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# EVALUATING GENE EDITING THERAPIES AGAINST CLONAL EXPANSION AND DELAYED MALIGNANCY

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**Abstract:**

This study evaluates how genomic safety evidence from therapeutic gene editing can inform international assessment of clonal expansion and delayed malignancy. A descriptive and exploratory synthesis examined 11 original publications from 2014 to 2021, comprising seven clinical studies with nine cohorts and 38 treated participants, alongside four laboratory investigations. Analysis integrated 27 source linked numerical records with mechanistic findings while preserving differences in biological systems, assays, and observation periods. Clinical evidence identified a median unintended mutation frequency of 0.05% across 18 candidate sites, while experimental investigations documented p53 mediated cellular selection, DNA damage associated toxicity, large deletions, complex rearrangements, and chromothripsis. Edited therapeutic cells remained detectable despite declining chromosomal translocation frequencies, demonstrating that cellular persistence and genomic abnormalities can follow distinct trajectories. These findings establish that editing efficiency, sequence specificity, structural integrity, and cellular survival represent separate dimensions of genomic evaluation. The study advances an outcome specific interpretive framework supporting differentiated genomic surveillance, standardized reporting, and long term therapeutic safety assessment across clinical settings.

**Key Words:** Therapeutic Gene Editing; Genomic Integrity; Clonal Expansion; DNA Damage Response; Genomic Safety Assessment.

## 1. Introduction:

The clinical promise of therapeutic gene editing depends not only on achieving the intended genetic modification but also on preserving genomic integrity in cells that survive, proliferate, and persist after treatment. This distinction creates a fundamental challenge for translational medicine: an intervention may demonstrate therapeutic activity and acceptable short-term tolerability while leaving important questions about DNA damage, cellular selection, chromosomal instability, and subsequent malignant transformation unresolved. The introduction of zinc finger nucleases (ZFNs), transcription activator-like effector nucleases (TALENs), and clustered regularly interspaced short palindromic repeats-associated protein 9 (CRISPR-Cas9) has expanded the possibilities for targeted genetic modification across infectious diseases, hematological disorders, and malignancies. Early clinical investigations established the feasibility of editing autologous CD4 T cells in individuals with HIV, engineering allogeneic T cells for refractory leukemia, and modifying hematopoietic stem cells for therapeutic applications (Tebas et al., 2014; Qasim et al., 2017; Xu et al., 2019). Subsequent studies extended therapeutic editing to refractory cancers, sickle cell disease, β-thalassemia, and transthyretin amyloidosis (Lu et al., 2020; Stadtmauer et al., 2020; Frangoul et al., 2021; Gillmore et al., 2021). These developments establish the clinical relevance of genome editing but also sharpen an unresolved scientific question: how should genomic safety be interpreted when therapeutic persistence, unintended sequence modifications, structural chromosomal alterations, and cellular selection are measured using different biological systems and observation windows?

The significance of this question extends beyond the immediate evaluation of editing efficiency. Therapeutic interventions must produce sufficient modified cells or tissues to achieve their intended biological effects, yet the mechanisms responsible for DNA cleavage and repair may also influence the genomic composition of surviving cells. Consequently, successful editing and genomic integrity cannot be assumed to represent equivalent outcomes. In an early clinical investigation, Tebas et al. (2014) demonstrated the feasibility of infusing CCR5-modified autologous CD4 T cells into individuals with HIV, establishing an important foundation for evaluating therapeutic cell persistence. Qasim et al. (2017) subsequently reported molecular remission following treatment with TALEN-edited universal chimeric antigen receptor T cells in infants with B-cell acute lymphoblastic leukemia. These studies established clinically relevant applications of nuclease-mediated editing but involved distinct therapeutic products, molecular targets, and clinical circumstances. Their findings therefore cannot independently establish the comparative genomic safety of different editing platforms. This distinction matters for clinical development because treatment feasibility, therapeutic response, and genomic safety represent related but analytically separate dimensions of intervention performance.

The biological basis of this separation lies in the relationship between targeted DNA cleavage, endogenous repair pathways, and cellular survival. Nuclease-mediated editing can introduce DNA double-strand breaks that activate protective cellular responses and repair processes. Although these mechanisms may prevent

the propagation of damaged cells, they can also influence which edited cells survive and contribute to the final cellular population. Haapaniemi et al. (2018) demonstrated that CRISPR-Cas9 editing activated a p53-mediated DNA damage response in human retinal epithelial cells, producing cell-cycle arrest and selection against cells retaining functional p53. Complementary evidence from Ihry et al. (2018) established that Cas9-induced DNA damage caused p53-dependent toxicity in human pluripotent stem cells. Together, these findings indicate that editing outcomes reflect more than the molecular efficiency of introducing intended sequence modifications. They also depend on the biological response of the recipient cells, particularly the relationship between DNA damage recognition, cellular viability, and selection. The theoretical implication is that the composition of a surviving edited population may be shaped jointly by editing activity and damage-responsive cellular selection, although the magnitude and clinical relevance of these mechanisms cannot be inferred directly from laboratory observations.

Cellular context consequently provides an essential condition for interpreting genomic outcomes. Retinal epithelial cells, pluripotent stem cells, differentiated therapeutic T cells, and hematopoietic stem cells differ in their biological functions and responses to genome modification. The p53-related findings reported by Haapaniemi et al. (2018) and Ihry et al. (2018) demonstrate that DNA damage responses can influence editing outcomes within specific experimental systems, but they do not establish that equivalent selection processes occur at comparable frequencies across therapeutic cell products. This distinction is particularly important when evaluating clonal expansion, because persistence of an edited cell population does not by itself demonstrate preferential expansion of genetically abnormal cells. Conversely, the absence of a reported selection event does not establish that selection has been comprehensively excluded. A mechanistically informed evaluation must therefore distinguish observed cellular selection from the broader persistence of therapeutic cells and interpret each observation according to its biological model, molecular target, and measurement context.

A second challenge concerns the relationship between sequence-level specificity and structural genomic integrity. Conventional assessments of unintended editing frequently concentrate on sequence changes at selected genomic locations, yet targeted cleavage may also generate structural alterations around the intended editing site. Kosicki et al. (2018) demonstrated that repair of CRISPR-Cas9-induced double-strand breaks could produce large deletions and complex genomic rearrangements in experimental systems. Leibowitz et al. (2021) further identified chromothripsis as a potential on-target consequence of CRISPR-Cas9 editing, linking targeted DNA damage to extensive chromosomal fragmentation and rearrangement through micronuclei and chromosome bridges. These findings establish that intended targeting and structurally intact repair are not interchangeable properties. They also challenge interpretations of genomic safety based exclusively on the frequency of detected mutations at selected candidate sites. The relevant scientific question is therefore not simply whether unintended modifications are detected, but which classes of genomic alterations are detectable using the applied measurement approach and what conclusions those measurements can legitimately support.

Clinical evidence illustrates the importance of this measurement distinction. In a study of CRISPR-edited T cells administered to patients with refractory non-small-cell lung cancer, Lu et al. (2020) reported a median unintended mutation frequency of 0.05% across 18 assessed candidate sites, with observed frequencies ranging from zero to 0.25%. This result provides evidence concerning detected sequence modifications within the specified assessment panel, rather than a comprehensive estimate of all possible genomic abnormalities. In contrast, the experimental findings of Kosicki et al. (2018) and Leibowitz et al. (2021) concern structural genomic outcomes that cannot be represented by the same candidate-site mutation frequency. The apparent contrast between low detected mutation frequencies and experimentally demonstrated structural alterations therefore need not indicate inconsistent biological findings. Instead, it reflects differences in the genomic features examined, biological systems studied, and measurement methods employed. This distinction establishes a central requirement for evaluating therapeutic gene editing: conclusions about genomic integrity must remain aligned with the specific alterations assessed and the scope of the underlying assays.

The relationship between therapeutic cell persistence and chromosomal abnormalities introduces a further dimension of genomic evaluation. Persistence is clinically relevant because modified cells may need to remain detectable to sustain their intended therapeutic activity. Nevertheless, the continued presence of edited cells does not establish whether cells carrying particular genomic alterations have expanded, contracted, or remained stable. Stadtmauer et al. (2020), investigating CRISPR-engineered T cells in patients with refractory cancer, reported persistence of edited therapeutic cells for up to nine months alongside declining frequencies of chromosomal translocations. These observations demonstrate that persistence of an edited cellular population and persistence of a measured chromosomal abnormality may follow different trajectories. Similarly, Xu et al. (2019) documented persistence of CRISPR-edited donor-derived stem cells for more than 19 months in a patient with HIV and acute lymphocytic leukemia, without reported gene-editing-related adverse events. Although these findings support the feasibility of sustained edited-cell detection, their different therapeutic products, observation periods, and genomic assessments preclude direct comparison of long-term genomic safety. They instead reinforce the importance of interpreting cellular persistence alongside, rather than as a substitute for, genomic measurements.

Taken together, the clinical and experimental literature establishes several complementary mechanisms through which therapeutic gene editing may affect genomic outcomes. Clinical investigations demonstrate the feasibility of applying different editing platforms to distinct therapeutic indications, while laboratory studies identify DNA damage responses, cellular selection, large deletions, complex rearrangements, and chromosome-level disruption as relevant biological processes (Haapaniemi et al., 2018; Ihry et al., 2018; Kosicki et al., 2018; Leibowitz et al., 2021). However, the reviewed evidence does not establish whether these outcomes can be compared directly across platforms, molecular targets, cell products, and assessment intervals. Clinical studies generally report intervention-specific outcomes, whereas mechanistic investigations examine particular cellular models under experimental conditions. The resulting evidence is informative but heterogeneous: mutation frequencies, structural abnormalities, toxicity responses, and persistence measurements differ in their definitions, units, denominators, and observation windows. Consequently, a single numerical measure of genomic safety would obscure important distinctions among the biological processes being evaluated.

The precise research gap therefore concerns the interpretation and integration of heterogeneous genomic evidence rather than the absence of studies investigating editing-related DNA damage. Existing investigations establish that therapeutic editing can achieve clinically relevant biological effects and that nuclease-induced damage can produce cellular selection and structural genomic alterations. What remains insufficiently resolved within the assembled evidence is how these findings should be organized to distinguish intervention characteristics, biological mechanisms, genomic outcomes, and measurement boundaries without imposing unsupported equivalence across studies. This gap is particularly relevant to the evaluation of clonal expansion and delayed malignancy, for which short-term therapeutic observations and isolated genomic measurements cannot independently establish long-term outcomes. A structured synthesis that preserves the distinctions between clinical cohorts and laboratory systems can therefore contribute to a more defensible interpretation of the available evidence. Its contribution lies in clarifying the correspondence between the biological question, the outcome measured, and the inference supported, rather than deriving a comparative causal effect or a pooled estimate of malignancy risk.

The empirical setting of this study comprises published investigations of therapeutic somatic gene editing and experimental systems relevant to genomic injury and cellular selection. The assembled evidence includes 11 original research publications spanning 2014-2021, comprising seven clinical publications contributing nine disease- or dose-specific cohorts and four laboratory publications providing mechanistic observations. Across the clinical cohorts, 38 treated participants are represented, with seven cohorts involving CRISPR-Cas9, one involving ZFNs, and one involving TALENs. Seven cohorts concern ex vivo editing, whereas two involve in vivo delivery. The accompanying evidence workbook contains 27 source-linked numeric metric records, including participant counts, treatment characteristics, mutation measurements, therapeutic observations, and assessment intervals. These records are nested within their originating clinical cohorts and do not constitute independent observations. The study consequently adopts a descriptive and exploratory evidence-synthesis approach, preserving original outcome definitions, measurement units, biological contexts, and observation windows. Clinical and laboratory evidence are interpreted together at the mechanistic level without combining incompatible denominators or attributing independent platform effects to comparisons in which intervention characteristics vary simultaneously.

This study aims to evaluate reported genomic outcomes associated with therapeutic gene editing by examining the relationships among editing platforms, molecular targets, therapeutic cell products, cellular damage responses, structural genomic alterations, and edited-cell persistence within their documented measurement contexts. The central research question is: How do reported genomic findings differ across therapeutic gene-editing interventions and experimental cellular systems, and what do these observations establish about cellular selection, structural genomic integrity, and the relationship between edited-cell persistence and chromosomal abnormalities? Three interconnected objectives guide the analysis. The first is to characterize reported genomic findings across editing platforms while retaining information on molecular targets, cell products, delivery settings, and assay coverage. The second is to identify the experimental cellular systems in which p53-related selection, DNA damage-associated toxicity, and structural genomic alterations have been documented. The third is to examine the reported temporal relationship between chromosomal translocations and edited-cell persistence where both outcomes have been measured. These objectives provide a coherent analytical basis for interpreting the available evidence without assuming causal relationships or statistical interactions that the underlying data cannot identify.

The study contributes to the evaluation of therapeutic gene editing by developing an outcome-specific synthesis that separates sequence-level mutation detection, structural genomic integrity, cellular selection, and therapeutic cell persistence. The conceptual contribution is to position genomic outcomes within a mechanistic framework in which DNA damage, endogenous repair, and cellular survival influence the interpretation of edited-cell populations. The methodological contribution is the preservation of source-specific measurement definitions and biological contexts across heterogeneous clinical and laboratory observations. Practically, this approach informs the interpretation of genomic safety evidence by clarifying why targeted mutation testing,

structural alteration assessment, and persistence monitoring answer different questions. Its broader relevance lies in providing a transferable framework for interpreting evidence across therapeutic indications without assuming that findings from different cell products, assays, or observation periods are directly comparable. The remainder of the article presents the research hypotheses and conceptual framework in Section 2, the data in Section 3, and the analytical methods in Section 4. Section 5 presents the findings, Section 6 discusses their significance, and Section 7 sets out the conclusions and implications.

**2. Theory, Conceptual Framework and Hypotheses Development:**

This analysis adopts a mechanistic framework grounded in DNA damage responses, cellular selection and genome repair. Targeted DNA cleavage activates repair processes that influence genomic integrity and cell survival. The relationship between gene editing and genomic outcomes therefore depends on the editing platform, molecular target and recipient cell type. Genomic safety is represented by separately reported mutations, chromosomal alterations and cellular selection responses rather than an assumed composite index.

Cellular selection provides the first theoretical mechanism. DNA damage can activate protective pathways that arrest proliferation or eliminate damaged cells. These responses may preserve genomic integrity while reducing the survival of edited cells. Haapaniemi et al. (2018) demonstrated that CRISPR Cas9 editing activated a p53 mediated response and selected against cells with functional p53 in a human retinal epithelial cell model. This evidence supports evaluating selection within the cellular system in which it was observed.

Cell type establishes a boundary condition for this mechanism. Different cellular systems can respond differently to editing induced DNA damage. Ihry et al. (2018) found that Cas9 induced DNA breaks caused p53 dependent toxicity in human pluripotent stem cells. Editing efficiency and cellular survival can therefore move in opposing directions. This analysis treats cell identity as an observed intervention characteristic and retains the distinction between efficient editing and genomic safety.

Genome repair provides the second mechanism. Cleavage at the intended target does not guarantee structurally intact repair. Kosicki et al. (2018) identified large deletions and complex rearrangements following CRISPR Cas9 editing in experimental cell systems. Their findings distinguish sequence specificity from structural integrity. Consequently, this analysis interprets each genomic outcome according to the assay and biological model used to measure it.

Clinical measurements further demonstrate the importance of assay coverage. Lu et al. (2020) reported a median mutation frequency of 0.05 percent across 18 candidate sites in patients receiving PDCD1 edited T cells. This measurement describes mutations at the assessed sites. The conceptual framework therefore retains mutation frequency and assay coverage as distinct recorded characteristics rather than treating a targeted assay as a comprehensive measure of genomic integrity.

Cellular persistence provides the third mechanism. Edited cells must survive to sustain their biological activity, but persistence requires interpretation alongside genomic findings. Stadtmauer et al. (2020) reported that chromosomal translocation frequencies decreased over time while edited therapeutic T cells remained detectable. This evidence supports examining persistence and chromosomal alterations separately. Detectable edited cells alone do not establish adverse clonal selection.

The conceptual framework organizes editing platform, molecular target and cell product as observed intervention characteristics. Reported mutation frequencies, chromosomal alterations and cellular selection responses constitute the genomic outcomes. DNA damage, repair and selection explain the theoretical connections between these characteristics and outcomes. Clinical observations and laboratory findings remain separate because they represent different biological systems and measurement conditions.

The analysis uses exploratory evaluation objectives appropriate to the available measurements. The first objective is to characterize reported genomic findings by editing platform while retaining molecular target, cell product and assay context. The second objective is to identify the cellular models in which p53 related selection, toxicity and structural genomic alterations were observed. The third objective is to describe reported changes in chromosomal translocations alongside edited cell persistence where both outcomes were measured. These objectives guide descriptive evidence synthesis without imposing unsupported directional relationships.

**3. Data:**

This analysis uses a source linked evidence workbook to document sample construction, define observed measures and preserve the context of each reported outcome. Clinical cohorts and laboratory studies form separate analytical groups, supporting descriptive comparison without combining incompatible measurements.

**3.1 Data Sources, Population, and Sample Construction:**

The dataset comprises eleven original research publications within the eligibility period of 2010 to 2021. Seven clinical publications contribute nine disease or dose specific cohorts, while four laboratory publications provide mechanistic evidence. The retained publications span 2014 to 2021. The workbook contains publication level and cohort level secondary data rather than individual patient records or regularly sampled longitudinal observations.

The clinical sources cover CCR5 edited T cells for HIV, TALEN edited T cells for infant leukemia, edited donor stem cells for HIV and leukemia, multiplex edited T cells for refractory cancer, and PDCD1 edited T cells for lung cancer. These reports supply treatment characteristics, participant counts, selected therapeutic outcomes and genomic observations. Each publication has a reference identifier and DOI, while each clinical cohort has a separate cohort identifier. These identifiers preserve the distinction between publications and the populations described within them. Tebas et al. (2014), Qasim et al. (2017), Xu et al. (2019), Stadtmauer et al. (2020), and Lu et al. (2020) constitute five of the seven clinical sources.

The remaining clinical publications describe edited stem cells for two hemoglobin disorders and two dose cohorts receiving liver directed editing for transthyretin amyloidosis. The two disease cohorts in Frangoul et al. (2021) and the two dose cohorts in Gillmore et al. (2021) remain separate observations because their indications or treatment doses differ.

The target population comprises reported therapeutic somatic gene editing interventions and experimental systems relevant to genomic injury or cellular selection. The accessible sampling frame is the eleven publications assembled in the workbook. Selection was targeted rather than probability based. The recorded eligibility rules require a verifiable original report, publication within the specified period and relevant therapeutic or genomic information. Germline editing and standalone gene addition interventions fall outside these boundaries. Hybrid products combining gene editing with transgene introduction remain eligible.

The empirical setting is biomedical research across human therapeutic applications and laboratory systems. Geography is not consistently recorded as a structured variable, so the analytical sample is not classified by country. Observation timing follows the source publication and its reported assessment windows. The dataset is an irregular collection of reported cohorts and experimental findings, not an annual panel.

Table 1: Documented sample construction

| Stage | Publications | Analytical Records | Recorded Basis |
|---|---|---|---|
| Assembled source corpus | 11 | 11 publication records | Original reports retained within the publication period |
| Clinical evidence group | 7 | 9 cohort records | Separate disease and dose cohorts |
| Laboratory evidence group | 4 | 4 study records | Separate experimental systems and genomic mechanisms |
| Clinical numeric extraction | 7 | 27 metric records | Selected values linked to their originating cohorts |
| Final descriptive evidence base | 11 | 9 clinical cohorts and 4 laboratory studies | Clinical and laboratory evidence retained separately |

The twenty-seven metric records are nested within the clinical evidence and do not represent additional cohorts or participants. A screening log documenting the number of records initially retrieved and excluded was not included. Consequently, the table reports the assembled evidence base rather than an inferred literature screening process.

The source providers are the research teams responsible for the original publications. Published articles and their DOI landing pages constitute the access route. The workbook records bibliographic details and extraction locations, principally abstracts, with methods or figure descriptions identified for selected records. Extraction dates, article version histories and article specific reuse licences were not recorded. Public access is therefore not treated as permission to redistribute the underlying publications.

**3.2 Data Integration, Cleaning, and Quality Assurance:**

Integration uses two explicit identifiers. Cohort identifiers connect numeric observations to clinical records, while reference identifiers connect clinical and laboratory records to bibliographic sources. The intended relationships are one publication to one or more cohorts and one cohort to one or more numeric observations. Laboratory studies retain their own identifiers and are not merged with clinical cohorts. Verification identified nine unique clinical cohort identifiers and eleven unique reference identifiers. All twenty seven numeric observations matched a clinical cohort, and all source identifiers matched a bibliographic record. No duplicate cohort identifiers, duplicate reference identifiers or duplicate combinations of cohort and metric were detected. Publication years agreed across linked clinical, laboratory and reference records.

Repeated reference identifiers represent legitimate observations from the same publication. The two hemoglobin disorder cohorts share one source, as do the two amyloidosis dose cohorts. Similarly, multiple measurements within a cohort represent different outcomes or assessment characteristics. These repetitions were retained. Measurements remain in their reported units. Participant counts use persons, treatment doses use milligrams per kilogram, and mutation or biomarker measures use percentages. Observation windows retain days, weeks or months. The recorded conversion expresses more than one year as a lower bound exceeding twelve months. It does not assign an exact follow up duration. Survival medians, biomarker assessment times and edited cell persistence windows remain distinct.

Missing information is explicitly coded. NR denotes information not reported in the extracted source section. NA denotes a field that is not applicable to the extracted measurement. Six of nine clinical records contain NR in the genomic or safety finding field. All nine contain NR for delayed new malignancy counts. Four numeric records have NA denominators because no applicable cell level denominator was extracted. None of the twenty seven numeric value fields is blank. No missing observation was replaced with zero. No interpolation, imputation, winsorization or outlier removal was applied. Range limits and confidence intervals remain attached to their corresponding measurements. Enrollment denominators are distinguished from treated participants. In the lung cancer report, twenty two enrolled participants, seventeen sufficient cell products and twelve treated participants describe successive stages rather than conflicting sample sizes. The workbook records published observations rather than reconstructed information available at each treatment date. It does not use later publications to revise earlier records. The timing of the original eligibility decisions and any subsequent changes was not documented.

**3.3 Variable Measurement, Construction, and Validation:**

Intervention characteristics comprise editing platform, molecular target, cell product and delivery setting. These variables are categorical descriptors rather than continuous measures of treatment intensity. Genomic outcomes retain their original measurement level and source context. Numeric mutation frequencies remain separate from narrative findings on structural alterations, toxicity and cellular selection. The laboratory evidence provides distinct observations of p53 related selection, p53 dependent toxicity, large deletions and complex rearrangements, and chromothripsis. These findings arise from different experimental systems and are not interchangeable indicators of a common numerical outcome. Haapaniemi et al. (2018), Ihry et al. (2018), Kosicki et al. (2018), and Leibowitz et al. (2021) provide the corresponding mechanistic records.

Table 2: Variable dictionary

| Variable or Indicator | Analytical Role | Definition and Construction | Source and Identifier | Unit and Frequency | Transformation and Direction | Missing Value Rule | Coverage and Limitation |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Editing platform | Intervention descriptor | Reported nuclease platform | Clinical records C01 to C09 | Category per cohort | CRISPR Cas9, ZFN or TALEN; no ordinal ranking | Retain reported category | Available for nine cohorts |
| Molecular target | Intervention descriptor | Reported edited gene or regulatory region | Clinical records C01 to C09 | Category per cohort | Multiple targets retained together where reported | No inferred target | Available for nine cohorts; target and indication vary together |
| Cell product or tissue | Intervention descriptor | Reported therapeutic cell product or targeted tissue | Clinical records C01 to C09 | Category per cohort | Source description retained | No inferred cell composition | Available for nine cohorts |
| Delivery setting | Intervention descriptor | Editing outside or inside the recipient | Clinical records C01 to C09 | Category per cohort | Ex vivo or in vivo | No substitution | Seven ex vivo and two in vivo cohorts |
| Treated participants | Sample descriptor | Reported number receiving treatment | Clinical records C01 to C09 | Persons per cohort | Original count retained | No inferred participants | Nine cohorts; counts are not genomic event denominators |
| Unintended mutation frequency | Genomic outcome | Reported median mutation frequency at candidate sites | C05, R05 | Percent at the reported assessment | Original percentage scale; higher values indicate more detected mutations | No extrapolation to untested sites | One cohort; eighteen candidate sites |
| Chromosomal translocations | Genomic outcome | Reported presence and temporal direction | C04, R04 | Narrative observation | Decreasing frequency retained as reported | No invented numerical frequency | One clinical cohort |
| Large deletions and rearrangements | Mechanistic outcome | Reported structural genomic alterations | M03, R10 | Laboratory finding | Presence retained without severity scoring | No inferred clinical event rate | One laboratory publication |
| p53 related selection | Mechanistic outcome | Selection against cells with functional p53 | M01, R08 | Laboratory finding | Source interpretation retained | No imputed selection coefficient | One laboratory publication |
| p53 dependent toxicity | Mechanistic outcome | Reported cellular toxicity associated with DNA breaks | M02, R09 | Laboratory finding | Source interpretation retained | No numerical mortality estimate | One laboratory publication |
| Chromothripsis | Mechanistic outcome | Reported chromosome fragmentation and rearrangement process | M04, R11 | Laboratory finding | Presence retained without clinical extrapolation | No inferred patient incidence | One laboratory publication |
| Observation window | Timing descriptor | Assessment time or persistence interval reported | Clinical and numeric | Days, weeks or months | Bounds and endpoint meanings retained | No common duration assigned | Heterogeneous timing |

| Variable or Indicator | Analytical Role | Definition and Construction | Source and Identifier | Unit and Frequency | Transformation and Direction | Missing Value Rule | Coverage and Limitation |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | by the source | records | | | | |
| Therapeutic outcome | Clinical context | Reported response relevant to the treated condition | Clinical records C01 to C09 | Narrative or source specific unit | Original outcome definition retained | No common response score | Outcomes differ across indications |
| Publication year | Source descriptor | Bibliographic publication year | R01 to R11 | Calendar year per publication | Original year retained | No substitution with treatment year | Complete for eleven publications |

Seven clinical cohorts use CRISPR Cas9, one uses ZFN and one uses TALEN. Reported cohort sizes sum to thirty-eight treated participants. Across nine cohorts, the mean size is 4.22 participants, the sample standard deviation is 4.49, the median is three, and the range is one to twelve. These statistics describe cohort size rather than patient outcomes.

The numeric table contains twenty-seven populated metric records, but these records measure different quantities. A combined mean across participant counts, doses, survival times and percentages would lack substantive meaning. Accordingly, descriptive summaries preserve metric identity, units and source qualifiers. Validation consists of identifier checks, publication year agreement, numeric field completeness and preservation of source definitions. No latent variable model, composite safety index, interaction term or standardized outcome was constructed.

**3.4 Analytical Framework, Identification, and Reproducibility:**

This analysis is descriptive and exploratory. Its analytical target is the distribution and measurement context of reported genomic findings across intervention characteristics and experimental systems. The evidence structure supports comparison of what was measured, where it was measured and how the resulting observations were reported.

Clinical findings are organized by platform, molecular target, cell product and delivery setting. Laboratory findings are organized by biological model and genomic mechanism. Numeric comparisons remain restricted to measurements with compatible definitions and units. Clinical and laboratory findings are interpreted together at the mechanistic level without combining their denominators.

Reproducibility rests on the workbook's cohort identifiers, reference identifiers, DOI links, metric labels, units, denominators and extraction locations. Range limits and observation bounds remain explicit. The source corpus supports descriptive evidence mapping, while its targeted selection limits claims about the complete published literature. Definitions and timing are aligned through source specific interpretation rather than forced numerical harmonization.

**4. Methods:**

This study employs a descriptive, exploratory evidence-synthesis approach to evaluate genomic outcomes associated with therapeutic gene editing. The methodology integrates source-linked clinical observations and experimental findings while preserving differences in biological systems, measurement definitions, and observation periods. The analytical procedures prioritize traceability, measurement comparability, and mechanistic interpretation rather than statistical estimation of treatment effects.

**4.1 Research Design and Analytical Identification:**

The research adopts a retrospective, observational design based on published primary investigations of therapeutic somatic gene editing and laboratory evidence of genomic injury. The analytical objective is to characterize the reported genomic consequences of different editing interventions, identify experimentally demonstrated cellular responses, and examine the coexistence of therapeutic cell persistence and chromosomal alterations. The unit of analysis differs according to the evidence: clinical cohorts constitute the primary units for therapeutic observations, whereas individual laboratory publications provide distinct mechanistic records. Multiple measurements originating from the same clinical cohort remain linked to that cohort rather than being treated as independent observations.

The study uses structured descriptive comparison to address three research objectives. First, genomic findings are examined in relation to editing platform, molecular target, therapeutic cell product, and delivery setting. Second, experimental observations are interpreted according to cellular model and reported biological mechanism. Third, evidence concerning edited-cell persistence is considered alongside reported temporal changes in chromosomal abnormalities. The analytical comparisons concern differences in reported measurements and biological contexts rather than differences in estimated treatment effects.

The identification strategy is therefore interpretive rather than causal. Variation across interventions reflects differences in editing technology, molecular target, therapeutic indication, cellular composition, and measurement procedures. Because these characteristics frequently vary together, their independent contributions to genomic outcomes cannot be identified. Moreover, the available evidence does not provide a common untreated comparison group, randomized platform assignment, or consistently measured longitudinal genomic outcomes. The design consequently supports characterization of observed genomic findings and evaluation of

mechanistic consistency, but not causal attribution of genomic injury to differences between therapeutic platforms.

**4.2 Analytical Specification and Measurement Framework:**

The analytical framework distinguishes intervention characteristics from genomic outcomes and the biological mechanisms through which those outcomes may arise. Editing platforms, molecular targets, therapeutic cell products, and delivery settings are retained as categorical descriptors. Genomic observations are organized into separately measured domains comprising unintended sequence modifications, chromosomal alterations, cellular selection responses, and editing-associated toxicity. Therapeutic cell persistence is interpreted as a distinct biological observation rather than a direct indicator of genomic integrity.

The methodological framework instead applies outcome-specific interpretation. Each reported finding is considered in relation to its source, biological model, assay coverage, measurement unit, and assessment interval. Mechanistic connections are evaluated through the established relationships among targeted DNA cleavage, endogenous repair, DNA damage responses, and cellular survival. This approach permits integration of complementary clinical and experimental evidence without converting mechanistic observations into unmeasured clinical event rates or assuming that cellular persistence demonstrates abnormal clonal expansion.

**4.3 Data Processing, Descriptive Analysis, and Evidence Integration:**

The analytical sample and variable definitions follow the procedures documented in Section 3, particularly the sample construction presented in Table 1 and the variable dictionary in Table 2. The evidence base comprises 11 original publications, including seven clinical investigations contributing nine distinct cohorts and four laboratory studies. The clinical records contain 27 extracted numerical observations linked to their originating cohorts and bibliographic sources.

Data integration uses unique reference identifiers to connect observations with original publications and cohort identifiers to associate numerical measurements with their corresponding clinical populations. Repeated observations from the same publication are retained where they represent distinct cohorts or outcome measurements. The processing procedures preserve original measurement units, reported assessment windows, numerical bounds, and source-specific definitions. Missing information is distinguished from measurements that are not applicable, and unreported genomic findings are not interpreted as evidence that abnormalities were absent.

Descriptive analysis characterizes the composition of the clinical evidence by editing platform and delivery setting and summarizes cohort sizes using the mean, sample standard deviation, median, and range. These statistics describe the assembled evidence base rather than population-level clinical outcomes. Numerical genomic measurements are interpreted individually because their definitions, denominators, and assessment procedures do not support pooled estimation. Laboratory observations are synthesized through source-specific interpretation of cellular selection, toxicity, and structural genomic alterations. Integration occurs at the mechanistic level, with clinical and laboratory observations remaining analytically separate.

The assessment of persistence and chromosomal abnormalities relies on the temporal descriptions provided in the originating publications. Reported changes are interpreted within their respective observation windows without reconstructing unreported time points or estimating trajectories from incomplete measurements. No interpolation, imputation, winsorization, or outlier removal was applied. The resulting analytical procedure preserves the distinction between observed genomic abnormalities, their reported temporal behavior, and the continued detection of therapeutic cells.

**4.4 Validation, Reproducibility, and Interpretive Boundaries:**

Methodological validation focuses on the integrity of source linkage, consistency of extracted measurements, and correspondence between reported observations and analytical conclusions. Identifier verification established that the clinical measurements were linked to valid cohort records and that clinical and laboratory observations corresponded to documented bibliographic sources. Publication-year consistency, numerical completeness, and duplicate-identifier checks were also applied. These procedures support internal consistency of the evidence workbook but do not independently establish the biological validity of every measurement reported in the original investigations.

The study does not employ inferential hypothesis testing, regression diagnostics, predictive validation, or statistical robustness estimation because the evidence structure does not support a common estimand or sufficiently comparable observations. Analytical credibility instead depends on retaining source-specific measurement boundaries and avoiding numerical aggregation across incompatible outcomes. Findings concerning targeted mutation frequencies are restricted to the genomic locations assessed, while experimental observations of structural damage and cellular selection are interpreted within their respective biological systems. Clinical persistence findings are not treated as direct measurements of clonal expansion or delayed malignancy.

Reproducibility is supported by the documented source identifiers, cohort classifications, bibliographic references, DOI links, extracted measurement labels, original units, denominators, and assessment windows. The source-linked workbook provides the basis for reconstructing the descriptive summaries and tracing

individual observations to their originating publications. Nevertheless, targeted publication selection and the absence of a complete screening history limit claims of systematic literature coverage. The study therefore contributes a transparent, measurement-sensitive approach to genomic evidence synthesis, enabling defensible interpretation of heterogeneous therapeutic and mechanistic findings without claiming causal identification or comprehensive estimation of long-term genomic risk.

**5. Findings:**

This analysis examines reported genomic outcomes across therapeutic editing interventions and laboratory systems. Findings address intervention characteristics, cellular responses and the relationship between edited cell persistence and genomic alterations. The evidence is organized around descriptive evaluation objectives rather than unperformed statistical hypothesis tests.

**5.1 Evidence Composition and Measurement Coverage:**

The evidence base comprises eleven publications within the 2010 to 2021 eligibility period. Seven clinical publications contribute nine cohorts, while four laboratory publications contribute distinct mechanistic records. The clinical cohorts contain thirty-eight treated participants as reported across the source publications. Cohort size averages 4.22 participants, with a sample standard deviation of 4.49, a median of three and a range of one to twelve.

Seven clinical cohorts use CRISPR Cas9, one uses zinc finger nucleases and one uses TALENs. Seven involve ex vivo editing, while two involve in vivo delivery. These counts describe the assembled evidence rather than the distribution of platforms across the wider clinical literature. Platform, indication, molecular target and cell product vary together, preventing interpretation of platform differences as independent safety effects.

The numeric dataset contains twenty-seven metric records nested within the nine clinical cohorts. These records include participant counts, treatment doses, mutation frequencies, therapeutic responses and observation windows. They do not constitute twenty-seven independent experimental units. Their differing units and definitions require outcome specific interpretation.

Table 3: Composition of the descriptive evidence base

| Characteristic | Verified Result |
|---|---|
| Original publications | 11 |
| Clinical publications | 7 |
| Laboratory publications | 4 |
| Clinical cohorts | 9 |
| Reported treated participants across cohorts | 38 |
| Extracted numeric metric records | 27 |
| CRISPR Cas9 clinical cohorts | 7 |
| Zinc finger nuclease clinical cohorts | 1 |
| TALEN clinical cohorts | 1 |
| Ex vivo clinical cohorts | 7 |
| In vivo clinical cohorts | 2 |

Coverage differs across genomic outcomes. A numerical mutation frequency is available for one clinical cohort, while another provides a narrative account of changing translocation frequencies. Laboratory records document cellular selection, toxicity and structural genomic alterations. Accordingly, the findings preserve these measurements as separate outcomes.

**5.2 Genomic Specificity, Cellular Selection and Structural Alterations:**

The clinical mutation measurement indicates a low detected frequency within a defined candidate site panel. Lu et al. (2020) reported a median unintended mutation frequency of 0.05 percent, with a range from zero to 0.25 percent across eighteen candidate sites. All reported treatment related adverse events were grade one or two. These observations characterize the tested sites and reported clinical events. They do not establish that all possible genomic alterations occurred at similarly low frequencies.

The laboratory evidence identifies a separate dimension of genomic integrity. Kosicki et al. (2018) reported deletions extending over kilobases and complex rearrangements around intended editing sites. This finding demonstrates that accurate targeting and structurally intact repair are distinct properties. A low mutation frequency at selected candidate sites therefore cannot substitute for assessment of structural alterations around the intended target.

Cellular selection introduces another distinction between editing activity and biological outcome. Haapaniemi et al. (2018) observed a p53 mediated DNA damage response and cell cycle arrest in human retinal epithelial cells, with selection against cells retaining functional p53. The extracted finding identifies a selection mechanism within that experimental system. It does not provide a numerical estimate of the same process in treated patients.

Ihry et al. (2018) documented p53 dependent toxicity in human pluripotent stem cells despite mean insertion or deletion efficiency exceeding 80 percent. High editing efficiency therefore coexisted with an adverse cellular response. Across these laboratory records, editing success and cell survival represent separate outcomes, supporting interpretation of efficiency alongside the cellular consequences of DNA damage.

Leibowitz et al. (2021) identified micronuclei and chromosome bridges associated with chromothripsis after CRISPR Cas9 editing. This record extends the observed structural outcomes beyond local mutations and deletions. Its contribution is mechanistic: it documents a route from targeted DNA breaks to extensive chromosome rearrangement within experimental systems.

Table 4: Extracted genomic findings and their interpretation

| Evidence Source | Recorded Measurement or Finding | Interpretation Supported by the Record |
|---|---|---|
| Clinical candidate site testing | Median mutation frequency of 0.05 percent across eighteen sites | Low detected frequency within the assessed panel |
| Retinal epithelial cell model | p53 response, cell cycle arrest and selection against functional p53 | Editing can alter the composition of surviving cells |
| Pluripotent stem cell model | p53 dependent toxicity alongside editing efficiency above 80 percent | Editing efficiency does not represent cellular survival |
| Experimental structural assessment | Large deletions and complex rearrangements | Intended targeting can coexist with structural genomic injury |
| Chromosome level assessment | Micronuclei, chromosome bridges and chromothripsis | Editing induced DNA breaks can produce extensive rearrangement |

Together, these records reveal complementary measurement domains. Candidate site testing measures selected sequence changes, cellular assays identify survival and selection responses, and structural assessments detect chromosome damage. Their findings cannot be reduced to a single numerical safety ranking.

**5.3 Edited Cell Persistence and Evaluation of the Proposed Relationships:**

The clinical evidence distinguishes persistence from the temporal behavior of genomic abnormalities. Stadtmauer et al. (2020) reported edited T cell persistence for up to nine months while chromosomal translocation frequencies decreased over time. Continued detection of edited cells therefore coexisted with declining frequencies of the measured abnormalities. Persistence alone did not describe the trajectory of translocations.

Xu et al. (2019) reported persistence of edited donor cells for more than nineteen months in a recipient with HIV and acute lymphoblastic leukemia, without reported gene editing related adverse events. This observation concerns one recipient and a different cell product. The nineteen month lower bound and the nine month maximum reported for therapeutic T cells describe separate observation windows, not a comparative estimate of durability.

The first evaluation objective identifies genomic findings within their intervention context. The clinical records provide a targeted mutation measurement and a temporal translocation finding, but these outcomes differ in definition and assay coverage. Their interpretation remains specific to the reported intervention.

The second objective identifies cellular models in which genomic injury or selection occurred. The laboratory records distinguish p53 related selection, p53 dependent toxicity, large deletions, complex rearrangements and chromothripsis. Their convergence concerns the presence of several routes through which editing can affect genomic integrity. It does not establish equal frequencies across cell types.

The third objective examines persistence alongside changing genomic findings. The multiplex edited T cell record documents persistence together with declining translocation frequencies. This provides descriptive evidence that edited cell persistence and the persistence of a measured genomic abnormality can follow different trajectories.

The central finding is that genomic evaluation depends on the outcome measured, the biological system and the observation window. The assembled evidence documents therapeutic cell persistence and several genomic injury mechanisms, while providing no basis for a pooled estimate of delayed malignancy. Clinical tolerability, editing efficiency and genomic integrity consequently require separate interpretation.

**6. Discussion:**

Therapeutic persistence and genomic integrity can follow different trajectories after gene editing. The evidence summarized in Tables 3 and 4 makes this distinction central to interpretation: continued detection of edited cells does not establish that their genomic composition remains unchanged, while detection of an abnormality does not establish its subsequent expansion. Stadtmauer et al. (2020) documented persistent edited T cells alongside decreasing chromosomal translocation frequencies. The analytical contribution is the integration of these distinct observations within an outcome specific framework. This shifts interpretation from a general judgment of editing safety toward assessment of which genomic feature was measured, in which cells and over what interval.

Cellular selection further changes how editing performance should be understood. The laboratory findings in Table 4 indicate that the surviving population reflects both successful editing and the cellular response to DNA damage. Haapaniemi et al. (2018) demonstrated selection against cells with functional p53 following editing in a retinal epithelial cell model. The theoretical implication is that observed editing outcomes depend partly on which cells survive the procedure. An edited population therefore represents the joint outcome of modification, repair and selection. This interpretation extends evaluation beyond the intended sequence change without treating laboratory selection as a measured clinical mediation effect.

The evidence also separates genomic specificity from structural repair integrity. Table 4 juxtaposes candidate site mutation testing with observations of large deletions, complex rearrangements and chromosome disruption. Kosicki et al. (2018) demonstrated that intended targeting can coexist with substantial alterations around the cleavage site, while Leibowitz et al. (2021) identified chromothripsis arising through micronuclei and chromosome bridges. These findings do not establish the relative contribution of each pathway, but they show why one measurement cannot represent all genomic consequences. The theoretical contribution is a multidimensional interpretation of genomic integrity in which sequence changes, structural damage and cellular selection remain analytically distinct.

The principal operational challenge concerns the correspondence between a measurement and the conclusion drawn from it. Lu et al. (2020) reported a median mutation frequency of 0.05 percent across eighteen candidate sites. As Table 4 indicates, this result supports a bounded conclusion about the assessed panel rather than a comprehensive judgment about the genome. Assay coverage therefore determines the scope of a defensible safety statement. The synthesis makes this relationship explicit: apparently different findings may reflect different measurement targets rather than contradictory biological outcomes. Evaluation reports should consequently identify the genomic feature assessed, assay coverage, cell product and observation window alongside each conclusion.

The international relevance of this analysis lies in a framework that can travel across therapeutic indications and research settings without assuming that their outcomes are interchangeable. The clinical diversity in Table 3 and the mechanistic diversity in Table 4 show why a universal platform ranking would obscure differences in target biology, cell identity and measurement coverage. The evidence supports a practical change in evaluation: report therapeutic persistence separately from genomic alterations, distinguish targeted mutation testing from structural assessment, and retain the biological context of selection findings. This contribution is a structured synthesis of complementary evidence rather than a new causal estimate. It redirects interpretation toward alignment between the biological question, the measurement used and the conclusion supported.

**7. Conclusion and Implications:**

The global advancement of therapeutic gene editing demands a fundamental shift from demonstrating successful genetic modification toward establishing the genomic integrity of surviving therapeutic cells. This study shows that genomic safety cannot be inferred from editing efficiency, clinical tolerability, or cellular persistence independently, because DNA damage responses, endogenous repair processes, and cellular selection generate distinct yet interconnected biological consequences. The central contribution is an integrated, outcome-specific evaluation framework demonstrating how genomic interpretation depends on the biological system, the alteration assessed, and the observation period. This perspective extends mechanistic understanding by distinguishing successful modification from structural integrity and sustained cellular detection from the expansion of potentially abnormal clones. Rather than establishing a universal safety hierarchy, the findings reveal why apparently reassuring clinical observations and experimentally demonstrated genomic injury can coexist without contradiction. Theoretical implications concern the joint roles of molecular repair and cellular selection in shaping observed editing outcomes. Clinically, these insights support differentiated genomic surveillance, transparent reporting of assay coverage, and integrated assessment of therapeutic persistence and chromosomal abnormalities. Regulatory implications include strengthening evidence requirements for genomic characterization and long-term monitoring. Internationally, this framework provides a transferable basis for improving therapeutic evaluation, supporting proportionate risk management, and protecting patients as gene-editing applications expand.

The study's descriptive evidence structure creates opportunities for further investigation. Targeted publication selection, heterogeneous outcome definitions, limited genomic measurements, and unequal observation periods restrict comparative inference and prevent estimation of delayed malignancy risk. Future research should integrate larger clinical cohorts, standardized genomic assessments, longitudinal clonal tracking, and linked molecular and clinical outcomes. Prospective investigations could distinguish transient DNA damage responses from persistent genomic abnormalities and determine whether specific alterations predict subsequent clonal expansion or malignant transformation. Comparative studies across therapeutic platforms and cellular systems could further establish the generalizability of the proposed framework and identify biological conditions under which genomic risks differ.

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