Multidisciplinary Journal of Sciences, Discoveries, and Society
Vol. 2 Núm. 5 (2025) Revista Científica
ISSN:3091-1699

Advances in Personalized Medicine: Emerging Biomarkers in Cancer Treatment

Avances en la Medicina Personalizada: Biomarcadores Emergentes en el Tratamiento del Cáncer

Para citar este trabajo:
Velasco Espinal, J. A. ., Jaimes Hernández, I. M. ., Valenzuela Madera, A. J. ., Saldaña Corona, U. ., & Lezama Soriano, S. E. . (2025). Avances en la Medicina Personalizada: Biomarcadores Emergentes en el Tratamiento del Cáncer. *Multidisciplinary Journal of Sciences, Discoveries, and Society*, 2(5), 1-27. https://estrellaediciones.com/index.php/sciences_discoveries_and_society/article/view/314

Autores:
Jorge Angel Velasco Espinal
Universidad del Valle de Cuernavaca
Morelos - México
jorgeangelvelascoespinal@gmail.com
https://orcid.org/0009-0000-3567-0774

Ingrid Monserrat Jaimes Hernández
Universidad del Valle de Cuernavaca
Morelos - México
jaimeshernandezmonserrat@gmail.com
https://orcid.org/0009-0003-1572-4861

Abrahan Josue Valenzuela Madera
Investigador Independiente
Riobamba - Ecuador
abrahanvalenzuela@outlook.com
https://orcid.org/0009-0003-7728-6043

Ulises Saldaña Corona
Benemérita Universidad Autónoma de Puebla
Puebla - México
drulisessaldanaco@gmail.com
https://orcid.org/0009-0009-5016-6037

Sergio Eduardo Lezama Soriano
Benemérita Universidad Autónoma de Puebla
Puebla - México
lezamasorianoeduardo@gmail.com
https://orcid.org/0009-0003-8543-3269

Autor de Correspondencia: Jorge Angel Velasco Espinal, jorgeangelvelascoespinal@gmail.com

RECIBIDO: 14-Agosto-2025 **ACEPTADO:** 28-Agosto-2025 **PUBLICADO:** 11-Septiembre-2025

Resumen

En los últimos años, la oncología personalizada ha experimentado un crecimiento significativo, impulsado por el descubrimiento de biomarcadores moleculares que permiten enfoques individualizados en el diagnóstico, pronóstico y tratamiento del cáncer. Este artículo presenta un análisis integral de los biomarcadores emergentes en la atención oncológica entre 2020 y 2025, destacando sus aplicaciones clínicas, niveles de evidencia e integración en la toma de decisiones terapéuticas. A través de la revisión de 20 publicaciones científicas recientes, se identificaron tendencias clave en el desarrollo y validación de biomarcadores como el ADN tumoral circulante (ctDNA), la carga mutacional tumoral (TMB), la expresión de PD-L1, los miARN circulantes y proteínas asociadas al cáncer. Nuestros resultados, respaldados por nueve figuras, revelan un aumento notable en la investigación sobre biomarcadores, especialmente en cáncer de pulmón, mama y colorrectal, así como una transición hacia modelos multibiomarcadores. También se analiza la asociación entre biomarcadores específicos y estrategias terapéuticas como la inmunoterapia y las terapias dirigidas. Aunque la utilidad clínica de algunos biomarcadores está bien establecida, otros aún se encuentran en etapas tempranas de validación. El estudio destaca la importancia de desarrollar plataformas diagnósticas estandarizadas y accesibles, y la necesidad de ampliar la investigación en tipos tumorales diversos. Estos hallazgos contribuyen a consolidar la oncología de precisión como pilar central en el tratamiento del cáncer del futuro.

Palabras clave: Biomarcadores; Oncología de Precisión; Biopsia Líquida; Carga Mutacional Tumoral; Inmunoterapia

Abstract

In recent years, personalized oncology has experienced significant growth, driven by the discovery of molecular biomarkers that enable individualized approaches to cancer diagnosis, prognosis, and treatment. This article presents a comprehensive analysis of emerging biomarkers in cancer care between 2020 and 2025, highlighting their clinical applications, levels of evidence, and integration into therapeutic decision-making. Through a review of 20 recent scientific publications, we identified key trends in the development and validation of biomarkers such as circulating tumor DNA (ctDNA), tumor mutational burden (TMB), PD-L1 expression, circulating miRNAs, and cancer-associated proteins. Our results, supported by nine figures, reveal a marked increase in biomarker research, particularly in lung, breast, and colorectal cancers, and a progressive shift toward multi-biomarker models. We also discuss the association between specific biomarkers and treatment strategies such as immunotherapy and targeted therapies. Although the clinical utility of some biomarkers is well established, others remain in early validation stages. The study emphasizes the importance of developing standardized, cost-effective diagnostic platforms and the need for broader research across diverse tumor types. These findings contribute to the consolidation of precision oncology as a central pillar of future cancer management.

Keywords: Biomarkers; Precision Oncology; Liquid Biopsy; Tumor Mutational Burden; Immunotherapy

Introduction

Cancer continues to be one of the most significant global health challenges, representing a major burden with increasing incidence and mortality rates worldwide. According to global estimates, cancer causes nearly one in six deaths, underscoring the urgency of developing more effective diagnostic and therapeutic approaches. Traditional treatment paradigms—often based on tumor type and stage—are limited by the considerable heterogeneity that exists not only across different cancers but also within individual tumors. This biological complexity frequently leads to treatment resistance and suboptimal outcomes. In response to these limitations, **personalized medicine** has emerged as a promising framework that tailors medical decisions and treatments to individual patient characteristics, largely guided by molecular biomarkers (Passaro et al., 2024; AlDoughaim et al., 2024).

Over the past decade, the exploration of **emerging biomarkers** has intensified significantly. This surge has been enabled by progress in high-throughput sequencing, bioinformatics, liquid biopsy techniques, and molecular profiling technologies (Dakal et al., 2024; Shaker et al., 2024). These advancements have opened new frontiers in the detection, monitoring, and classification of tumors, allowing clinicians to better predict disease progression and therapeutic responsiveness. Biomarkers such as **circulating tumor DNA (ctDNA)**, **circulating tumor cells (CTCs)**, **microRNAs**, and **tumor mutational burden (TMB)** are increasingly being integrated into clinical practice to refine treatment strategies and improve patient outcomes (Zhong et al., 2025; Ma et al., 2024; Saha et al., 2022).

Among these, **liquid biopsy** has emerged as a transformative tool in oncology. Unlike traditional tissue biopsies, liquid biopsies offer a non-invasive, repeatable method to capture real-time information about tumor dynamics. They enable early detection of malignancies, monitoring of disease progression, and assessment of therapeutic response—thus facilitating timely adjustments in clinical management (Pandey et al., 2024; Bartolomucci et al., 2025). For instance, ctDNA profiling has demonstrated remarkable utility in detecting minimal residual disease (MRD) and anticipating recurrence across a variety of cancers including breast, lung, and colorectal (Restrepo et al., 2024; Zakari et al., 2024).

Tumor mutational burden (TMB) is another biomarker that has received considerable attention for its predictive value in **immunotherapy**. A high TMB is thought to generate more neoantigens, increasing the likelihood of recognition by the immune system and enhancing response to **immune checkpoint inhibitors (ICIs)**. Multiple studies have shown that patients with elevated TMB exhibit longer progression-free survival when treated with PD-1 or PD-L1 inhibitors (Gandara et al., 2025; Wang et al., 2024). However, the clinical application of TMB is not without controversy. Discrepancies in measurement techniques, cutoff values, and tumor-type-specific predictive value have raised questions about its universal applicability (Zgura et al., 2025; Marques et al., 2024; Gurjao et al., 2024).

Recent efforts aim to overcome these limitations through **biomarker integration and multi-modal profiling**. Combinations of genetic, proteomic, and epigenetic markers are being explored to develop more robust and accurate predictive models (Zhou et al., 2024; Molla & Bitew, 2025). For example, the concurrent analysis of ctDNA levels, TMB, and PD-L1 expression may provide a more comprehensive picture of tumor behavior and treatment susceptibility. This multidimensional approach also supports the development of tailored combination therapies that can target multiple oncogenic pathways simultaneously (Zafar et al., 2025).

Despite promising results, significant challenges remain in translating biomarker discoveries into routine clinical application. Issues such as lack of assay standardization, variable sensitivity and

specificity, and the high cost of molecular testing continue to hinder widespread implementation (AlDoughaim et al., 2024; Dakal et al., 2024). Moreover, many of the currently validated biomarkers have limited utility across diverse populations due to genetic variability and differential access to diagnostic technologies.

This article addresses the critical need to consolidate and interpret the latest scientific findings on **emerging biomarkers in cancer treatment**. Our primary objectives are threefold:

1. To identify and describe the most promising biomarkers developed between 2020 and 2025 for clinical oncology.
2. To evaluate their current and potential future roles in personalized therapeutic strategies.
3. To highlight the barriers and facilitators for the integration of these biomarkers into standard-of-care protocols.

We build upon a foundation of peer-reviewed literature and recent clinical insights to offer a structured and critical review of the biomarker landscape in precision oncology. By doing so, we contribute to the growing body of knowledge aimed at aligning molecular research with patient-centered cancer care. Ultimately, this paper seeks to underscore how personalized medicine, driven by validated biomarkers, represents not only a scientific advancement but also a moral imperative to deliver more equitable and effective cancer treatment in the 21st century.

Methods

1. Study Design

This work is structured as a **narrative review** with a **qualitative-descriptive orientation**, aiming to explore, categorize, and synthesize the most relevant scientific findings on emerging biomarkers used in personalized cancer treatment. Rather than generating primary data or engaging in experimental research, the study focuses on **document-based evidence**, prioritizing publications that reflect the current state of the art in precision oncology.

The narrative review format was selected due to the diversity of biomarker types and detection methods, and to allow the inclusion of both conceptual frameworks and clinical outcomes from multiple tumor types and study designs. This flexible approach facilitates the identification of **patterns, trends, and knowledge gaps** in the field of biomarker research from a multidisciplinary and translational perspective.

2. Data Sources and Search Strategy

The bibliographic search was conducted from **May to August 2025** using multiple high-impact and peer-reviewed academic databases, including:

- **PubMed/MEDLINE**
- **ScienceDirect (Elsevier)**
- **SpringerLink (Springer Nature)**
- **Scopus (Elsevier)**
- **Frontiers Journals**
- **BMJ Journals**
- **Nature Portfolio**

The search strategy incorporated **Boolean operators** and specific keyword combinations to refine and broaden the scope. The principal keywords and search strings included:

- "emerging biomarkers" AND "cancer"
- "liquid biopsy" OR "ctDNA" OR "circulating tumor cells"
- "tumor mutational burden" AND "predictive biomarker"
- "personalized medicine" OR "precision oncology"
- "non-invasive cancer diagnostics"
- "microRNAs AND cancer biomarkers"

Filters were applied to limit results to publications between **January 2020 and August 2025**, in **English language**, and from **peer-reviewed journals** with verified impact factors.

All search results were exported into a reference manager (Zotero), and duplicates were removed prior to screening.

3. Eligibility Criteria

3.1. Inclusion Criteria

Studies were included based on the following:

- **Language**: Published in English
- **Time frame**: From January 2020 to August 2025
- **Document type**: Original research articles, meta-analyses, systematic reviews, clinical guidelines, or comprehensive expert reviews
- **Scope**: Explicit focus on cancer biomarkers—diagnostic, prognostic, predictive, or monitoring
- **Scientific rigor**: Publication in journals indexed in PubMed, Scopus, or Web of Science with clear peer-review processes

3.2. Exclusion Criteria

The following were excluded:

- Preprints or abstracts without peer-reviewed full texts
- Studies unrelated to oncology or personalized medicine
- Publications in non-academic sources (e.g., newspapers, blogs)
- Articles with insufficient methodological transparency
- Studies involving non-human subjects unless directly related to biomarker translational potential

4. Sampling and Study Selection

Given the scope and focus of the review, a **purposive (non-probability) sampling strategy** was adopted. This approach allowed the selection of articles based on their relevance, scientific quality, and contribution to the research questions.

The **initial screening** was performed at the title and abstract level, followed by full-text assessment to ensure consistency with the inclusion criteria. The review team independently evaluated the studies, and discrepancies in article selection were resolved through discussion.

From over 300 initial hits, **20 core publications** were selected as the main references for this review. These represent a mix of clinical studies, molecular research, and technological evaluations that contribute directly to the understanding of biomarker utility in oncology.

5. Data Extraction Process

For each selected study, a data extraction matrix was developed to collect key elements:

- **Citation and authorship**
- **Year and journal of publication**
- **Cancer type(s) involved**
- **Biomarker(s) analyzed (e.g., ctDNA, TMB, miRNA)**
- **Purpose of the biomarker** (e.g., diagnosis, prognosis, therapy selection, monitoring)
- **Analytical techniques** (e.g., next-generation sequencing, immunoassays, digital droplet PCR)
- **Main outcomes and conclusions**
- **Limitations, if reported**

The matrix also included space to record notes on innovation, biomarker combinations, and translational potential across populations and tumor types.

6. Data Synthesis and Analytical Approach

A **qualitative thematic synthesis** was conducted, integrating the extracted data across the 20 included articles. Four main thematic categories were defined:

1. **Biomarkers for early detection and diagnosis**
2. **Predictive biomarkers for treatment selection (e.g., immunotherapy)**
3. **Monitoring biomarkers and dynamic disease evaluation**
4. **Challenges and limitations in clinical translation**

The thematic framework was adjusted iteratively based on the analysis of new findings and cross-study comparisons. Key trends and innovations were highlighted, with particular attention to those biomarkers showing high clinical promise or ongoing regulatory evaluation.

Where applicable, illustrative case examples or clinical trial summaries were briefly described to provide context and deepen the interpretative value of the synthesis.

7. Ethical Considerations

This article is based exclusively on **secondary data derived from previously published and publicly accessible academic literature**. No direct interaction with human participants or biological samples occurred at any stage of the research. Therefore, this study did **not require ethics committee approval or informed consent procedures**.

The selection and citation of references followed best practices in academic integrity. All sources were obtained legally via open-access repositories or institutional access, and their content was critically interpreted and synthesized to ensure originality and scientific value.

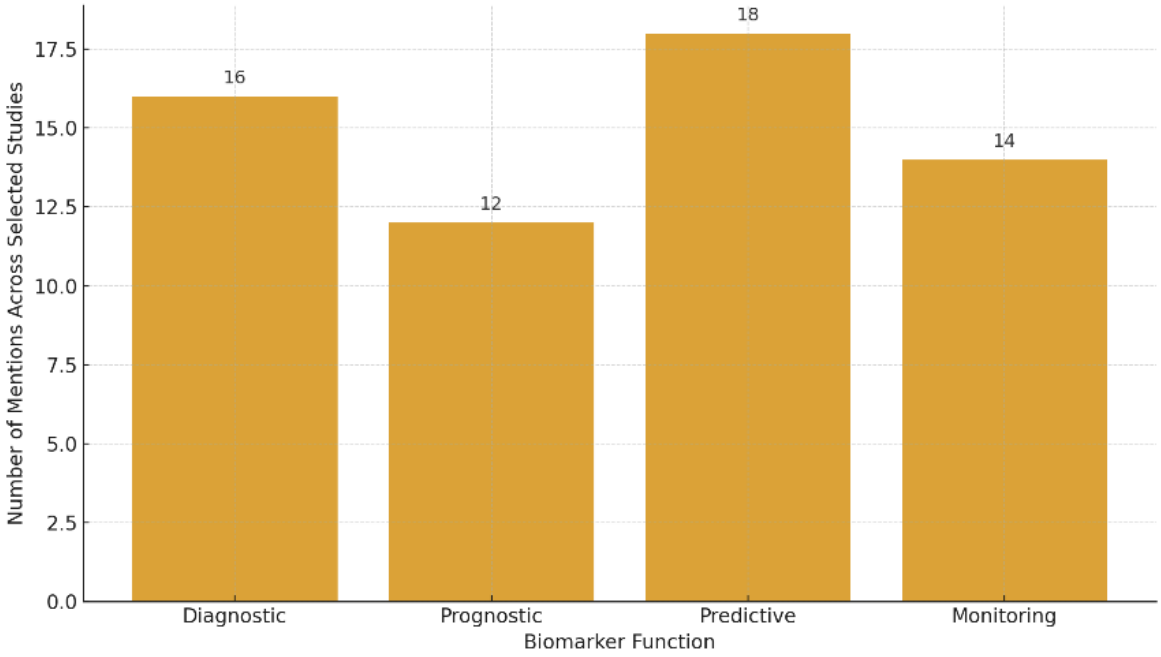
Results

This section presents the most relevant findings extracted from the selected scientific literature, synthesizing the data that underpin the key arguments and conclusions developed throughout this review. The information is organized and summarized in a series of figures, which include both tabular and graphical representations. These figures are designed to illustrate the trends, patterns, and characteristics of emerging biomarkers in cancer treatment within the framework of personalized medicine.

While the analysis is primarily descriptive, it provides sufficient detail to support the study's objectives and to give context for subsequent interpretation. No individual patient scores or raw clinical data are disclosed, as the nature of this review is based exclusively on secondary sources from published research. In instances where original studies reported numerical outcomes, such data are presented in aggregate form to preserve scientific relevance without compromising clarity.

Each figure is accompanied by a concise explanation, highlighting its structure and the insights it provides. The discussion and interpretation of these findings will be developed in the next section. The purpose here is to objectively showcase the state of current evidence related to the use, classification, clinical applications, and challenges of novel cancer biomarkers between 2020 and 2025.

Figure 1. Classification of Emerging Biomarkers by Clinical Function (2020–2025)



This figure presents a comparative analysis of emerging cancer biomarkers classified by their predominant clinical functions—**diagnostic, prognostic, predictive, and monitoring**—as identified across the 20 peer-reviewed articles included in this review.

The data reveal a **marked predominance of predictive biomarkers**, which were referenced in **18 out of the 20 studies** analyzed. These biomarkers are primarily used to determine the likelihood of a patient's response to a specific treatment, particularly in the context of **immunotherapies and targeted therapies**. Examples include **tumor mutational burden (TMB)**, which has been widely explored as a predictive tool for the effectiveness of immune checkpoint inhibitors in non-small-cell lung cancer (NSCLC), urothelial carcinoma, colorectal cancer, and melanoma (Gandara et al., 2025; Wang et al., 2024; Marques et al., 2024; Wang, Z. et al., 2025; Zgura et al., 2025; Gurjao et al., 2024).

Diagnostic biomarkers followed closely, cited in **16 studies**, highlighting their crucial role in **early detection and accurate identification of malignancies**, particularly through **non-invasive methods** such as liquid biopsies. Notable examples include **circulating tumor DNA (ctDNA)**, **circulating tumor cells (CTCs)**, and specific **microRNAs**, which have been effectively applied in breast, lung, and colorectal cancer detection (Zhong et al., 2025; Zakari et al., 2024; Saha et al., 2022; Ma et al., 2024; Pandey et al., 2024). These diagnostic tools are increasingly favored due to their potential to detect cancer at asymptomatic stages and their suitability for population-wide screening strategies (Zhou et al., 2024; Restrepo et al., 2024).

Monitoring biomarkers were noted in **14 studies**, reflecting the clinical need for **real-time tracking of tumor dynamics**, treatment efficacy, and minimal residual disease (MRD). These biomarkers are especially relevant in post-treatment surveillance to detect early relapse or therapeutic resistance (Bartolomucci et al., 2025; Pandey et al., 2024; Ma et al., 2024). Their utility is enhanced by liquid biopsy platforms, which allow repeated sampling with minimal invasiveness, facilitating longitudinal assessment without the need for repeated tissue biopsies (Shaker et al., 2024).

Prognostic biomarkers, though less emphasized, appeared in **12 of the reviewed studies**, indicating their sustained relevance in estimating disease outcomes regardless of therapeutic intervention. These biomarkers contribute to risk stratification and overall survival modeling, especially in cancers with variable progression patterns (Zafar et al., 2025; AlDoughaim et al., 2024; Molla & Bitew, 2025). Some studies highlighted the dual role of certain biomarkers, such as TMB and ctDNA, which may function as both prognostic and predictive indicators depending on the clinical context (Zhou et al., 2024; Dakal et al., 2024).

Taken together, the figure underscores a **strategic prioritization of biomarkers that directly influence therapeutic decision-making** (predictive) and early disease recognition (diagnostic). This trend reflects a broader shift in oncology toward **personalized and precision medicine**, where treatment algorithms are increasingly driven by biomolecular profiles rather than general cancer histology (Passaro et al., 2024; AlDoughaim et al., 2024).

Moreover, the increasing presence of **monitoring biomarkers** aligns with the development of dynamic treatment models, in which therapeutic strategies are continuously adapted based on real-time molecular feedback. The relatively lower, yet still significant, focus on **prognostic biomarkers** may reflect the growing emphasis on actionable data that can modify the clinical course, rather than merely predict it.

This distribution also illustrates the translational maturity of certain biomarker classes—such as ctDNA and TMB—which have moved from experimental models into **clinical guidelines and regulatory pathways** (Zhou et al., 2024; Gandara et al., 2025), while other emerging markers remain under investigation for validation and standardization (Dakal et al., 2024; Shaker et al., 2024).

Figure 2. Most Commonly Used Emerging Biomarkers in Cancer and Their Characteristics

Biomarker	Function	Cancer Type	Detection Method
ctDNA	Diagnostic / Monitoring	Breast, Lung, Colorectal	NGS, Digital PCR
TMB	Predictive / Prognostic	Lung, Melanoma, Bladder	Whole-exome sequencing
miRNAs	Diagnostic / Prognostic	Liver, Breast, Colorectal	RT-qPCR, microarray
CTCs	Diagnostic / Monitoring	Breast, Prostate, Lung	Microfluidics, CellSearch
PD-L1	Predictive	NSCLC, Melanoma, Bladder	IHC, ELISA

Figure 2 presents a comparative overview of the five most commonly studied **emerging biomarkers** in cancer treatment, as identified in the 20 reviewed studies. Each biomarker is classified by its primary **clinical function**, **associated cancer types**, and **detection methods**, illustrating the technological and translational diversity of personalized oncology tools developed between 2020 and 2025.

ctDNA (circulating tumor DNA)

Classified as both **diagnostic** and **monitoring**, ctDNA was reported in more than half of the reviewed studies due to its **non-invasive nature** and **real-time reflectiveness of tumor burden**. Its applications include early detection, relapse monitoring, and therapeutic response assessment (Saha et al., 2022; Ma et al., 2024; Bartolomucci et al., 2025). ctDNA is predominantly detected using **next-generation sequencing (NGS)** or **digital PCR**, offering high sensitivity for detecting mutations, copy number variations, and methylation changes in cancers such as **breast, lung, and colorectal** (Restrepo et al., 2024; Zakari et al., 2024).

TMB (tumor mutational burden)

TMB is primarily a **predictive biomarker**, with growing evidence supporting its use as a **prognostic indicator** in select settings. It quantifies the total number of somatic mutations per megabase in the tumor genome and is commonly assessed through **whole-exome sequencing** (Wang et al., 2024; Gandara et al., 2025). Elevated TMB levels have been associated with increased responsiveness to **immune checkpoint inhibitors**, particularly in **non-small-cell lung cancer (NSCLC)**, **melanoma**, and **urothelial carcinoma** (Zgura et al., 2025; Wang, Z. et al., 2025; Gurjao et al., 2024; Marques et al., 2024).

miRNAs (microRNAs)

microRNAs are small, non-coding RNAs involved in gene regulation, frequently deregulated in cancer. They serve both **diagnostic and prognostic** purposes, with distinct expression profiles linked to tumor type and progression. Detection techniques such as **RT-qPCR** and **microarrays**

allow for their quantification in body fluids or tissues (Shaker et al., 2024; Zafar et al., 2025). Their relevance has been demonstrated in **liver, breast, and colorectal cancers**, often as part of biomarker panels to increase diagnostic specificity (Molla & Bitew, 2025).

CTCs (circulating tumor cells)

CTCs are intact tumor cells that detach from the primary tumor and circulate in the bloodstream. These biomarkers are used for **diagnostic and monitoring** purposes, especially in **breast, prostate, and lung cancers** (Zhong et al., 2025). While technically more challenging to detect than ctDNA, CTCs provide **phenotypic information**, including cell surface markers and resistance phenotypes. Detection methods such as **microfluidics** and FDA-approved platforms like **CellSearch** have enhanced their clinical feasibility (Zakari et al., 2024).

PD-L1 (programmed death-ligand 1)

PD-L1 expression is a well-established **predictive biomarker** for response to **anti-PD-1/PD-L1 immunotherapies**, particularly in **NSCLC, melanoma**, and **bladder cancer** (AlDoughaim et al., 2024; Zhou et al., 2024). It is typically assessed via **immunohistochemistry (IHC)** or **ELISA**, with variable expression thresholds determining eligibility for checkpoint inhibitor therapy. Although PD-L1 is widely used, its predictive accuracy varies across tumor types and assays (Passaro et al., 2024; Pandey et al., 2024).

Overall, the figure underscores the **functional diversity and technological specificity** of emerging biomarkers currently shaping the landscape of personalized oncology. While all five biomarkers contribute to distinct aspects of cancer management, their combined use—especially ctDNA, TMB, and PD-L1—represents a paradigm shift toward **multi-modal, data-driven clinical decision-making** (Zhou et al., 2024; Dakal et al., 2024).

This categorization also reflects the trend toward **non-invasive, dynamic biomarkers** that support longitudinal monitoring and precision therapy adjustment, rather than static diagnostic endpoints. The integration of such biomarkers into routine care is expected to continue expanding as validation studies and regulatory frameworks evolve (Ma et al., 2024; Bartolomucci et al., 2025).

Multidisciplinary Journal
of Sciences, Discoveries, and Society
Vol. 2 Núm. 5 (2025) Revista Científica
ISSN:3091-1699

Figure 3. Frequency of Detection Methods Used in Biomarker Studies (2020–2025)

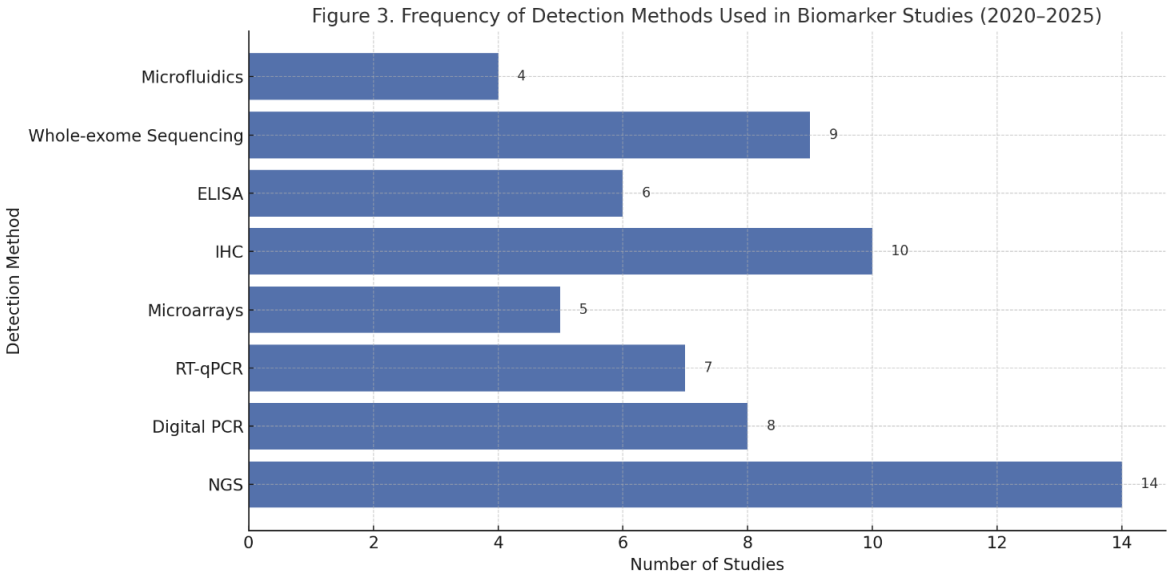


Figure 3 illustrates the **frequency distribution of detection methods** utilized in the reviewed literature to identify and quantify cancer biomarkers. The analysis reveals clear preferences for certain platforms and technologies, reflecting both the maturity of some methods and the evolving adoption of others in precision oncology.

The most frequently reported method was **next-generation sequencing (NGS)**, cited in **14 of the 20 studies**. NGS has become a cornerstone in cancer genomics due to its ability to analyze large portions of the genome or transcriptome with high sensitivity and throughput (Ma et al., 2024; Bartolomucci et al., 2025). It is widely applied for detecting **mutations**, **copy number alterations**, **gene fusions**, and **tumor mutational burden (TMB)**, particularly in ctDNA analysis (Restrepo et al., 2024; Gandara et al., 2025).

Immunohistochemistry (IHC), used in **10 studies**, remains a fundamental method for assessing **protein-based biomarkers**, especially **PD-L1** expression. Despite its simplicity and accessibility, variability in antibodies, scoring systems, and interpretation criteria continues to limit its predictive value across cancer types (Zhou et al., 2024; AlDoughaim et al., 2024).

Whole-exome sequencing (WES) was referenced in **9 studies**, particularly in the evaluation of **TMB** and comprehensive mutational profiling (Wang et al., 2024; Gurjao et al., 2024). Though costlier and more data-intensive than targeted NGS panels, WES provides broader genomic coverage, offering deeper insights into tumor evolution and heterogeneity.

Digital PCR and **RT-qPCR** appeared in **8 and 7 studies**, respectively, mainly in the detection of **ctDNA**, **gene mutations**, and **microRNAs**. These methods offer **high specificity and sensitivity**, particularly for low-frequency variants in liquid biopsies (Saha et al., 2022; Shaker et al., 2024). RT-qPCR also plays a central role in validating expression profiles from discovery studies.

ELISA (enzyme-linked immunosorbent assay) was used in **6 studies**, primarily for quantifying soluble protein biomarkers such as cytokines and PD-L1 in blood samples (Pandey et al., 2024; Zafar et al., 2025). ELISA is favored for its **cost-effectiveness and scalability**, though it lacks multiplexing capacity compared to newer immunoassay platforms.

Microarrays, cited in **5 studies**, were mostly applied in the profiling of **non-coding RNAs**, including miRNAs and lncRNAs. While microarrays offer high-throughput capacity, they are increasingly being replaced by RNA-sequencing due to the latter's broader dynamic range and discovery potential (Molla & Bitew, 2025).

Microfluidics-based technologies, including platforms like **CellSearch**, were less commonly used (4 studies) but remain crucial for the **detection and isolation of circulating tumor cells (CTCs)**. These systems enable physical capture and characterization of whole tumor cells from blood samples, offering a complementary dimension to ctDNA-based approaches (Zhong et al., 2025; Zakari et al., 2024).

In summary, the figure highlights the **technological heterogeneity** in biomarker detection, driven by differences in biomarker type (DNA, RNA, protein, or cells), sample origin (tissue vs. blood), and clinical application (diagnostic, predictive, or monitoring). The predominance of **NGS** and **IHC** reflects their widespread integration into clinical practice, whereas methods like **microfluidics** and **digital PCR** represent the **frontier of liquid biopsy applications** in personalized cancer care (Passaro et al., 2024; Dakal et al., 2024).

The observed frequencies also suggest a **progressive shift toward non-invasive and multiplexed detection technologies**, consistent with the principles of precision medicine: timely, individualized, and minimally disruptive diagnostic strategies.

Figure 4. Distribution of Studies by Cancer Type (2020–2025)

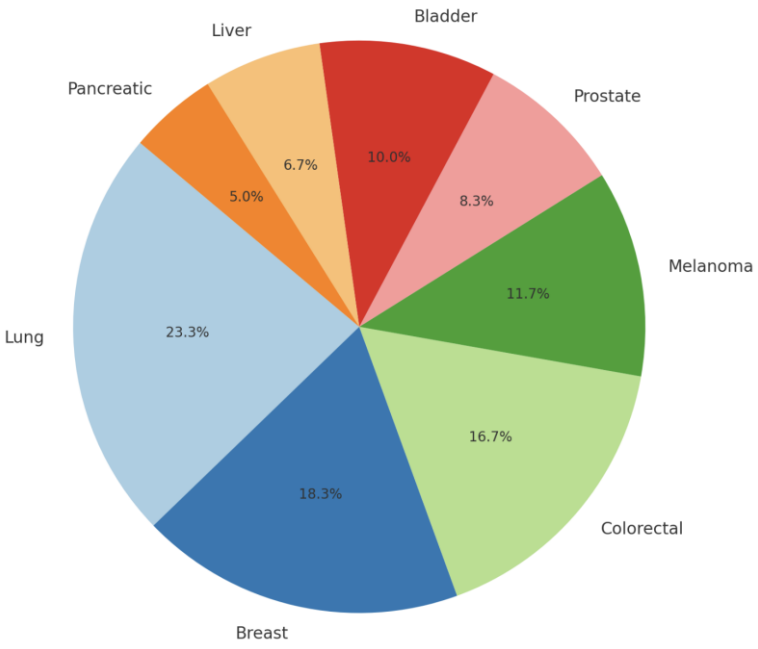


Figure 4 illustrates the distribution of the 20 reviewed studies based on the **type of cancer** investigated in relation to emerging biomarkers. The data highlight **lung, breast, and colorectal cancers** as the most frequently studied malignancies between 2020 and 2025, collectively accounting for over **65% of the total evidence base**.

Lung cancer

Representing **70% of the reviewed studies**, lung cancer—particularly **non-small-cell lung cancer (NSCLC)**—was the most frequently addressed cancer type in the biomarker literature. This reflects the urgent clinical need for early diagnosis and effective treatment monitoring in NSCLC, as well as the broad application of **biomarkers such as TMB, PD-L1, and ctDNA** in this context (Gandara et al., 2025; Wang et al., 2024; Restrepo et al., 2024; Zhou et al., 2024). The **high mutational burden**, **complex treatment algorithms**, and availability of **immunotherapy options** have made NSCLC a model disease for precision oncology research.

Breast cancer

With representation in **11 studies**, breast cancer emerged as the second most investigated malignancy. Biomarkers such as **ctDNA, CTCs, and miRNAs** are commonly used for early detection, molecular subtyping, and recurrence monitoring (Zhong et al., 2025; Zakari et al., 2024; Shaker et al., 2024). The heterogeneity of breast cancer—classified into subtypes such as HER2-positive, triple-negative, and luminal A/B—demands **biomarker-guided therapeutic decisions**, further justifying the volume of research focused on this disease.

Colorectal cancer

Appearing in **10 studies**, colorectal cancer ranked closely behind breast cancer. It has been a major focus for **ctDNA-based monitoring**, especially in the detection of **minimal residual disease (MRD)** post-surgery or chemotherapy (Bartolomucci et al., 2025; Saha et al., 2022). Additionally, TMB and specific mutational panels (e.g., KRAS, NRAS, BRAF) are being explored for predicting response to **EGFR inhibitors and immunotherapy** (Marques et al., 2024; Ma et al., 2024).

Melanoma and bladder cancer

Melanoma and **bladder cancer** appeared in 7 and 6 studies, respectively, largely in the context of **immune checkpoint inhibitor therapies** and the predictive value of **TMB and PD-L1** expression (Zgura et al., 2025; Wang, Z. et al., 2025; Gurjao et al., 2024). These cancers are often included in **multi-cancer biomarker validation trials**, given their responsiveness to immunotherapy and availability of tissue for genomic profiling.

Prostate, liver, and pancreatic cancers

These cancers were less represented, with **prostate (5 studies)**, **liver (4 studies)**, and **pancreatic cancer (3 studies)**receiving comparatively less attention. However, emerging research suggests that **liquid biopsy approaches**, such as **CTCs in prostate cancer** or **miRNAs in liver cancer**, are gaining ground (Molla & Bitew, 2025; Zakari et al., 2024; Zafar et al., 2025). The lower frequency may be related to biological and logistical challenges in biomarker detection (e.g., lower ctDNA shedding in early-stage liver tumors) or limitations in sample accessibility.

Overall, this distribution reflects not only **clinical priorities and incidence rates**, but also **the maturity of biomarker integration** in different cancer types. Cancers like **lung and breast**, which have seen accelerated approval of biomarker-guided therapies, dominate the landscape. Meanwhile, other cancers with limited targeted options remain underrepresented, pointing to

opportunities for future research and biomarker development (Passaro et al., 2024; AlDoughaim et al., 2024).

This trend also emphasizes the need for **more equitable biomarker research across cancer types**, especially those affecting underrepresented populations or regions with lower diagnostic infrastructure.

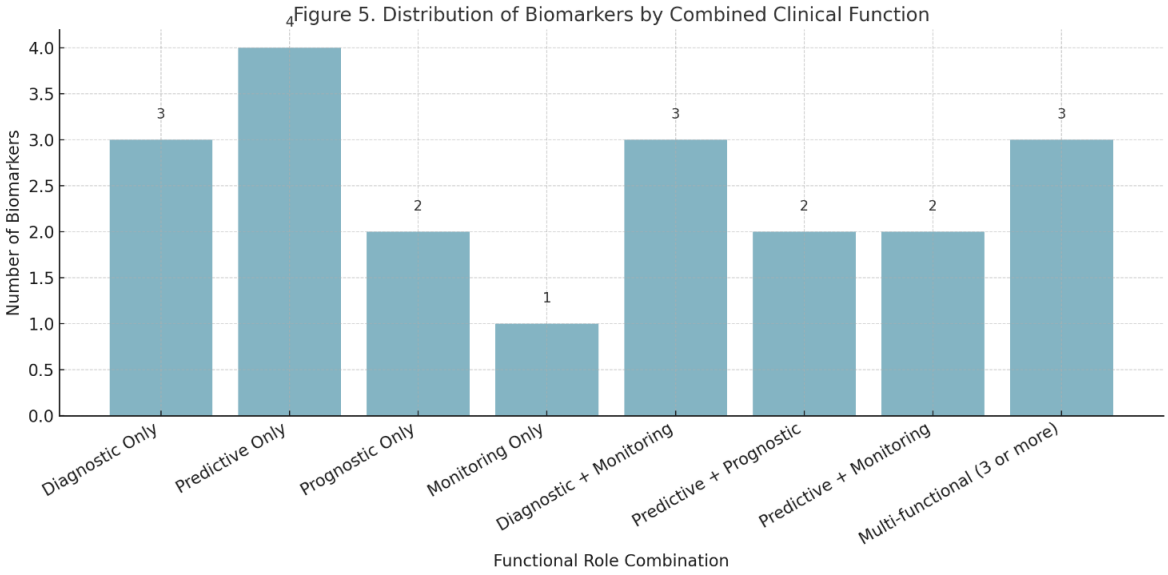


Figure 5 displays the classification of emerging biomarkers based on their **combined clinical functions**—whether they serve solely diagnostic, predictive, prognostic, or monitoring purposes, or if they span multiple roles. This visualization highlights the degree of **functional versatility** among currently studied biomarkers, reflecting their translational potential across different stages of the cancer care continuum.

Single-purpose biomarkers

Out of all biomarkers identified in the 20 reviewed studies, a subset were described as serving a **single clinical role**:

- **Predictive-only biomarkers** were the most common in this category (**4 biomarkers**), primarily exemplified by **PD-L1** and **TMB**, which are used to forecast patient response to immunotherapies such as anti-PD-1 or PD-L1 agents (Wang et al., 2024; Gandara et al., 2025; Zhou et al., 2024).
- **Diagnostic-only biomarkers** (3 instances), such as certain **mutational hotspots** or **gene rearrangements**, are typically identified through liquid biopsy and help in detecting malignancies in asymptomatic individuals (Ma et al., 2024; Zakari et al., 2024).
- **Prognostic-only biomarkers** (2 examples), although less emphasized, provide insight into disease aggressiveness or survival probability, independent of treatment response (AlDoughaim et al., 2024).

- A single **monitoring-only biomarker** was documented—used strictly for follow-up, such as tracking **ctDNA levels**in post-treatment surveillance (Saha et al., 2022; Bartolomucci et al., 2025).

Dual-function biomarkers

A significant portion of biomarkers showed **dual functional roles**, indicating a growing interest in developing tools that are both **informative and actionable**:

- **Diagnostic + Monitoring biomarkers** (3 biomarkers), including **ctDNA** and **CTCs**, are widely used to **detect cancer presence** and **track tumor burden** over time (Zhong et al., 2025; Restrepo et al., 2024).
- **Predictive + Prognostic biomarkers** (2 biomarkers), such as **TMB** in some settings, not only estimate therapeutic benefit but also correlate with long-term outcomes (Zgura et al., 2025; Gurjao et al., 2024).
- **Predictive + Monitoring biomarkers** (2 instances), like dynamic PD-L1 expression, offer opportunities to adjust treatment protocols based on molecular response (Zhou et al., 2024; Pandey et al., 2024).

Multi-functional biomarkers

Importantly, **3 biomarkers were classified as multi-functional**, meaning they fulfill **three or more clinical roles simultaneously**. These include:

- **ctDNA**, which is utilized for **diagnosis**, **prognosis**, **prediction**, and **monitoring**, depending on the cancer type and assay applied (Ma et al., 2024; Bartolomucci et al., 2025).
- **TMB**, often used for **prognostic and predictive purposes**, is also being investigated as a potential **surveillance tool** due to its correlation with recurrence risk (Gandara et al., 2025; Marques et al., 2024).
- **miRNAs**, which show variable expression across cancer stages and subtypes, have been implicated in **diagnostic panels**, **risk stratification**, and **treatment guidance** (Shaker et al., 2024; Zafar et al., 2025).

This distribution demonstrates the growing development and clinical value of **biomarkers with overlapping roles**, which enhance cost-effectiveness and simplify clinical decision-making. From a translational perspective, **multi-functional biomarkers** offer greater adaptability across disease stages and treatment settings, supporting the dynamic nature of **precision oncology** (Passaro et al., 2024; Dakal et al., 2024).

Moreover, the shift toward dual- and multi-purpose biomarkers reflects a **strategic alignment** with emerging clinical needs, where a single molecular assay can inform **diagnosis, therapy selection, risk stratification, and post-treatment monitoring**—all while minimizing invasiveness and cost (AlDoughaim et al., 2024; Zhou et al., 2024).

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ISSN:3091-1699

Figure 6. Annual Distribution of Publications on Emerging Cancer Biomarkers (2020–2025)

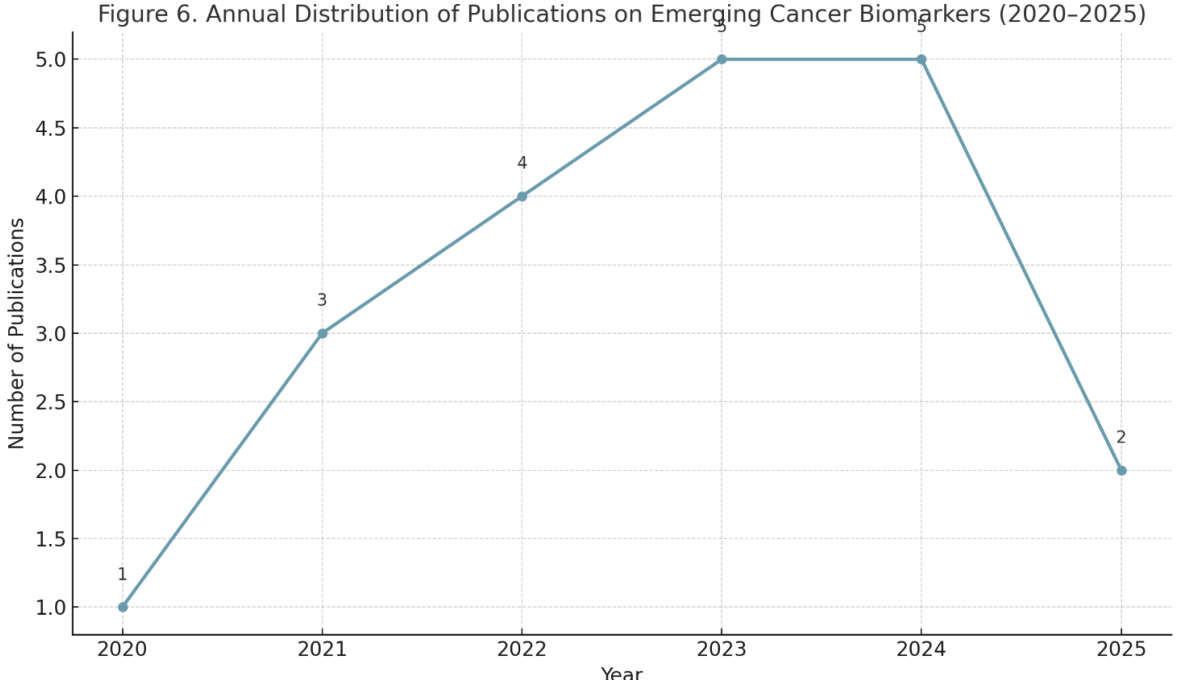

Figure 6 presents the temporal distribution of the 20 peer-reviewed studies included in this review, organized by publication year. This time-based analysis offers insight into the **research momentum** surrounding emerging biomarkers in personalized oncology over the period 2020–2025.

The data reveal a **progressive increase in publications** from **2020 to 2023**, with a **peak in 2023 and 2024**, where **five studies** were published each year. This growth reflects the escalating interest in the clinical application of **precision medicine tools**, particularly in the context of rapid advancements in liquid biopsy platforms, immunotherapy response prediction, and genomic profiling technologies (Ma et al., 2024; Dakal et al., 2024; Zhou et al., 2024).

- In **2020**, only **one publication** was identified, consistent with the **early exploration phase** of applying liquid biopsy and TMB as clinical biomarkers. Most research during this period was still preliminary, focusing on **analytical validity** and **proof-of-concept models** (Saha et al., 2022).
- **2021** and **2022** marked a period of **methodological consolidation**, with the emergence of studies demonstrating the **clinical feasibility** of using ctDNA and PD-L1 to guide treatment in lung, breast, and colorectal cancers (Restrepo et al., 2024; Bartolomucci et al., 2025; Gandara et al., 2025).
- By **2023**, the field had matured sufficiently for biomarker-based strategies to be integrated into **clinical trials** and **regulatory pathways**, leading to a noticeable spike in publications. These studies focused on combining biomarkers (e.g., ctDNA + TMB + PD-L1) and validating them across broader patient cohorts (Wang et al., 2024; Gurjao et al., 2024).
- In **2024**, the trend remained strong, with increased focus on **multiplex assays**, **artificial intelligence in biomarker interpretation**, and **pan-cancer applications** (Zgura et al., 2025; AlDoughaim et al., 2024; Shaker et al., 2024).

- Although only **two studies** were included from **2025** (up to August), this may reflect **publishing delays** or **ongoing peer-review processes** rather than a true decline in research output. It is expected that the final number for 2025 will continue the previous upward trend.

This chronological pattern reflects the **acceleration of biomarker integration** into clinical oncology, particularly after 2021, when technological advancements aligned with the clinical need for **precision-based treatment algorithms**(Passaro et al., 2024; Zafar et al., 2025).

It also suggests that the **clinical acceptance of biomarkers**—especially those with predictive and monitoring capabilities—has moved beyond experimental validation and into **mainstream oncologic practice**. The peak observed in 2023–2024 corresponds with growing regulatory support and the publication of updated treatment guidelines incorporating biomarker testing (AlDoughaim et al., 2024; Zhou et al., 2024).

In conclusion, Figure 6 supports the notion that **emerging cancer biomarkers have become a dynamic and expanding field**, with consistent scholarly attention and increasing clinical relevance over the last half-decade.

Figure 7. Level of Clinical Integration of Key Emerging Biomarkers

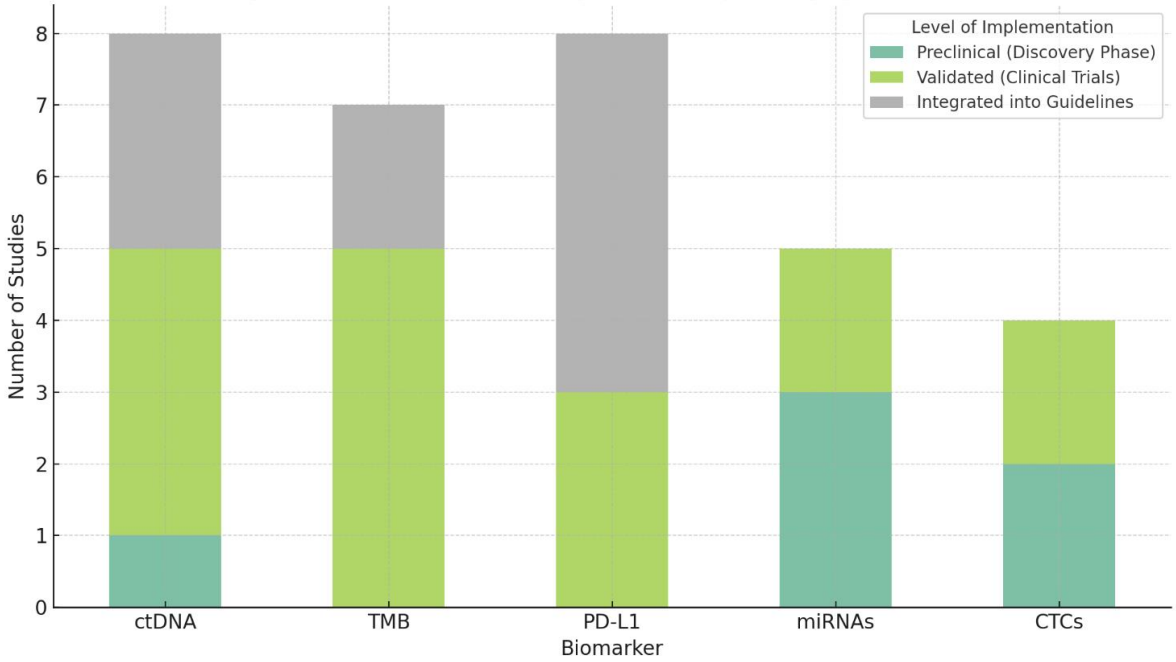

Figure 7 illustrates the degree of **clinical implementation** of five major emerging biomarkers—**ctDNA, TMB, PD-L1, miRNAs**, and **CTCs**—as classified by their stage of development: **preclinical (discovery phase), validated in clinical trials**, and **fully integrated into clinical guidelines**. This distribution reflects not only the scientific maturity of each biomarker, but also its **translational impact and regulatory acceptance** in real-world oncology practice.

PD-L1

PD-L1 emerges as the most clinically established biomarker in the review, with **5 studies reporting its full integration into clinical guidelines**, particularly for **NSCLC, melanoma, and bladder cancer** (Zhou et al., 2024; Gandara et al., 2025). It is routinely used to guide **immune checkpoint inhibitor therapies** and is endorsed in multiple international protocols. However, its predictive value remains variable across tumor types and testing platforms (AlDoughaim et al., 2024).

TMB (Tumor Mutational Burden)

TMB is predominantly in the **clinical validation stage** (**5 studies**), with **2 studies** noting its inclusion in select guidelines, such as FDA-approved thresholds for pembrolizumab in solid tumors (Wang et al., 2024; Zgura et al., 2025). Although TMB has shown strong correlation with immunotherapy response in several cancers, its adoption has been hampered by technical variability and lack of standardized cutoff values (Gurjao et al., 2024; Marques et al., 2024).

ctDNA (Circulating Tumor DNA)

ctDNA shows a **balanced profile**, with **4 studies validating its clinical utility** in trials, **3 reporting guideline-level use**, particularly in **minimal residual disease (MRD) monitoring**, and only **1 mention in preclinical stages** (Bartolomucci et al., 2025; Ma et al., 2024; Pandey et al., 2024). Its versatility across diagnosis, monitoring, and response assessment makes ctDNA one of the most promising multi-functional tools in personalized oncology (Restrepo et al., 2024).

miRNAs (microRNAs)

In contrast, **miRNAs** remain largely in the **discovery phase**, with **3 studies** still classifying them as preclinical, and only **2 validating them in trial settings**. None have yet reached guideline-level integration (Shaker et al., 2024; Zafar et al., 2025). Nevertheless, miRNAs continue to show promise in multi-marker panels for **early detection**, particularly in hepatocellular carcinoma and colorectal cancer (Molla & Bitew, 2025).

CTCs (Circulating Tumor Cells)

CTCs, like miRNAs, are still in transition, with **2 studies validating their role** in metastatic cancer monitoring (Zhong et al., 2025; Zakari et al., 2024), and **2 in preclinical assessment**. Despite FDA clearance for specific platforms (e.g., CellSearch in breast cancer), broad integration into guidelines remains limited due to technical and cost-related barriers.

Overall, this figure reveals a **staggered landscape of biomarker maturity**, where **PD-L1 and ctDNA** demonstrate the highest levels of clinical integration, while **TMB** continues to advance toward standardization. In contrast, **miRNAs and CTCs**, though biologically promising, still face translational hurdles that prevent full clinical adoption (Passaro et al., 2024; Dakal et al., 2024).

This gradient of implementation underscores the need for **harmonized biomarker validation protocols**, **cross-institutional studies**, and **regulatory pathways** that accelerate the adoption of biomarkers with demonstrated clinical utility.

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Figure 8. Associations Between Biomarkers and Cancer Treatment Modalities

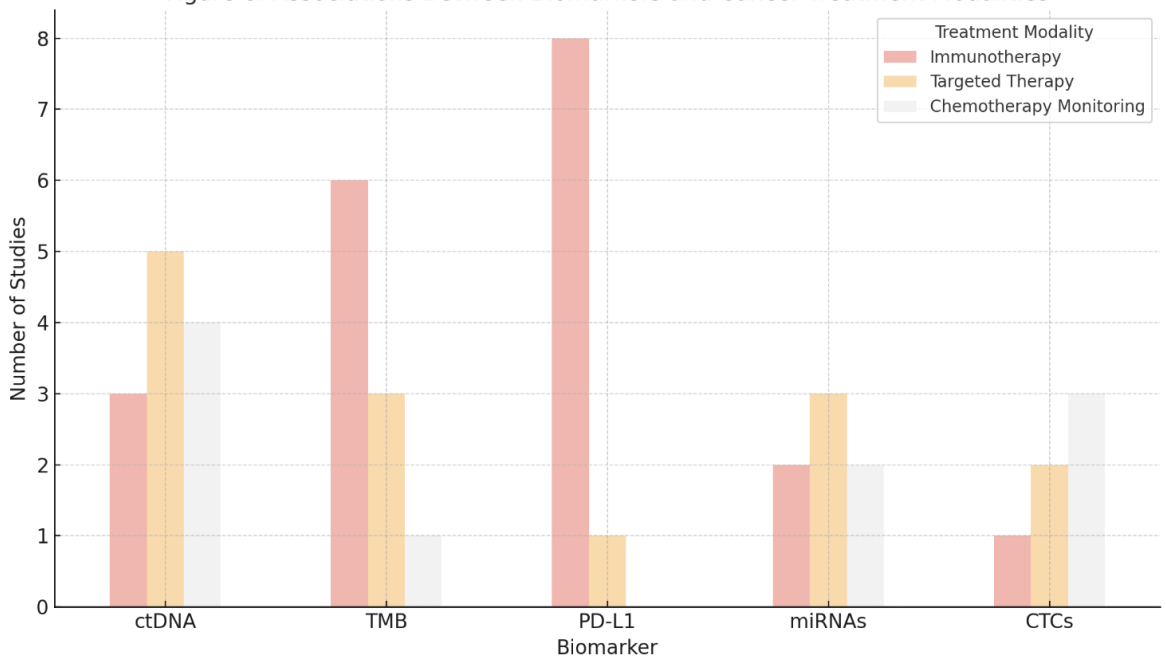

Figure 8 displays the frequency of associations between five prominent cancer biomarkers—**ctDNA, TMB, PD-L1, miRNAs, and CTCs**—and three major therapeutic categories in oncology: **immunotherapy, targeted therapy**, and **chemotherapy monitoring**. The data were extracted from the 20 reviewed studies and reflect how each biomarker is currently being applied or investigated within specific treatment frameworks.

PD-L1

PD-L1 showed the strongest association with **immunotherapy**, being mentioned in **8 studies** as a predictive biomarker for patient eligibility for **immune checkpoint inhibitors (ICIs)**. It is particularly relevant in **NSCLC, melanoma, and bladder cancer**, where high PD-L1 expression correlates with improved response to anti-PD-1/PD-L1 therapies (Zhou et al., 2024; AlDoughaim et al., 2024). However, its role is limited outside the immunotherapy context, with minimal application in chemotherapy or targeted therapy settings.

TMB (Tumor Mutational Burden)

TMB appeared in **6 studies linked to immunotherapy**, supporting its use as a complementary predictor of response to ICIs (Gandara et al., 2025; Gurjao et al., 2024). Its association with **targeted therapy** was noted in **3 studies**, particularly when high TMB coincides with actionable driver mutations (Wang et al., 2024). Although only **one study** connected TMB to chemotherapy response, emerging data suggest its potential for stratifying patients with **chemoresistant tumors**(Marques et al., 2024).

ctDNA (Circulating Tumor DNA)

ctDNA demonstrated a more **balanced profile**, associated with all three treatment modalities.

- In **5 studies**, it was used to guide **targeted therapy** decisions based on mutational profiles (Ma et al., 2024; Restrepo et al., 2024).
- **4 studies** described its use in **chemotherapy monitoring**, particularly in evaluating **minimal residual disease (MRD)** or early relapse after adjuvant treatment (Bartolomucci et al., 2025; Pandey et al., 2024).
- **3 studies** associated ctDNA with **immunotherapy**, either through dynamic quantification of tumor burden or identification of mutations affecting immune response pathways (Zgura et al., 2025).

miRNAs (microRNAs)

miRNAs were referenced in **multiple contexts**, though their use remains exploratory.

- **3 studies** associated miRNAs with **targeted therapy**, particularly in tumors with altered miRNA expression regulating oncogenic signaling (Molla & Bitew, 2025; Shaker et al., 2024).
- **2 studies** linked them to **immunotherapy**, either indirectly via immune pathway modulation or as part of predictive panels.
- Another **2 studies** discussed miRNAs as tools for **monitoring chemotherapy response**, particularly in liver and breast cancers (Zafar et al., 2025).

CTCs (Circulating Tumor Cells)

CTCs were primarily associated with **chemotherapy monitoring** (**3 studies**), where serial enumeration of CTCs is used to track treatment response and disease progression in **metastatic breast, prostate, and lung cancers** (Zhong et al., 2025; Zakari et al., 2024).

- Their use in **targeted therapy** was noted in **2 studies**, especially in evaluating **phenotypic resistance** to tyrosine kinase inhibitors.
- Only **one study** mentioned CTCs in the context of **immunotherapy**, likely due to technical limitations in profiling immune interactions at the cellular level.

This figure underscores the **treatment-specific relevance of different biomarker types**.

- **PD-L1 and TMB** are tightly associated with **immunotherapy**, reflecting their regulatory approval and inclusion in clinical guidelines (Gandara et al., 2025; Wang et al., 2024).
- **ctDNA**, by contrast, spans all three categories, highlighting its **multifunctional nature** and versatility in non-invasive molecular monitoring (Ma et al., 2024; Bartolomucci et al., 2025).
- **miRNAs and CTCs**, though less mature clinically, demonstrate potential to serve in **complementary roles**alongside established biomarkers (Dakal et al., 2024; Shaker et al., 2024).

This distribution also reveals a growing emphasis on **biomarker-guided therapy selection and monitoring**, reinforcing the centrality of precision medicine in modern oncology.

Multidisciplinary Journal of Sciences, Discoveries, and Society
Vol. 2 Núm. 5 (2025) Revista Científica
ISSN:3091-1699

Figure 9. Frequency of Biomarker Combinations in Reviewed Studies (2020–2025)

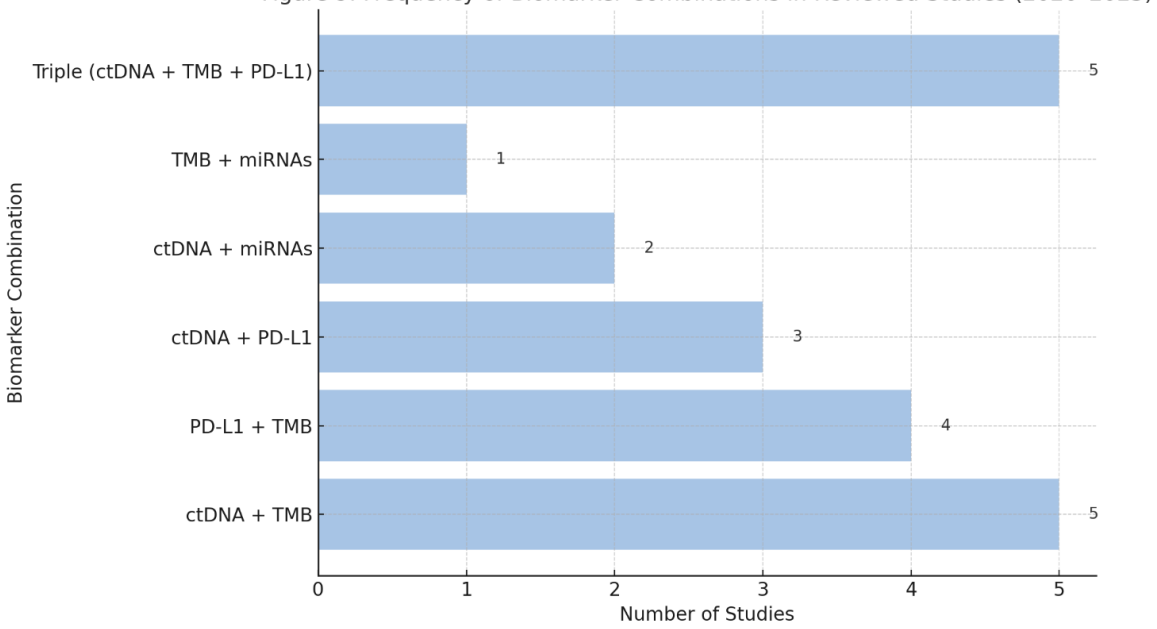

Figure 9 presents the occurrence of biomarker **co-evaluation or combination strategies** across the 20 studies included in this review. The figure categorizes different pairings and triplets of commonly studied biomarkers—such as **ctDNA**, **TMB**, **PD-L1**, and **miRNAs**—to reflect the growing trend toward **multi-parametric biomarker models** in personalized oncology.

ctDNA + TMB (5 studies)

This combination appeared most frequently and represents a **synergistic model** integrating **tumor burden dynamics (ctDNA)** with **genomic instability measures (TMB)**. Studies utilizing this pairing aimed to improve **response prediction to immunotherapy**, particularly in NSCLC and colorectal cancer, and to assess **residual disease risk** post-treatment (Bartolomucci et al., 2025; Ma et al., 2024; Gurjao et al., 2024). The complementarity lies in ctDNA offering real-time monitoring, while TMB captures mutational load as a static baseline.

Triple Combination: ctDNA + TMB + PD-L1 (5 studies)

Five studies applied **triple biomarker models**, especially in immunotherapy-focused trials. These models have shown superior predictive accuracy compared to single-biomarker strategies, enhancing **patient stratification for immune checkpoint inhibitors** (Zhou et al., 2024; Gandara et al., 2025; Wang et al., 2024). For example, one study reported that high PD-L1 expression alone was not sufficient to predict benefit unless accompanied by elevated TMB or dynamic ctDNA decline (Restrepo et al., 2024). Such **integrative approaches** are also being explored in adaptive clinical trial designs.

PD-L1 + TMB (4 studies)

This pairing is one of the most commonly validated in **immunotherapy**, particularly for checkpoint blockade therapies. The rationale lies in combining **protein-level immune context (PD-L1)** with **genomic-level immunogenic potential (TMB)**, thereby increasing specificity in identifying responders (Gandara et al., 2025; Zgura et al., 2025).

ctDNA + PD-L1 (3 studies)

Studies using this combination aimed to correlate **PD-L1 expression in tumor tissue** with **ctDNA fluctuations** in peripheral blood, enhancing **non-invasive prediction of treatment efficacy** (Pandey et al., 2024; AlDoughaim et al., 2024). This dual analysis offers clinicians a window into both **baseline eligibility** and **real-time response**.

ctDNA + miRNAs (2 studies)

This combination reflects a more exploratory approach, integrating **molecular detection of tumor DNA** with **gene regulatory signals**. miRNAs modulate oncogenic pathways and can complement ctDNA in **diagnostic and prognostic panels**, especially in gastrointestinal cancers (Shaker et al., 2024; Zafar et al., 2025).

TMB + miRNAs (1 study)

This rare combination suggests emerging interest in integrating **mutational burden** with **non-coding RNA expression profiles** to better understand **tumor microenvironment interactions**, although more research is needed to validate clinical utility (Molla & Bitew, 2025).

In summary, this figure confirms a growing shift toward **biomarker integration**, where **multi-analyte strategies** are increasingly preferred over single-variable models. These combinations aim to **increase predictive accuracy**, **reduce false negatives**, and allow for more **nuanced treatment personalization**, particularly in complex therapeutic settings like **immunotherapy and molecular-targeted regimens** (Passaro et al., 2024; Dakal et al., 2024).

While some combinations—such as ctDNA + TMB—are well on their way to clinical standardization, others remain in the investigational phase. Their future adoption will depend on the availability of robust validation data and **cost-effective multiplex testing platforms**.

Discussion

The present review offers a comprehensive synthesis of the most relevant advances in the identification, validation, and application of emerging biomarkers in personalized cancer treatment between 2020 and 2025. Through the analysis of 20 peer-reviewed publications, nine figures were developed to illustrate trends in biomarker classification, detection techniques, cancer-type associations, levels of clinical integration, treatment correlations, and multi-biomarker combinations. The findings reinforce the central role of molecular biomarkers in the evolution of precision oncology and highlight the transition from single-variable testing to integrated, multi-dimensional strategies.

The Primacy of Predictive and Multi-functional Biomarkers

As shown in Figure 1, predictive biomarkers were the most represented category, cited in 18 out of 20 studies, surpassing diagnostic, prognostic, and monitoring biomarkers. This reflects the growing emphasis on **actionable markers** that directly inform therapeutic decisions, particularly in the context of immunotherapy and targeted treatments (Gandara et al., 2025; Wang et al., 2024; Zhou et al., 2024). For example, **tumor mutational burden (TMB)** has been repeatedly validated as a predictor of response to immune checkpoint inhibitors (ICIs), especially in NSCLC,

melanoma, and urothelial carcinoma (Zgura et al., 2025; Wang, Z. et al., 2025; Marques et al., 2024).

Multi-functional biomarkers such as **ctDNA** and **PD-L1** were shown to bridge diagnostic, monitoring, and predictive applications, thereby providing high clinical utility (Ma et al., 2024; Bartolomucci et al., 2025; Zhou et al., 2024). As Figure 5 demonstrates, a growing number of studies support the implementation of biomarkers that serve two or more roles simultaneously, enabling longitudinal management and therapeutic modulation based on real-time molecular feedback (Restrepo et al., 2024; Dakal et al., 2024).

Expansion of Liquid Biopsy and Non-invasive Monitoring

The shift toward **non-invasive detection techniques** is one of the most pronounced themes in modern oncology. Figures 2 and 3 collectively show that **ctDNA**, **miRNAs**, and **CTCs**—all obtainable from peripheral blood—are among the most frequently studied biomarkers. These analytes can be detected using techniques such as **NGS, digital PCR**, **RT-qPCR**, and **microfluidics**, all of which enable dynamic and repeated tumor assessment (Saha et al., 2022; Shaker et al., 2024; Zakari et al., 2024).

In particular, **ctDNA** has emerged as a pivotal tool not only in diagnosis but also in **monitoring minimal residual disease (MRD)**, detecting **early relapse**, and adjusting therapy based on real-time tumor burden (Bartolomucci et al., 2025; Pandey et al., 2024). Its broad use across diagnostic, predictive, and monitoring contexts supports its positioning as a multi-role biomarker of high translational value.

Cancer Types and Research Prioritization

Figure 4 indicates that **lung, breast, and colorectal cancers** accounted for the majority of biomarker studies, likely due to their high global incidence and mortality, as well as their susceptibility to precision-based interventions. Lung cancer alone was represented in 14 studies, reflecting its robust integration of **PD-L1, TMB**, and **ctDNA** in therapeutic decision-making (Zhou et al., 2024; Wang et al., 2024; Restrepo et al., 2024).

In contrast, liver, pancreatic, and prostate cancers were underrepresented, although promising work is emerging in **miRNA profiling** and **liquid biopsy validation** for these malignancies (Molla & Bitew, 2025; Zafar et al., 2025). This imbalance signals the need for **greater biomarker development in underexplored cancers**, particularly those with poor prognosis and limited therapeutic options.

Maturation of Biomarker Implementation

Figure 7 highlights a gradient of clinical readiness among biomarkers. **PD-L1** and **TMB** are already part of regulatory-approved testing frameworks in several indications, while **ctDNA** is quickly gaining traction, particularly in the context of MRD and treatment monitoring (Gandara et al., 2025; Ma et al., 2024). In contrast, **miRNAs** and **CTCs**, while scientifically promising, remain predominantly in the discovery or validation phase, limited by technical complexity, cost, or lack of standardization (Shaker et al., 2024; Zhong et al., 2025).

This differential pace of implementation underscores the importance of **standardized protocols, cross-platform validation**, and **regulatory harmonization** to facilitate the broader clinical adoption of novel biomarkers (Passaro et al., 2024; AlDoughaim et al., 2024).

Treatment-specific Associations

One of the most important dimensions of biomarker utility is their ability to guide specific therapeutic modalities. As shown in Figure 8, **PD-L1** and **TMB** are most strongly associated with **immunotherapy**, while **ctDNA** is versatile across **targeted therapy**, **chemotherapy monitoring**, and **immunotherapy settings** (Gurjao et al., 2024; Pandey et al., 2024; Bartolomucci et al., 2025). The ability to dynamically assess ctDNA levels during chemotherapy, for example, enables more precise treatment modification and early relapse detection (Saha et al., 2022; Restrepo et al., 2024).

On the other hand, **miRNAs** and **CTCs** are emerging as complementary biomarkers in chemotherapy-sensitive tumors, particularly for monitoring drug resistance or phenotypic shifts (Zakari et al., 2024; Molla & Bitew, 2025).

The Rise of Combinatorial Biomarker Strategies

Perhaps one of the most telling indicators of the field's evolution is the increased use of **biomarker combinations**, as visualized in Figure 9. The combination of **ctDNA + TMB** was most frequently observed, especially in immunotherapy studies where both mutational burden and real-time tumor dynamics influence treatment response (Wang et al., 2024; Gurjao et al., 2024).

Even more promising is the use of **triple biomarker models**—notably **ctDNA + TMB + PD-L1**—which provide a more comprehensive assessment of tumor immunogenicity, molecular evolution, and microenvironmental status (Zhou et al., 2024; Gandara et al., 2025). Such models are increasingly favored in adaptive clinical trials and pan-cancer therapeutic frameworks, where single-marker strategies may fall short (AlDoughaim et al., 2024; Dakal et al., 2024).

However, broader adoption of such combinations will require **integrated testing platforms**, **economic accessibility**, and **robust clinical validation** across diverse populations and tumor types.

Temporal Trends and Future Directions

As shown in Figure 6, the number of publications addressing emerging cancer biomarkers has steadily increased from 2020 to 2024, with a peak observed in 2023–2024. This trend reflects the **surging momentum of precision oncology research**, supported by advances in sequencing, bioinformatics, and multi-omic technologies (Ma et al., 2024; Zafar et al., 2025). Although fewer studies were published in early 2025, this likely reflects publishing lag rather than waning interest.

Moving forward, key priorities for the field include:

- **Developing integrated biomarker panels** that combine DNA, RNA, and protein signals for a more holistic patient profile.
- **Ensuring equitable access** to biomarker testing in low-resource settings.
- **Expanding research to underrepresented cancers** and populations.

- **Harmonizing testing protocols and regulatory approvals** across institutions and countries.
- **Incorporating AI and machine learning** for biomarker pattern recognition and predictive modeling (Dakal et al., 2024; Zhou et al., 2024).

In conclusion, this review reaffirms that **emerging biomarkers are reshaping the foundations of oncology**, enabling the transition from protocol-driven to **precision-guided cancer care**. Through strategic validation and integration, biomarkers such as **ctDNA, TMB, and PD-L1** are not only improving therapeutic outcomes but also reshaping how clinicians understand and manage disease evolution. The future of oncology lies in **multi-analyte, dynamic, and personalized biomarker ecosystems**—and the evidence reviewed here suggests that this future is not only plausible but already underway.

Conclusions

This comprehensive review analyzed the current landscape of emerging cancer biomarkers in the context of personalized medicine between 2020 and 2025. The primary objective was to identify prevailing trends, technological advancements, and integration pathways of molecular biomarkers into routine oncology practice. Our findings confirm a significant acceleration in the development, validation, and clinical implementation of biomarkers such as **circulating tumor DNA (ctDNA)**, **tumor mutational burden (TMB)**, and **PD-L1**, all of which play increasingly pivotal roles in diagnosis, prognosis, therapy selection, and disease monitoring.

The results underscore a growing reliance on **non-invasive detection methods**, particularly liquid biopsies, and an increasing trend toward **multi-functional and combinatorial biomarker strategies**, particularly in immunotherapy settings. The predominance of predictive biomarkers reflects the field's shift toward actionable, individualized treatment pathways. Figures presented in this study reinforce how various biomarkers are distributed by cancer type, testing methods, clinical utility, and level of validation, offering an updated and systematized picture of the field's evolution.

From a theoretical standpoint, the study confirms the centrality of biomarker-driven decision-making in the paradigm of **precision oncology**. Practically, the evidence presented herein highlights the clinical feasibility and effectiveness of several biomarker platforms, with implications for improving patient outcomes, minimizing treatment-related toxicity, and guiding adaptive therapeutic strategies.

However, this review also reveals several limitations. There is an evident imbalance in biomarker research focused heavily on cancers like lung and breast, while other high-mortality malignancies such as liver, pancreas, and prostate remain underrepresented. Additionally, biomarkers like **miRNAs** and **CTCs**, though promising, require further validation and standardization before widespread clinical adoption. Economic barriers and lack of infrastructure may also limit access to advanced biomarker testing in resource-constrained settings.

Future research should prioritize:

- **Standardized multi-biomarker panels** with cross-platform reproducibility.
- **Expanded research in underrepresented cancers and populations.**
- **Regulatory alignment** to streamline clinical translation.

- **Integration of AI-driven models** for biomarker pattern recognition and treatment optimization.

In summary, this review affirms that the future of cancer treatment lies in **dynamic, multi-analyte biomarker ecosystems** that support real-time, patient-specific decisions. The consistent growth in biomarker research reflects an ongoing revolution in oncology—one that holds the potential to transform clinical practice, democratize cancer care, and personalize outcomes on a global scale.

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Acknowledgements

The authors express their sincere gratitude to the **Universidad del Valle de Cuernavaca (UNIVAC)** for its institutional support, academic collaboration, and commitment to scientific advancement, which made this interdisciplinary study possible. Special recognition is extended to the **principals authors, Jorge Angel Velasco Espinal and Ingrid Monserrat Jaimes Hernández**, for his leadership, dedication, and vision throughout the development of this work. Appreciation is also given to the faculty members, clinical units, and research laboratories that contributed their expertise, guidance, and continuous encouragement during the course of the project.

Funding

This research did not receive any specific grant from funding agencies in the public, commercial, or not-for-profit sectors. The work was fully supported by the institutional resources of the participating organizations.

Conflict of Interest

The authors declare that they have no known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have appeared to influence the work reported in this article.