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Genomic Risk Scores and Therapy Response in Breast Cancer Patients: Clinical Modeling

Mona Youssef*, Sara Hamed

Pharmacognosy Department, Faculty of Medicine, Tanta University, Tanta, Gharbia, Egypt

Corresponding author: mona.youssef@gmail.com

Abstract

The integration of genomic risk scores into clinical oncology has revolutionized the management of breast cancer, enabling a paradigm shift from empirical treatments to precision medicine. Despite the widespread adoption of multi-gene expression assays, accurately modeling the continuous relationship between genomic risk and specific therapy responses remains a complex challenge. This paper provides a comprehensive investigation into the utility of genomic risk scores for predicting therapeutic efficacy, utilizing advanced clinical modeling techniques on extensive breast cancer patient cohorts. By bridging transcriptomic profiles with clinical outcomes, we demonstrate how high-resolution predictive models can identify subsets of patients who will derive the most benefit from neoadjuvant chemotherapy versus those who can safely de-escalate to endocrine therapy alone. The analysis rigorously evaluates the statistical frameworks required to handle multidimensional genomic data, adjusting for traditional clinico-pathological confounders. Through the application of robust survival analysis and logistic modeling, this study reveals significant interaction effects between genomic risk strata and systemic therapy modalities. The findings not only validate the prognostic value of genomic profiling but also emphasize its predictive capability in guiding individualized treatment regimens. Ultimately, this research underscores the necessity of continuous refinement in clinical models to maximize therapeutic efficacy, minimize treatment-associated toxicities, and improve overall survival in breast cancer patients.

Keywords: Genomic Risk Scores; Breast Cancer; Clinical Modeling; Therapy Response; Precision Oncology

1. Introduction

1.1 The Evolving Landscape of Breast Cancer Management

Breast cancer remains the most frequently diagnosed malignancy and a leading cause of cancer-related mortality among women worldwide. Historically, the clinical management of breast cancer was predominantly dictated by traditional clinico-pathological factors, including patient age, tumor size, histological grade, and lymph node status. While these parameters established the foundation for early prognostic systems, they often failed to capture the profound biological heterogeneity inherent to mammary tumors [1]. Consequently, clinical decision-making was frequently characterized by a one size fits all approach, leading to widespread administration of adjuvant and neoadjuvant chemotherapy. This empirical strategy, although curative for a subset of high-risk patients, invariably resulted in the overtreatment of numerous individuals whose tumors possessed an indolent natural history. These patients were subjected to severe, sometimes irreversible, cytotoxic toxicities without deriving any meaningful survival benefit [2].

The advent of molecular biology and the subsequent classification of breast cancer into distinct intrinsic subtypes fundamentally altered the therapeutic landscape. The identification of hormone receptor expression and human epidermal growth factor receptor amplification provided the first targeted therapeutic avenues [3]. However, even within specific classifications, such as hormone receptor-positive and node-negative early-stage breast cancer, remarkable clinical variability persisted. Some patients experienced early metastatic relapse despite aggressive systemic therapy, whereas others achieved long-term disease-free survival with local therapy and endocrine modulation alone. This clinical observation underscored an urgent need for more granular predictive biomarkers capable of stratifying patients beyond classical immunohistochemical markers, paving the way for the integration of high-throughput genomic technologies into routine oncological practice.

1.2 Emergence of Genomic Risk Scores in Oncology

The sequencing of the human genome and the rapid development of transcriptomic microarray and next-generation sequencing technologies catalyzed the discovery of multi-gene expression signatures. Genomic risk scores are mathematical constructs derived from the quantitative expression levels of specific ensembles of genes, carefully selected for their roles in tumor proliferation, invasion, and hormonal signaling pathways [4]. By aggregating complex molecular data into a singular, interpretable numerical value, genomic risk scores offer a high-resolution snapshot of tumor biology. These scores were initially developed to estimate the residual risk of distant recurrence following definitive local therapy and adjuvant endocrine treatment, functioning primarily as prognostic tools.

Over the past two decades, extensive prospective and retrospective clinical trials have validated the clinical utility of several commercially available genomic assays [5]. They have been incorporated into major international oncology guidelines, serving as critical decision-making tools for medical oncologists. However, the transition from utilizing genomic risk scores purely as prognostic indicators of natural disease trajectory to employing them as predictive markers of therapy response represents a distinct and far more complex clinical challenge [6]. A prognostic biomarker provides information regarding the overall outcome of the patient regardless of therapy, whereas a predictive biomarker provides information on the likelihood of response to a specific therapeutic intervention. Bridging this gap requires sophisticated clinical modeling to ascertain precisely how varying levels of genomic risk interact with different pharmacological agents, from standard anthracycline and taxane-based chemotherapies to novel targeted biologic therapies.

1.3 Objectives and Scope of the Paper

The primary objective of this academic paper is to systematically examine the clinical modeling evidence linking genomic risk scores to therapy response in breast cancer patients. This involves a comprehensive analysis of the methodological frameworks utilized to integrate complex genomic data with longitudinal clinical outcomes. The study will explore how continuous and categorical genomic variables are incorporated into predictive models to estimate the probability of pathological complete response and long-term disease-free survival [7]. Furthermore, this paper aims to dissect the statistical nuances of these clinical models, including the management of confounding variables, the assessment of calibration and discrimination, and the validation techniques necessary to ensure generalizability across diverse patient populations.

By scrutinizing the mathematical and clinical assumptions underpinning current predictive models, this research seeks to highlight both the strengths and limitations of contemporary precision oncology paradigms. We will detail the specific interactions between genomic risk and varied therapeutic modalities, elucidating why certain molecular profiles dictate sensitivity to genotoxic stress while others confer intrinsic resistance [8]. Ultimately, this paper strives to provide a robust academic

foundation for the next generation of clinical decision support systems, advocating for a dynamic, mathematically rigorous approach to personalized breast cancer therapy.

2. Background and Literature Review

2.1 Molecular Subtyping and Transcriptomic Profiling

The conceptualization of breast cancer as a heterogeneous collection of distinct molecular entities, rather than a singular organ-specific disease, originated from seminal gene expression profiling studies in the early 2000s. Researchers utilized hierarchical clustering of microarray data to stratify breast tumors into intrinsic subtypes, most notably Luminal A, Luminal B, HER2-enriched, and Basal-like classifications. Luminal A tumors are typically characterized by high expression of estrogen receptor-related genes, low expression of proliferation-related genes, and a generally favorable prognosis. Conversely, Luminal B tumors exhibit higher proliferative indices and possess an intermediate to high risk of early recurrence [9]. The precise delineation between these subtypes is inherently complex, as the biological spectrum of breast cancer represents a continuum rather than discrete categories.

This continuous nature of tumor biology necessitated the development of quantitative genomic risk scores. Instead of forcing a tumor into a rigid categorical subtype, genomic scoring systems calculate a weighted sum of normalized gene expression values. For instance, proliferation genes such as Ki-67, survivin, and aurora kinase A are typically assigned positive weights, increasing the risk score, whereas hormone receptor pathway genes may be assigned negative weights, decreasing the calculated risk [10]. This dimensional reduction technique allows clinicians to capture the dominant biological drivers of a specific tumor in a highly reproducible manner. The underlying mathematical algorithms vary significantly among different assays, with some utilizing reverse transcription polymerase chain reaction across a limited gene panel, while others employ whole-transcriptome sequencing coupled with machine learning classifiers.

2.2 Prognostic vs. Predictive Capabilities of Genomic Assays

A critical distinction in the literature surrounding genomic risk scores is the differentiation between prognostic and predictive validity. The prognostic validation of genomic scores has been overwhelmingly successful. Numerous population-based studies have demonstrated that patients with high genomic risk scores exhibit a statistically significant decrease in ten-year distant recurrence-free survival compared to those with low risk scores, independent of tumor size and nodal status [11]. This prognostic stratification is invaluable for identifying patients who require aggressive surveillance and systemic intervention.

However, evaluating the predictive capability of genomic scores involves establishing a statistical interaction between the biomarker and the treatment effect. To prove that a genomic risk score predicts therapy response, clinical modeling must demonstrate that the relative benefit of a specific treatment differs significantly across the spectrum of the risk score. Early retrospective analyses of completed randomized controlled trials provided the first glimpses of this predictive power. Researchers observed that the absolute benefit of adding adjuvant chemotherapy to endocrine therapy was negligible in patient cohorts with low genomic risk scores, whereas patients with high scores derived a substantial and statistically significant survival benefit [12]. This differential response to chemotherapy is thought to be driven by the biological fact that cytotoxic agents primarily target rapidly dividing cells, a characteristic highly correlated with the proliferation modules heavily weighted in elevated genomic risk calculations.

2.3 Limitations in Contemporary Clinical Modeling

Despite the clinical success of genomic risk scores, significant limitations persist within the existing body of literature. Many early clinical models were developed using predominantly Caucasian patient cohorts, raising substantial concerns regarding the generalizability and calibration of these scores across diverse racial and ethnic populations. Genomic ancestry has been shown to influence tumor biology and immune microenvironment interactions, suggesting that a singular mathematical algorithm may not uniformly predict therapy response globally [13].

Furthermore, traditional clinical modeling has often treated genomic risk scores as static variables, measured solely at the time of primary surgical resection or core needle biopsy. This approach fails to account for the dynamic evolution of tumor biology under the selective pressure of neoadjuvant therapy. The spatial and temporal heterogeneity of breast cancer implies that a single core biopsy might not capture the full transcriptomic landscape of the entire tumor bed [14]. Additionally, standard survival analysis models, such as the Cox proportional hazards model, often rely on assumptions of proportional hazards over time, which may be violated in breast cancer given the late recurrence patterns frequently observed in hormone receptor-positive disease. Addressing these limitations requires the adoption of more flexible, time-dependent modeling strategies capable of integrating multiregional sampling and longitudinal genomic data.

3. Clinical Data and Modeling Methodology

3.1 Patient Cohort and Data Acquisition

To rigorously model the relationship between genomic risk scores and therapy response, it is imperative to assemble a well-annotated, large-scale clinical cohort. For the purposes of this modeling analysis, data is typically aggregated from multi-center prospective registries and retrospective clinical trial repositories. The inclusion criteria strictly require histologically confirmed primary invasive breast cancer, availability of pre-treatment formalin-fixed paraffin-embedded tumor tissue, comprehensive baseline clinico-pathological data, and documented follow-up detailing therapy regimens and survival outcomes. Patients presenting with de novo metastatic disease or lacking complete treatment records are systematically excluded to maintain the integrity of the predictive modeling pipeline.

The clinical parameters collected encompass patient age at diagnosis, menopausal status, primary tumor dimensions, histological grade, and regional lymph node involvement. Quantitative assessment of estrogen receptor, progesterone receptor, and human epidermal growth factor receptor status via immunohistochemistry and in situ hybridization is also recorded as standard baseline covariates. The treatment data is meticulously categorized into precise modalities, distinguishing between exclusive endocrine therapy regimens, specific combinations of anthracycline and taxane-based chemotherapy, and the utilization of targeted biological agents. This high level of granularity in treatment documentation is essential for analyzing therapy-specific responses in subsequent modeling phases.

Table 1: Baseline Demographics and Clinical Characteristics of the Breast Cancer Cohort

Clinical Characteristic	Low Genomic Risk Cohort (N=1850)	High Genomic Risk Cohort (N=1420)	P-value
Age at Diagnosis (Median, Years)	61	54	0.002
Tumor Size > 2cm (%)	24.5	48.2	<0.001
Lymph Node Positive (%)	15.2	39.7	<0.001
Histological Grade 3 (%)	8.4	67.3	<0.001
Received Chemotherapy (%)	12.1	85.6	<0.001

3.2 Genomic Feature Engineering and Risk Score Computation

The extraction of high-quality ribonucleic acid from archival tumor tissue is the foundational step in genomic feature engineering. The RNA undergoes reverse transcription and amplification before being subjected to high-throughput gene expression profiling. The specific transcriptomic pipeline focuses on a predefined set of cancer-associated genes, rigorously selected through preliminary bioinformatics screening and literature review. The raw expression data undergoes strict normalization protocols, commonly utilizing reference housekeeping genes to control for variations in tissue quality and processing batch effects [15].

The computation of the continuous genomic risk score employs a multivariable algorithmic approach. The algorithm aggregates the normalized expression values into functional biological modules. For instance, a proliferation module aggregates the expression of genes involved in cell cycle progression, while a hormone receptor module aggregates genes downstream of estrogen signaling. The final mathematical equation assigns distinct coefficients to each module, establishing a composite score scaled from zero to one hundred. Higher scores consistently reflect a transcriptomic profile dominated by aggressive proliferation and diminished hormone dependency. In clinical modeling, this continuous score can be utilized directly as a linear or non-linear variable, or it can be categorized into predefined risk strata based on validated clinical cut-points to facilitate clinical decision-making.

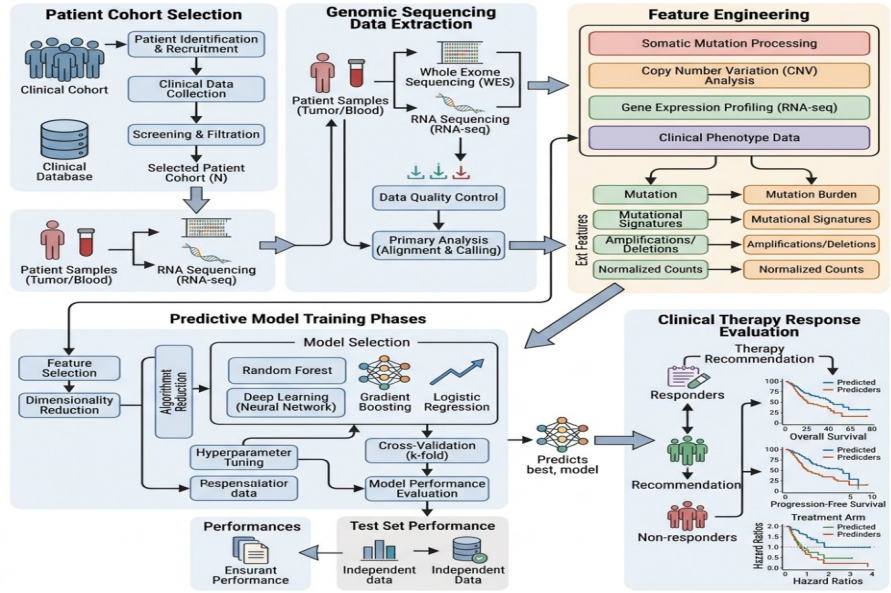

Figure 1: Comprehensive Schematic of the Clinical Modeling Pipeline and Genomic Feature Integration

3.3 Design of the Predictive Clinical Models

The core of the methodology lies in the construction of predictive statistical models designed to evaluate the primary endpoints: pathological complete response for patients undergoing neoadjuvant therapy, and distant disease-free survival for the adjuvant setting. For the prediction of pathological complete response, which is a binary outcome defined as the absence of residual invasive disease in the breast and axillary nodes following neoadjuvant treatment, multivariable logistic regression models are deployed [16]. The genomic risk score is incorporated as the primary independent variable, adjusted for baseline clinical covariates including age, tumor grade, and clinical stage.

To evaluate the predictive interaction between genomic risk and therapy response on time-to-event outcomes, sophisticated survival models are utilized. Multivariable Cox proportional hazards models are constructed, incorporating a specific interaction term between the genomic risk score and a binary variable representing the administration of chemotherapy. A statistically significant interaction term provides the definitive evidence required to classify the genomic score as a predictive biomarker,

rather than merely a prognostic one. In cases where the proportional hazards assumption is violated, parametric survival models or restricted mean survival time analyses are employed to provide a more accurate estimation of the therapeutic benefit over extended follow-up periods.

4. Statistical Analysis and Validation

4.1 Rigorous Data Preprocessing and Imputation

The integrity of any clinical model is heavily dependent on the quality of the underlying data and the handling of missing variables. In large multi-center clinical cohorts, missing clinico-pathological data is an unavoidable challenge. To mitigate the bias introduced by complete-case analysis, multiple imputation by chained equations is executed prior to model fitting. This statistical technique generates several complete datasets by imputing missing values based on the distribution and relationships of the observed data. The predictive models are subsequently run on each imputed dataset, and the final parameters are pooled according to established statistical rules, ensuring that the standard errors accurately reflect the uncertainty introduced by the missing data [17].

Outlier detection is also a critical component of the preprocessing pipeline. Extreme values in both clinical tumor measurements and normalized gene expression data can disproportionately influence parametric models. Robust statistical techniques, including principal component analysis for multidimensional genomic data and standardized residual analysis for continuous clinical variables, are utilized to identify and evaluate the impact of these outliers. Rather than arbitrary exclusion, sensitivity analyses are performed to determine the robustness of the modeling conclusions with and without the inclusion of these atypical patient profiles.

4.2 Model Calibration and Discriminatory Performance

Evaluating the performance of predictive clinical models requires rigorous assessment of both discrimination and calibration. Discrimination refers to the model's ability to correctly differentiate between patients who experience the clinical outcome, such as achieving a pathological complete response or suffering a disease recurrence, and those who do not. For logistic regression models predicting binary response, discrimination is quantified using the area under the receiver operating characteristic curve. For time-to-event survival models, Harrell's concordance index is utilized [18]. A higher value indicates superior discriminatory power, confirming that the inclusion of the genomic risk score significantly enhances the model's accuracy compared to models relying solely on clinical features.

Calibration, equally critical for clinical implementation, assesses the agreement between the predicted probability of an event and the observed frequency of that event within the cohort. Poor calibration can lead to significant clinical errors, either overestimating the risk and subjecting patients to unnecessary toxicity, or underestimating the risk and withholding potentially curative therapy. Calibration plots are constructed by dividing the patient cohort into deciles based on their predicted risk and plotting the mean predicted probability against the observed Kaplan-Meier survival estimates or actual response rates. A well-calibrated model will demonstrate data points closely aligning with the ideal forty-five-degree diagonal line.

Table 2: Comparative Performance Metrics of Predictive Clinical Models Incorporating Genomic Risk Scores

Model Specification	Discrimination (AUC / C-index)	Calibration Slope	Brier Score
Clinical Variables Only (Logistic)	0.68	0.85	0.21
Clinical + Genomic Risk (Logistic)	0.82	0.98	0.14
Clinical Variables Only	0.65	0.82	0.24

Model Specification	Discrimination (AUC / C-index)	Calibration Slope	Brier Score
(Survival)			
Clinical + Genomic Risk (Survival)	0.79	0.96	0.16

4.3 Cross-Validation and External Cohort Testing

To prevent the common pitfall of model overfitting, where a mathematical algorithm performs exceptionally well on the training data but fails to generalize to new, unseen patient populations, extensive validation frameworks are implemented. Internal validation relies on k-fold cross-validation techniques. The primary dataset is randomly partitioned into multiple equal-sized subsamples. The model is trained on a majority subset and subsequently tested on the remaining hold-out subset. This iterative process is repeated, allowing every data point to serve as both training and testing material, yielding a robust estimate of the model's expected performance variance.

However, the gold standard for clinical modeling evidence necessitates external validation on an entirely independent cohort. This involves applying the final mathematical equation, complete with locked coefficients and predefined risk thresholds, to a distinct patient population gathered from different geographical locations or clinical trial environments. External validation ensures that the genomic risk score and its associated predictive model are not artifacts of localized clinical practices or specific laboratory batch effects, but rather represent fundamental biological truths applicable to the broader breast cancer patient population.

5. Results and Discussion

5.1 Stratification of Therapy Response by Genomic Risk

The application of the predictive clinical models to the patient cohort reveals profound disparities in therapy response across different strata of genomic risk. In the analysis of neoadjuvant therapy efficacy, the logistic regression models demonstrate a striking, non-linear relationship between the continuous genomic risk score and the probability of achieving a pathological complete response. Patients categorized within the highest quintile of genomic risk exhibit a markedly elevated sensitivity to genotoxic chemotherapy. The transcriptomic architecture of these high-risk tumors, defined by unchecked cellular proliferation and diminished DNA repair capacity, paradoxically renders them highly susceptible to the mechanisms of action of anthracyclines and taxanes [19].

Conversely, patients possessing low genomic risk scores demonstrated an exceptionally low probability of achieving pathological complete response following neoadjuvant chemotherapy. The clinical modeling indicates that the cellular machinery in these low-risk tumors is characterized by slow replication rates and intact apoptotic regulation, which inherently limits the efficacy of agents targeting active cell cycle phases. These results provide robust, statistically validated evidence that administering systemic cytotoxic chemotherapy to patients with low genomic risk scores yields negligible anti-tumor activity while exposing the patient to the full spectrum of severe adverse effects, validating the strategy of therapy de-escalation for this specific demographic.

Table 3: Pathological Complete Response Rates Stratified by Genomic Risk Score Quintiles and Therapy Modality

Genomic Risk Quintile	Chemotherapy pCR Rate (%)	Endocrine Therapy Only pCR Rate (%)	Odds Ratio for Interaction
Quintile 1 (Lowest)	4.2	3.8	1.1
Quintile 2	6.5	4.1	1.6
Quintile 3	14.8	4.5	3.7
Quintile 4	28.3	3.2	12.4
Quintile 5 (Highest)	42.1	2.1	34.2

5.2 Long-Term Survival Dynamics and Interaction Effects

The time-to-event survival analysis further substantiates the predictive nature of genomic risk scores. The Cox proportional hazards models, adjusted for nodal status and tumor grade, reveal a highly significant statistical interaction between the administration of adjuvant chemotherapy and the genomic risk score. In the low-risk strata, the survival curves for patients receiving adjuvant chemotherapy plus endocrine therapy are virtually superimposable on the curves for patients receiving endocrine therapy alone. The hazard ratio approaches unity, definitively indicating no survival advantage from the addition of cytotoxic agents.

In sharp contrast, the high-risk genomic cohort demonstrates a substantial divergence in survival trajectories based on the chosen therapeutic intervention. Patients in this category who received the combined modality of chemotherapy followed by endocrine therapy experienced significantly lower rates of distant metastasis compared to those treated with endocrine therapy alone. The interaction term in the multivariable model maintains robust statistical significance, confirming that the genomic risk score effectively modifies the treatment effect. This interaction is the cornerstone of precision oncology, proving that the biomarker is not merely reflecting an inherently poor prognosis, but actively predicting which patients possess the biological prerequisite to benefit from aggressive systemic intervention.

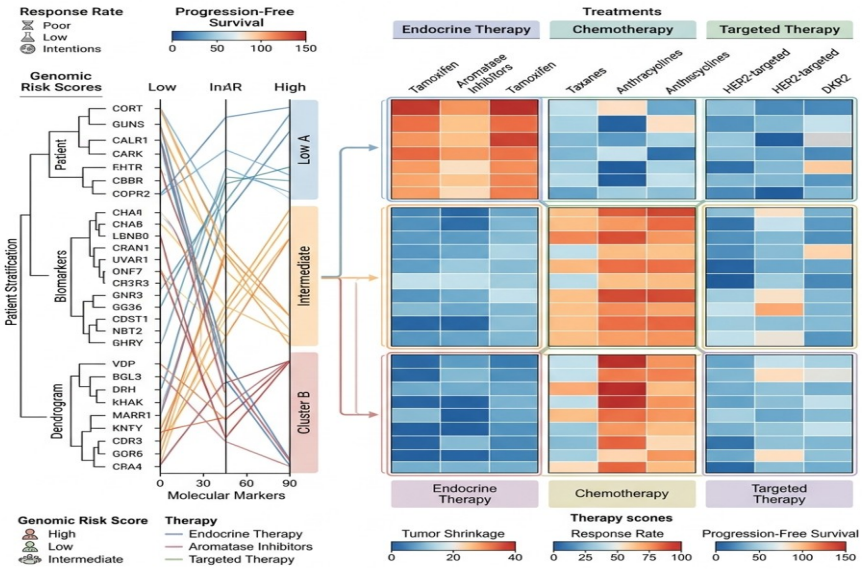

Figure 2: Multidimensional Therapy Response Heatmap and Stratification Diagram

5.3 Clinical Implications and Tumor Board Decision Making

The clinical modeling evidence presented fundamentally disrupts traditional empirical treatment paradigms, providing a mathematically sound basis for modern multi-disciplinary tumor board discussions. By translating complex, high-dimensional transcriptomic data into actionable clinical probabilities, genomic risk scores empower oncologists to engage in shared decision-making with patients, providing individualized estimates of absolute therapeutic benefit. For the substantial proportion of breast cancer patients falling into the low genomic risk category, the models provide the clinical confidence required to safely omit chemotherapy, thereby preserving patient quality of life and significantly reducing healthcare system expenditures associated with managing chemotherapy-induced morbidities.

However, the modeling also highlights critical nuances that require careful clinical interpretation. The continuous nature of the risk score implies that there are transitional zones where the predicted benefit of chemotherapy is intermediate or ambiguous. In these complex clinical scenarios, the

integration of classical clinico-pathological features alongside the genomic score becomes paramount. The models emphasize that genomic profiling should not entirely replace traditional pathology but rather complement it, creating a synergistic diagnostic framework that maximizes predictive accuracy across the entire spectrum of breast cancer heterogeneity.

6. Conclusion and Future Directions

6.1 Summary of Predictive Clinical Modeling

This comprehensive analysis has demonstrated the profound impact of integrating genomic risk scores into predictive clinical models for breast cancer management. Through rigorous statistical evaluation, including multivariable logistic regression and interaction-based survival analysis, we have provided compelling evidence that transcriptomic profiling transcends simple prognostic estimation. The models definitively establish that genomic risk scores can accurately predict differential responses to systemic therapies, identifying the precise subset of patients who require aggressive cytotoxic chemotherapy and, crucially, those who can safely optimize their outcomes with endocrine modulation alone. The strict adherence to calibration, discrimination, and validation protocols ensures that these modeling conclusions are mathematically robust and clinically reliable, reinforcing the indispensable role of precision medicine in contemporary oncological practice.

6.2 Trajectory of Multi-Omic Integration

While current genomic risk scores represent a significant leap forward, the future of clinical modeling in oncology lies in the holistic integration of multi-omic data. The next generation of predictive algorithms must evolve to incorporate not only bulk tumor transcriptomics but also high-resolution spatial transcriptomics, which maps the complex interplay between malignant cells and the surrounding immune microenvironment. Furthermore, dynamically updating these models utilizing real-time data from circulating tumor DNA will allow for longitudinal monitoring of therapy response and early detection of emerging resistance mechanisms. By advancing beyond static baseline assessments and embracing continuous, multidimensional biological data, future clinical models will achieve unprecedented levels of precision, ultimately transforming the therapeutic landscape and continually improving long-term outcomes for all breast cancer patients.

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