

#### 158 Articles selected

159 Seventeen articles [12-28] were included in this review study (Table 1). The clinical 160 objectives of these articles were to classify cancer severity according to: deep myometrial 161 invasion (n=5) [14, 16, 19, 22, 25], lympho-vascular space invasion (n=3) [12, 16, 24], lymph 162 nodes involvement (n=4) [18, 19, 23, 27], "high-risk" endometrial carcinoma (n=2) [20, 28], 163 histologic grade (n=5) [12, 13, 16, 17, 21], high-risk histological subtype (n = 1) [19]; 164 endometrial precancerous lesion versus early-stage carcinoma (n=1) [26], benign versus 165 malignant endometrial lesion (n=1) [15], recurrence-free survival (n=1) [17], cervical stroma 166 invasion (n=1) [19].

167 Of the 17 studies, only 2 were multicentric [18, 28]. None was prospective. The predominant 168 technique was Magnetic Resonance Imaging (n=14) [12-19, 21, 22, 24, 25, 27, 28]. Positron 169 emission tomography computed tomography (n=2) [23, 26] and contrast-enhanced CT (n=1) 170 [20] were the two other modalities studied. Only two studies developed a Deep Learning-171 based model [14, 22]. The other 15 studies employed radiomics-based models [12, 13, 15- 172 21, 23-28].

173

#### 174 **Quality Assessment**

175 Quality assessment is shown in Table 2. Mean SRQS ranged from 0 to 14. The median score 176 was 4.

177 The highest SRQS (14/20) was for the article studying high risk group classification which 178 included different clinical and radiological parameters [28]. Absence of testing dataset and 179 retrospective design of the study were the most decisive criteria. Based on this analysis, we 180 have selected seven articles [22-28] that demonstrated sufficient quality (> 10/20):

181 myometrial invasion (n = 2) [22, 25], lympho-vascular space invasion (n = 1) [24], lymph 182 nodes involvement (n = 2) [23, 27], high-risk endometrial cancer (n = 1) [28] and on 183 differential diagnosis between endometrial precancerous lesion and early-stage carcinoma 184  $(n = 1)$  [26].

185

186 Article analysis

187 Only the results of the 7 articles of sufficient quality were analyzed [22-28]. Performance 188 metrics of these seven articles are summarized in Table 3.

189 Chen [22] and Stanzione's [25] articles, both published in 2020, studied myometrial 190 invasion by endometrial carcinoma. Both were retrospective studies based on MRI images. 191 The study by Chen *et al.* included 530 patients including 138 in the testing dataset and aimed 192 to determine the diagnostic performance of a deep learning model in assessing myometrial 193 invasion. This model demonstrated higher accuracy than radiologists (84.8% *versus* 78.3%) 194 based on pathology examination, but the best results were observed when both were 195 associated (86.2%). However, this study had limitations, including an unbalanced database 196 with only 18 cases of deep invasion (≥ 50%) and 120 cases of shallow invasion (< 50%) in the 197 testing dataset. The authors concluded that their model was effective and could be used in 198 clinical practice by radiologists [22].

199 The article by Stanzione *et al.* aimed to measure the performance of a learning 200 machine model to detect deep myometrial invasion. They included 54 patients (of which 201 20% were in the testing dataset and 80% in the training dataset). They found an accuracy of 202 92% *versus* 82% for unaided radiologists, and an accuracy of up to 100% (n = 11) when the 203 radiologist was assisted by the algorithm. The main limitation of these results was the low 204 number of patients. Nevertheless, this study demonstrated the feasibility of this model and 205 its usefulness in improving radiologists' performance and reducing inter-individual variability 206 [25].

207 The article by Luo *et al.*, published in 2020, was interested in evaluating lympho-208 vascular space invasion in preoperative imaging, as it is an important prognostic parameter 209 currently only accessible after post-operative pathological examination. The authors 210 performed a retrospective study based on MRI and developed a nomogram based on clinical 211 features and a radiomics score. They included 144 patients of which 43 were in the testing 212 dataset. The nomogram had a sensitivity of 94%, a specificity of 78.6%, and an area under 213 the curve (AUC) of 0.807. However, this study did not have a dataset validation, thus 214 exposing itself to the risk of overfitting and poorer diagnostic performance on the testing 215 dataset. These results could be used to predict preoperative lympho-vascular space invasion 216 and thus possibly adapt the therapeutic sequence for endometrial cancer [24].

217 Crivellaro *et al.* and Xu *et al.* studied lymph node involvement in endometrial cancer. 218 Crivellaro et al. published a retrospective study of 167 patients with early-stage endometrial 219 cancer in 2020. They evaluated the role of the 18FDG PET-scanner in predicting lymph node 220 involvement. They showed a moderate contribution in this configuration, especially since it 221 was based on a morphological and not a morphometabolic parameter, thus eventually 222 suggesting a better efficiency of MRI [23].

223 Xu *et al.* published in 2019 a retrospective study evaluating MRI for preoperative 224 prediction of metastatic lymph node involvement in 200 patients with endometrial cancer. 225 The algorithm was developed on 70% of the patients and tested on the remaining 30%. The 226 authors found an accuracy of about 85%, especially for intermediate sized nodes [27].

227 Yan *et al.* published in 2020 a retrospective multicenter study on a nomogram based 228 on clinical and MRI-based radiomic data to predict preoperatively high-risk endometrial 229 cancers (defined as the presence of at least one of deep myometrial invasion, grade 3 tumor, 230 lympho-vascular space invasion, cervical stroma invasion, lymph node metastasis, extra-231 uterine invasion, or non-endometrioid adenocarcinoma) and therefore their optimal surgical 232 management. They included 717 patients and compared the therapeutic proposals based on 233 the nomogram with those taken for these patients. They found on one hand good 234 preoperative prediction rates (AUC between 0.896 and 0.919) and on the other hand a 235 benefit in terms of correction of clinical decisions, thus suggesting a possible application in 236 clinical practice for the choice of surgical treatment [28].

237 Finally, Wang *et al.* investigated the differential diagnosis between atypical 238 hyperplasia with field cancerization and early-stage endometrial cancer  $(I_A)$ . They used 239 radiomics data from PET-scans of 170 patients. Maximum SUV and peak SUV were the best 240 predictors of diagnosis, especially between field cancerization and invasive cancer [26].

241

#### 242 Reliability of SRQS

243 The two independent readers were an oncology surgeon and a radiologist. There was an 244 excellent agreement between the two reviewer's assessment (Kappa = 0.95 IC 95% [0.907- 245 0.988]). There was almost no variability between the two readers, except for the item 246 "clinical outcome improving patient management" in 4 articles [17, 19, 21, 24].

247

#### 249 **Discussion**

250 We conducted a systematic review of the currently available data on the impact of 251 radiomics on preoperative imaging assessment in endometrial cancer. There is a need for a 252 non-invasive, efficient and reproducible method of stratification of the risk of recurrence to 253 adapt the therapeutic management of EC. Most of research studies were MRI-based, the 254 imaging modality of reference, and focusing on relevant clinical issues [14, 16-18, 22-24, 27, 255 28]. They demonstrated strong diagnostic performance in various objectives such as deep 256 myometrial invasion, lympho-vascular space invasion, lymph nodes involvement or 257 histologic grade. However, only few articles matched quality requirements [22-28], and none 258 provided a tool with a short-term applicability in clinical practice. We are therefore 259 compelled to consider that to date, we are only at the beginning of the development of this 260 field. Quality requirements should be of critical concern for researchers and clinicians in this 261 domain. For this reason, we developed a novel quality assessment score which avoids the 262 pitfalls of those already available. Nonetheless, radiomics is a very promising field and its 263 application in endometrial cancer could change our future practices.

264

#### 265 Quality issues

266 First, we noted a certain degree of heterogeneity among methodologies. This 267 heterogeneity is due to a lack of standardization, and this seems to be true not only for 268 mathematical methodology, but also for analyzed data.

269 Secondly, most of the included articles did not provide an independent testing of the 270 developed model preventing them from generalizability and external applicability. Indeed, 271 performances of AI algorithms can be impressive on training datasets due to overfitting.

272 While multicentric and prospective studies are necessary for accurately assessing impact on 273 clinical outcomes, none have been published.

#### 274 Quality assessment using a Simplified AI Quality Score

275 Assessing radiology research on artificial intelligence (AI) may be complex. Scores 276 have been proposed to evaluate the quality of AI studies. The Checklist for Artificial 277 Intelligence in Medical Imaging (CLAIM) [9] was inspired from validated ones such as the 278 STARD-AI [29] and CONSORT-AI [30] checklists. The CLAIM intended to provide a writing and 279 reading map to ensure standardization, reproducibility and high-quality of research articles. 280 Similarly, Bluemke *et al.* had previously proposed the key considerations for authors, 281 reviewers, and readers, from the definition of image datasets to the explainability of AI 282 algorithms [10]. Moreover, the Radiomics Quality Score proposed by Lambin *et al.* intended 283 to provide guidance and evaluation criteria to readers [5]. However, this score presents 284 some limitations. It is complex to be used in routine, does not apply to Deep Learning 285 Research and does not include clinical relevance.

286 To fill with the described requirements, we modified the Radiomics Quality Score into 287 a novel Simplified and Reproducible AI Quality Score (SRQS) applicable to Radiomics and 288 Deep Learning studies based on 10 items and ranging from 0 to 20 points. This score was 289 designed to focus on essential steps and distinguish robust AI research articles. Its main 290 advantages are to be easy to use, reproducible and discriminant. First, we considered that 291 no study could be justified without a clinical substrate. Therefore, any study that did not 292 attempt to address a clinical issue was considered irrelevant. Secondly, we highlighted 293 details of dataset acquisition as selection biases are of critical concern, especially for AI 294 algorithms which can perfectly fit to a specific dataset. It is an understatement to say that 295 the prospective aspect of a study shields from severe bias. Thirdly, model development is 296 defined by the training and testing details. Training an AI model requires consistency and 297 robustness. Every detail should be provided to the reader to ensure reproducibility by 298 another research team. In a matter of reproducibility and standardization in the field of 299 "traditional" radiomics, the Image Biomarker Standardization Initiative, an independent 300 international collaboration, gave guidelines and definitions for the extraction of high-301 throughput image biomarkers. Such definitions of image biomarkers cannot apply to the 302 field of Deep Learning as they are free of human intervention. As mentioned, testing a 303 model, preferably using an independent and external dataset, is mandatory to assure its 304 generalization. We stated in this score that testing a model was the major step in the 305 development of an AI model. Finally, statistical analysis – including performance metrics – 306 should be detailed and were therefore included in our score.

307

#### 308 **Conclusion**

309 Although there is insufficient evidence of a benefit of radiomics in endometrial 310 cancer, preliminary data suggest that these new technologies – applied in conjunction with 311 human intelligence – can address some of the clinical issues. We found that some models 312 are already under development and show good performances. These models need to follow 313 high-quality standards and undergo external validation through prospective clinical trials. In 314 view of the rapid expansion of this domain, we expect to see in a short-term future new and 315 evidence-based models with applicability in clinical practice.

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318

- 321 **Declaration of interests**
- 322 None
- 323 **Acknowledgements**
- 324 This work was supported by French state funds managed within the "Plan Investissements
- 325 d'Avenir" and by the ANR (reference ANR-10-IAHU-02)

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## **Table 1: Characteristics of the studies included in the review**











