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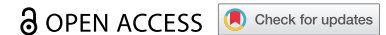


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REVIEW



X-linked myotubular myopathy: an untreated treatable disease

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ABSTRACT

Introduction: X-linked myotubular myopathy (XLMTM) is a life-threatening congenital disorder characterized by severe respiratory and motor impairment. This disease presents significant therapeutic challenges, with various strategies being explored to address its underlying pathology. Among these approaches, gene replacement therapy has demonstrated substantial functional improvements in clinical trials. However, safety issues emerged across different therapeutic approaches, highlighting the need for further research.

Areas covered: This review provides a comprehensive analysis of the data gathered from natural history studies, preclinical models and clinical trials, with a particular focus on gene replacement therapy for XLMTM. The different therapeutic strategies are addressed, including their outcomes and associated safety concerns.

Expert opinion: Despite the encouraging potential of gene therapy for XLMTM, the occurrence of safety challenges emphasizes the urgent need for a more comprehensive understanding of the disease's complex phenotype. Enhancing preclinical models to more accurately mimic the full spectrum of disease manifestations will be crucial for optimizing therapeutic strategies and reducing risks in future clinical applications.

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X-linked myotubular myopathy; centronuclear myopathy; myotubularin; gene therapy; adeno-associated viral vectors; neuromuscular junction; congenital myopathy

1. Introduction

X-linked myotubular myopathy (XLMTM, OMIM 310,400) is a devastating congenital disease. This childhood neuromuscular disorder presents an incidence of approximately 1:50,000 in males [1,2]. Severe XLMTM has a poor prognosis as it presents a high death rate, mostly because of respiratory failure [3–5].

In the most severe and frequent clinical presentation, XLMTM male living patients exhibit severe global hypotonia, hyporeflexia or areflexia and respiratory insufficiency leading to early death [6–8]. Patients surviving the neonatal period present with a delay in motor milestones and most of the patients do not achieve independent ambulation [3,9]. In addition, patients eventually exhibit motor regression- progression of respiratory insufficiency, and early death is frequent. Additionally, recent studies have frequently identified liver dysfunction in patients, which is linked to intrahepatic cholestasis [10–13].

Although most of the heterozygous females are asymptomatic, manifesting carriers may experience myalgia, muscle weakness and rarely respiratory failure [14–18].



Different phenotypes of XLMTM have been classified into severe, moderate and mild based on the delay in motor milestones, need for respiratory support, and achievement of independent ambulation [7,19]. Moderate and mild forms have been identified as progressive conditions with loss of acquired milestones and a decline in motor scales [9]. Nevertheless, since the publication of this classification, other milder phenotypes have been identified [20].

XLMTM is caused by mutations in the *myotubularin* (*MTM1*) gene [6,21]. This gene codes for a lipid phosphatase, which dephosphorylates phosphatidylinositol-3-phosphate (PtdIns3P) and phosphatidylinositol 3,5-bisphosphate (PtdIns(3,5)P₂) [22,23]. It is ubiquitously expressed throughout the body and is involved in vacuole formation and transport, desmin assembly and architecture, mitochondrial morphology and positioning, and cytoskeletal organization [23–27].

The lack of functional myotubularin disrupts triad structure, leading to defective excitation-contraction coupling and impaired neuromuscular junction (NMJ) structure and function. This deficiency also results in centrally located cell nuclei, organelle disorganization, pale peripheral halos detectable with oxidative staining and perinuclear vacuole-like areas [28–32]. Additionally, loss of myotubularin triggers dysregulation of the ubiquitin-proteasome system, AKT/mTOR signaling and apoptotic pathways [27,33–36].

Several re-positioned medications are used off-label, such as pyridostigmine and salbutamol [29,31,37–40] but their efficacy has never been formally demonstrated.

Currently, no disease-modifying treatments have been approved for XLMTM. Although gene therapy has been demonstrated to be transformative for patients with XLMTM [41], clinical development is currently on hold for Sudden Unexpected Serious Adverse Reactions (SUSAR) that led to death in four patients [42]. Oligo-antisense development (NCT04033159) and tamoxifen (NCT04915846) have also recently been stopped for safety reasons during clinical trials [43,44].

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Article highlights

- X-linked myotubular myopathy (XLMTM) is a severe congenital disorder characterized by high mortality and severe motor and respiratory dysfunction.
- Gene therapy has shown transformative potential for XLMTM, with clinical trials demonstrating marked improvements in motor function and respiratory outcomes.
- Serious safety concerns have emerged in a gene therapy trial, prompting the FDA to halt the clinical study.
- Additional therapeutic strategies, such as the use of estrogen modulators and antisense oligonucleotides, have also faced clinical holds due to safety issues.
- Existing preclinical models do not fully capture the disease's complexity, lacking several clinical features that are present in patients.
- A deeper understanding of the complex phenotype associated with XLMTM is crucial to advance therapeutic development and improve patient outcomes.

The improvement of neuromuscular and respiratory functions in patients following gene therapy illustrates the possibility to treat XLMTM and to significantly ameliorate the conditions of patients [42]. This review aims to analyze the different treatment options, the reasonable expectations they may generate, the safety limitations and the ethical issues related to the benefit/risk ratio.

2. Natural history studies

Natural History Studies have consistently demonstrated the severity of XLMTM across all age ranges (Table 1). Retrospective studies, such as RECENSUS (NCT02231697) have captured data on the patients deceased during the neonatal period, thereby illustrating the high mortality rate associated with the congenital form, which was reported at 64% for patients under 5 years of age [45]. On the other hand, two prospective studies, INCEPTUS (NCT02704273) and NatHis-MTM (NCT02057705), monitored young patients with respiratory dysfunction [12] and the entire spectrum of patients [9], respectively.

INCEPTUS was initiated in 2016 to collect longitudinal data on XLMTM and to serve as a run-in study before the ASPIRO gene therapy phase I trial (NCT03199469). This study was focused on a young and severely affected population, all under four years old and dependent on mechanical ventilatory support. Given the inclusion criteria participants exhibited low respiratory capacity, severely limited motor functions and inability to ambulate, and three of them succumbed to serious adverse events related to cardiopulmonary failure, aspiration pneumonia and hepatic hemorrhage. It should be noted that nearly a quarter of the patients exhibited hepatic disease and half of them received treatment for cholestatic and other hepatic conditions [12].

NatHis-MTM enrolled a broader range of patients who had survived beyond the neonatal period, providing a comprehensive perspective on the progression of the disease. The most significant finding, observed over a 1-year period, was the progressive decline in motor function. However, other analyzed outcomes, such as pulmonary capacity, remained stable within a 1-year timeframe [9].

3. Animal models

3.1. Murine models

The *MTM1* knockout (KO), *MTM1*^{−/y} mouse, also referred to as *MTM1*Δ4 mouse, represents the first animal model developed for XLMTM, created through a large deletion in exon 4 [46]. *MTM1* KO mice are the most extensively utilized models in preclinical studies due to their availability and ability to replicate most of the key features of XLMTM.

Since then, additional engineered murine models have been generated: (1) condition tissue-specific *MTM1*^{−/y} mice, in which the *MTM1* deficiency is limited to skeletal muscle utilizing a muscle-specific desmin promoter [35]; (2) *MTM1*^{R69C/y} mice, which reproduce the mild XLMTM phenotype by knocking in the c.205C>T mutation, resulting in exon 4 skipping [47]; (3) *MTM1*^{gt/y} mice, developed through gene trapping in intron 1, leading to a truncated, nonfunctional version of *MTM1* and exhibiting similar muscle pathology compared to that observed in *MTM1*^{−/y} mice [36]; (4) *MTM1*^{Δ5/y} and *MTM1*^{Δ7/y} mice, generated by deletions of 5 and 7 base pairs, respectively, within the *MTM1* gene, display similar features than *MTM1*^{−/y} mice [48].

3.2. Zebrafish models

A zebrafish knockdown model was developed using morpholino antisense to reduce *MTM1* expression. This knockdown model exhibits impaired skeletal muscle function and recapitulates the clinical manifestations observed in patients living with XLMTM [29,49]. However, it is important to note that *MTM1* deficiency in this model does not impact autophagy [50].

Additionally, a homozygous zebrafish *MTM1* mutant line (*MTM1*^{Δ8/Δ8}) was generated using zinc finger nucleases, leading to an early stop mutation as a result of an 8 base pairs deletion in exon 5 [51].

3.3. Canine models

Naturally occurring missense variants in the *MTM1* gene have been identified in dogs: the p.N155K mutation was found in Labrador Retrievers [52] and the p.Q384P mutation was discovered in Rottweilers [53]. Both mutations result in a dramatic reduction in *MTM1* levels.

These affected dogs present similar features to those observed in murine models and effectively reproduce the phenotype associated with human XLMTM [52–55]. Nevertheless, it should be emphasized that canine carriers do not exhibit any pathological features [56].

4. Potential therapeutic targets

The different therapeutic targets and the corresponding pre-clinical and clinical data are summarized in Table 2

4.1. Myotubularin

More than 250 pathogenic variants have been described for the *MTM1* gene [6,20,57–59]. In order to target the underlying

Table 1. XLMTM natural history studies.

Study	Trial ID	Study Type	Participants	Age	Countries	Completion dates	Duration	Primary objective	Key Results	Conclusions	References
MTMES	NCT01840657	Prospective and cross-sectional, non-interventional study	33 males	1 day to 42.3 years	North America	Apr 2013-Oct 2015	12 months	To collect clinical and non-clinical data on XLMTM patients.	88% of patients were non-ambulant. 81% required invasive respiratory support. 82% had a gastrostomy, 76% tracheostomy and 43% had learning disabilities. Average age of death: 6 years, 10 months. 24% mortality rate, with 83% of deaths attributed to respiratory complications.	XLMTM patients experience significant morbidities and require extensive mechanical interventions.	[3]
NatHis-MTM	NCT02057705	Prospective, multicenter, longitudinal study	45 males	3.5 months to 56.8 years	North America and Europe	Feb 2014-Jun 2017	36 months	To quantify disease burden and identify optimal outcome measures	29% had a mild phenotype, 16% intermediate, and 55% severe. 71% were not ambulant by 2 years of age. 82% needed respiratory support in the first year of life. 60% had scoliosis, 60% required gastrostomy, and 82% used feeding tubes. 25% had neutralizing antibodies, with 2 patients showing high inhibitory levels.	Progression of motor dysfunction within a 1-year period.	[9]
RECENSUS	NCT02231697	Retrospective, non-interventional, multicenter medical chart review	145 males, 126 with ventilatory support	Data not available	North America, South America, Europe and Australia	Sep 2014 - Dec 2019	Not applicable	To characterize disease manifestations and record medical management practices	Nearly 90% required respiratory support at birth. 48% ventilator dependency. 72% of patients had a tracheostomy by age 2, and 94% required gastrostomy. Average of 3.7 surgeries during the first year of life. 47% mortality among 126 patients on ventilatory support (59% in patients ≤5 years old). Respiratory failure was the most common cause of death (67%).	High mortality, predominantly due to respiratory failure, especially in the neonatal period.	[5,45]

(Continued)

Table 1. (Continued).

Study	Trial ID	Study Type	Participants	Age	Countries	Completion dates	Duration	Primary objective	Key Results	Conclusions	References
INCEPTUS	NCT02704273	Prospective, multicenter, non-interventional clinical assessment	34 males with ventilatory support	6 months to 32.9 years	North America and Europe	Jul 2016 - Sep 2019	32.9 months	To assess neuromuscular and respiratory outcomes through a longitudinal study	80% required permanent invasive ventilation; 20% used noninvasive ventilation. 97% had a gastrostomy and 80% tracheostomy. CHOP INTEND score ranged from 19 to 52 (mean: 35.1). 91% showed signs of hepatobiliary disease. 3 deaths (due to aspiration pneumonia, cardiopulmonary failure, and hepatic hemorrhage). 61 serious events, with 52 related to respiratory complications.	High mortality and frequent medical complications, with minimal motor improvement and a high prevalence of hepatobiliary disease over a 1-year period.	[12]

cause of the disease, *MTM1* replacement strategies have been developed, such as gene therapy [24,60–63] and enzyme replacement therapy [64], and have shown a dramatic efficacy on small and large animal models.

4.2. Myotubularin-related protein 2

Myotubularin-related protein 2 (MTMR2) belongs to the myotubularin-related proteins family and plays a key role in regulating cellular membrane trafficking [65]. It exhibits high expression levels in motor and sensory neurons [66]. Mutations in the *MTMR2* gene cause Charcot-Marie-Tooth disease, characterized by chronic degenerative neuropathy [67]. Similarly to *MTM1*, *MTMR2* exhibits lipid phosphatase activity on PtdIns3P and PtdIns(3,5)P₂ [23,68,69]. Consequently, this protein has been identified as a therapeutic target for XLMTM disease [70,71]. This strategy could represent an alternative or complementary approach to traditional gene replacement therapy

4.3. Dynamin 2

This ubiquitous enzyme, coded by the *DNM2* gene, presents GTPase activity and is involved in vesicular trafficking regulation, autophagy and cytoskeletal dynamics [72–75]. Mutations in this gene are associated with another form of centronuclear myopathy (CNM) [76]. Interestingly, patients living with XLMTM and *MTM1*-deficient mice model muscle biopsies show elevated levels of dynamin 2 (DNM2), suggesting that *MTM1* and *DNM2* share a common molecular pathway, i.e. a gain of function of *DNM2* that is normally under *MTM1* control [77,78]. Indeed, reducing *DNM2* expression has been shown to rescue the XLMTM phenotype in mice [77].

4.4. Myostatin

This protein, which belongs to the transforming growth factor- β family, is expressed by myocytes and plays a crucial role in muscle differentiation and growth [79]. Decreased levels of this protein have been associated with muscle hypertrophy [80]. Therefore, it has been hypothesized that inhibiting myostatin could be a potential therapeutic approach in a broad range of muscle wasting conditions, with only limited efficacy so far in Spinal Muscular Atrophy (SMA). Nevertheless, the myostatin signaling pathway is disrupted due to *MTM1* deficiency, resulting in reduced levels of this protein in XLMTM. It has been hypothesized that this reduction is triggered as a countermeasure against muscular hypotrophy [81,82]. Consequently, the concentration of circulating myostatin may serve as a biomarker for assessing disease progression and treatment efficacy, considering the age, gender, and disease severity of patients [82].

4.5. NMJ dysfunction

It has been shown that abnormalities at the NMJ are one of the factors contributing to the pathogenesis of XLMTM disease, leading to dysregulated Ca²⁺ homeostasis which causes defective excitation-contraction coupling [31]. In the case of

acetylcholinesterase inhibitors, their mechanism of action facilitates longer persistence and therefore higher concentrations of acetylcholine molecules at the NMJ, thereby counteracting the effects of non-depolarizing neuromuscular blocking agents [83–85]. β -adrenergic agonists have been shown to improve structural defects and increase the NMJ area, however, the mechanism of action is not yet fully understood [86–88].

4.6. PI3KC2 β kinase

This kinase is a member of the PI3-kinases family of proteins, which generates 3-phosphorylated phosphatidylinositol [89]. Within this family, class II PI3-kinases (PI3K) produce PtdIns3P and PtdIns(3,4)P₂. PI3KC2 β kinase, a class II PI3-kinase, is involved in endosomal trafficking and mTORC1 pathway [90,91]. Elevated levels of PtdIns(3,5)P₂ have been detected in mice due to mutations in the MTM1 protein, leading to disrupted Ca²⁺ homeostasis [28,92].

4.7. Histone deacetylases

These enzymes are essential for crucial cellular processes, including transcription, cell cycle, signal transduction, chromatin remodeling and gene expression regulation [93]. The modulation of gene expression is mediated through the acetylation and deacetylation of transcription factors [94]. A significant upregulation of histone deacetylase-4, expressed in skeletal muscles, was detected in mature muscles from patients living with XLMTM. It has been hypothesized that this over-activation may impact the expression of muscle-specific transcripts, adversely affect the triad structure and induce pathogenic features resembling those of fetal muscle [95].

4.8. Amphiphysin 2

This protein is coded by the gene bridging integrator 1 (*BIN1*) and is involved in membrane curvature and remodeling, endocytosis, excitation-contraction coupling and nuclear positioning [96–99]. Mutations in *BIN1*, analogous to those in the *MTM1* gene, cause central nuclear myopathy [100]. MTM1 binds to and regulates amphiphysin 2, playing a critical role in the modulation of transverse tubule maturation [101,102]. Disruption of this interaction can result in muscular dysfunction, suggesting that overexpression of amphiphysin 2 may compensate for the loss of MTM1 in murine models [103].

4.9. mTORC1

The mechanistic target of rapamycin (mTOR) is a member of the phosphatidylinositol kinase-related kinases family. It forms the catalytic subunit of two distinct complexes: mTORC1, which regulates cell growth and metabolism, and mTORC2, involved in cell proliferation and survival [104]. mTORC1 signaling is overactivated in *MTM1* KO mice, leading to the inhibition of autophagy in skeletal muscle, which subsequently impairs the removal of protein aggregates and damaged mitochondria [36].

5. Pre-clinical and clinical data

5.1. Gene therapy

Gene replacement strategies have shown dramatic efficacy on small and large animal models [24,60–63].

Recombinant adeno-associated viruses (rAAV) have emerged as a powerful tool for gene replacement therapy in monogenic neuromuscular diseases. Over the past several years, major clinical breakthroughs have been achieved in both small and large animal models after a single administration of rAAV.

Nevertheless, several critical factors must be addressed in preclinical studies, including the definition of a safe dose-response ratio, the feasibility of wide dose escalation and the effectiveness of the therapy in older patients. It has been reported that over 5% of potentially eligible patients living with XLMTM present neutralizing antibodies against AAV8 [9].

5.1.1. MTM1 replacement strategies

MTM1 gene is a good candidate for rAAV-mediated gene therapy, as its coding sequencing can be effectively packaged without requiring sequence optimization. Gene editing is much more challenging considering the diversity of mutation and their different position in the gene [9].

An early study utilized rAAV1-CMV-MTM1 for intramuscular injection in *MTM1* KO mice to deliver *MTM1* complementary DNA (cDNA). This approach resulted in successful phenotypic correction, evidenced by increased muscle and myofiber volume, enhanced contractile force, and the centralization of nuclei within muscle cells. However, long-term effects or immune responses were not evaluated. Remarkably, alterations in membrane homeostasis, leading to the formation of packed membrane structures near the sarcolemma, were observed in the KO mice compared to wild-type mice receiving the same doses [24]. Similar outcomes were reported in a subsequent study employing rAAV8-pDesmin-MTM1, which demonstrated long-term correction of skeletal muscle pathology for up to one year in *MTM1* KO mice following systemic administration [60].

In *MTM1* KO mice, no systemic toxicity was identified, although focal inflammatory infiltrates and fibrotic lesions were reported in the hearts of the group treated with the highest dose [24,60].

Further studies in canine models harboring p.N155K mutation showed amelioration in gait and motor, neurological, and respiratory functions for up to 4 years after treatment with rAAV8-pDesmin-MTM1 via isolated limb perfusion and intravenous administration [60,61,63,105]. These therapeutic effects were dose-dependent and a homogeneous biodistribution of the vector was observed throughout the body. It should be noted that XLMTM dogs did not develop humoral or cellular immune responses and no off-target effects were detected [61].

Additionally, no acute or chronic toxicity was observed in dogs, with liver enzyme levels and cardiac tissue appearing entirely normal [60].

ASPIRO (NCT03199469) was the first gene therapy clinical trial for XLMTM utilizing a potential disease-modifying

Table 2. Preclinical and clinical approaches for XLMTM.

Target	Function	Strategy	Therapeutic approach	Treatment	Therapeutic effect	Current status	References
MTM1	Regulates muscle function, vacuole formation and transport; desmin assembly and architecture; mitochondrial structure and cytoskeletal organization	Replacement	Gene therapy	rAAV1-MTM1 rAAV8-MTM1: AT132 (Resamirigene bilparovovec) Not applicable 3E10Fv-MTM1	Delivers MTM1 cDNA to muscle cells, correcting muscle pathology, improving myofiber size and contractile force. Corrects myofiber size, improves respiratory and motor functions. Increases muscle mass, improves function, and regenerates NMJ. Improves muscle function.	Preclinical studies in mice. Phase 1/2/3 ASPIRO clinical trial on hold by the FDA due to SUSAR (NCT03199469). Preclinical studies in mice. Preclinical studies in mice.	[24] [42,107] [153] [64]
MTMR2	Regulates cellular membrane trafficking; lipid phosphatase activity on PtdIns3P and PtdIns(3,5)P2.	Overexpression	Gene therapy	rAAV9-MTMR2	Restores PtdIns3P levels, rescues muscle phenotype and extends lifespan in MTM1 KO mice.	Preclinical studies in mice.	[70,71]
BIN1	Involved in membrane curvature, endocytosis, and excitation-contraction coupling.	Overexpression	Gene therapy	rAAV8-BIN1	Extends lifespan, improves motor strength and histopathology in mouse models.	Preclinical study in mice.	[103]
DNM2	GTPase activity; regulates vesicular trafficking, autophagy, cytoskeletal dynamics.	Inhibition	ASO	DYN-101	Extends lifespan and restore muscle mass.	Phase 1/2 trials of DYN101 halted due to lack of efficacy and SUSAR (NCT04033159; NCT04743557).	[48,77,131,132]
		Inhibition	Chemical compound	Dynasore	Rescues cholestatic phenotype.	Preclinical study in zebrafish.	[13]
Myostatin	Regulates muscle differentiation and growth.	Inhibition	Protein	ActRIIB-mFc	Mild improvement in muscle function.	Preclinical studies in mice.	[81,140,141]
NMJ dysfunction	Impaired excitation-contraction coupling due to dysregulated Ca ²⁺ homeostasis.	Restoration	Chemical compound	Pyridostigmine	Improves NMJ function, enhances muscle performance.	Preclinical studies in zebrafish and in mice, also tested in humans.	[31,37]
		Restoration	Chemical compound	Salbutamol/albuterol	Improves NMJ function, enhances muscle performance and reduce fatigue.	Phase IV trial ongoing (NCT05099107).	[39,40]
PBKC2 β kinase	Involved in endosomal trafficking and mTORC1 pathway regulation.	Inhibition	Chemical compound	Wortmannin	Improves motor function and muscle histology, mild efficacy.	Preclinical studies in mice.	[51,92]

(Continued)

Table 2. (Continued).

Target	Function	Strategy	Therapeutic approach	Treatment	Therapeutic effect	Current status	References
Histone deacetylase	Modulate gene expression through acetylation/deacetylation of transcription factors.	Inhibition	Chemical compound	Valproic acid	Ameliorates phenotypic features in XLMTM mouse and zebrafish models.	Predclinical studies in zebrafish and mice.	[148]
mTORC1	Regulates cell growth, metabolism, and autophagy.	Inhibition	Chemical compound	AZD8055	Restores autophagy, increases muscle mass and improves mitochondrial function.	Predclinical study in mice.	[34,36]
Estrogen receptor	Involved in DNM2, desmin and BIN1 pathways.	Inhibition	Chemical compound	Tamoxifen	Extends lifespan, improves muscle function.	Phase 1/2 TAM4MTM trial terminated due to SUSAR (NCT04915846).	[150,151]

approach. This therapy, named Resaminrigene bilparvovec (AT132), consisted of a single intravenous administration of a non-replicating rAAV8 delivering full-length human *MTM1* complementary DNA under the control of a muscle-specific desmin promoter and enhancer. Additionally, the expression cassette was engineered to include a synthetic DNA sequence complementary to the *MTM1* coding region, along with a second intron and a polyadenylation sequence derived from the human β -globin gene. This expression cassette was flanked by inverted terminal repeats (ITRs) from the AAV2 serotype [42].

This trial was a multinational, open-label, dose-escalation, randomized study conducted in hospitals across North America and Europe, starting in June 2016. The trial enrolled 26 male patients with XLMTM, all under 5 years of age and reliant on mechanical ventilatory support. These patients had previously participated in the INCEPTUS prospective study and met the required eligibility criteria for ASPIRO. Control data for the trial were derived from 14 INCEPTUS participants who were not dosed [12,42].

The study was divided into two distinct parts. Part 1 focused on safety and dose escalation, allowing for the assessment of adverse events and tolerability at increasing dose. Following this phase, Part 2 employed a randomized delayed-treatment concurrent control design. The two different doses administered were the following: 1.3×10^{14} vector genomes (vg)/kg body weight and 3.5×10^{14} vg/kg body weight [42].

Following rAAV administration, MTM1 expression levels showed a significant increase, and remained elevated for up to 48 weeks. This outcome was accompanied by improvements in myofiber size and in organelle localization. Additionally, notable enhancements in both respiratory and motor functions were observed, with some patients achieving ventilator independence after treatment [42,106,107]. These functional gains contrast with the outcomes observed within the untreated group as well as with the results from other natural history studies, further underscoring the therapeutic potential of this approach [3,9,12].

After the completion of Part 1, the higher dose was selected for continuation into Part 2. However, after administering this dose, SUSARs led to the death of three participants. Consequently, the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA), placed the trial on hold in May 2020. The deceased participants, all with a history of hepatobiliary disease, had developed severe cholestatic liver injury, which progressed to cholestatic liver failure at the time of death. In December 2020, the FDA lifted the hold, allowing the clinical trial to resume, but only with the lower dose. Enhanced hepatic monitoring was implemented, alongside the introduction of prophylactic or reactive therapies to manage chronic or recurrent cholestasis. Despite these measures, a fourth patient succumbed to the same complication after receiving the lower dose, prompting the FDA to issue a second clinical hold in September 2021, which remains in effect. Additionally, five participants, four of whom received the higher dose, exhibited non-fatal hepatobiliary adverse events, which were hypothesized to be treatment-related [42].

Hepatotoxicity has also been reported in other gene therapy trials, including those for hemophilia A, hemophilia B and SMA, although, in those cases, the liver toxicity was not of cholestatic nature [108–115]. Long-term follow-up studies in hemophilia A and B gene therapy trials did not identify any evidence of liver toxicity or malignancy, suggesting that the use of corticosteroids mitigated any lasting clinical impact of elevated liver enzymes [116–119].

In addition to cholestasis, several of the adverse events reported in the treated group were also observed in the control cohort, as well as in patients from previous natural history studies, including hepatic complications and respiratory and cardiac sequelae [3,9,12]. Notably, three deaths were also reported in the control group due to these complications [42]. In the treated group, additional adverse events such as transient thrombocytopenia and elevated troponin level were documented, consistent with the side effects described for other rAAV-based gene therapy trials, particularly those targeting conditions like SMA and Duchenne Muscular Dystrophy (DMD) [120–125].

As previously noted, patients with XLMTM exhibit a distinctive form of intrahepatic cholestasis, which was unrecognized in studies conducted prior to the ASPIRO clinical trial. This condition has been identified as an inherent complication of the disease [10,126,127]. Notably, liver abnormalities were not previously detected in preclinical models; however, a recent study has demonstrated that *MTM1* deficiency can lead to liver abnormalities consistent with both cholestasis and hepatic steatosis in zebrafish [13]. This discovery not only expands our understanding of the disease but also enables the evaluation of the potential impact that future treatments may have on preexisting cholestasis in this model. Nevertheless, zebrafish are not an appropriate model for rAAV infusion highlighting the need for further investigation in alternative animal models to establish a suitable approach for future preclinical gene therapy studies.

5.1.2. Myotubularin-related protein 2

rAAV9-mediated expression of *MTMR2* or its isoform, *MTMR2-S* has been shown to effectively rescue the muscular phenotype in a *MTM1* KO murine model, comparable to therapeutic approaches targeting *MTM1* deficiency. Intravenous infusion of rAAV9-*MTMR2* ameliorated both the structural and mechanical properties of muscle fibers, while also extending the lifespan of the mice. Furthermore, restoration of PtdIns3P levels was reported [70,71]. These findings suggest that *MTMR2* may act as a compensatory mechanism, similar to those identified in limb-girdle muscular dystrophy (LGMD) type 2C or in DMD [128–130]. However, the studies were limited in duration, and further investigation is required to fully assess the long-term efficacy of this approach in animal models and in humans.

5.1.3. Amphiphysin 2

Overexpression of amphiphysin 2 in XLMTM mouse models has been demonstrated to extend lifespan generally by more than 10 months, resulting in survival rates similar to those of wildtype mice. Additionally, it ameliorates motor strength and coordination, restoring strength values to wildtype levels in 2-,

7- and 24-month-old mice. It also improves main histopathological hallmarks of XLMTMs, rescuing fiber size, nuclei position, and oxidative staining [103].

These effects were achieved through the genetic cross of humanized *BIN1* transgenic mice with *MTM1*^{-/-} mouse models. A similar effect was observed following systemic administration of rAAV8-mediated *BIN1* transfer [103]. Further studies in larger animals should be conducted to assess safety and long-term *BIN1* expression and before first in-human studies.

5.2. Other therapeutic approaches

5.2.1. Dynamin 2

Preclinical studies have demonstrated that reducing *DNM2* expression effectively rescues skeletal muscle atrophy by increasing muscular strength and improving muscle ultrastructure. Additionally, it significantly reduces, or even eliminates, histological abnormalities in *MTM1* KO mice, including fiber hypotrophy, abnormal triad structures, mislocalized nuclei, impaired myoblast fusion, and defective myofibers maturation. Moreover, *DNM2* downregulation extends lifespan, with treated mice reaching up to 2 years of age. This therapeutic effect was achieved either by crossing *MTM1* KO mice with *DNM2* heterozygous mice or by deleting miR199a-1, a conserved intragenic micro-RNA within the *DNM2* gene. These findings suggest that targeting *DNM2* downregulation may serve as a viable therapeutic strategy for patients with XLMTM [48,77].

Furthermore, similar therapeutic benefits have been observed for other CNM disorders, such as autosomal dominant CNM, through rAAV1-mediated delivery of allele-specific shRNA sequences [131].

The use of antisense oligonucleotide (ASO) to reduce *DNM2* expression has been shown to extend the lifespan, restore muscle mass and force in a dose-dependent manner in *MTM1* KO mice [132]. Based on these results, a phase 1/2, multicenter, open-label, dose-confirmation trial was conducted to assess the safety and preliminary efficacy of DYN101 in patients over 16 years of age with CNM caused by mutations in *MTM1* or *DNM2* (NCT04033159). However, no clinical benefit was observed and SUSARs were reported, halting further dosing [43]. Consequently, a second planned trial following the same approach for patients ranging from 2 to 17 years of age (NCT04743557/EUCTR2020 -004,608-32-DE) was withdrawn due to outcomes of the previous trial [133].

In a separate recent study, a chemical screening identified Dynasore, a dynamin-2 inhibitor, as a potential strategy to rescue the cholestatic phenotype in the *MTM1* KO zebrafish model [13]. While this suggests a potential combination therapy with gene therapy, more research is necessary to assess its feasibility and safety.

5.2.2. Myostatin

Myostatin inhibitors have been clinically tested in other neuromuscular disorders, including facioscapulohumeral dystrophy, DMD and inclusion body myositis, with no clinical efficacy demonstrated [134–138]. In SMA, efficacy has been suggested in a phase 2 trial and a phase 3 trial with the same compound has been announced being positive [139].

In the context of XLMTM, treatment with soluble activin receptor type IIB (ActRIIB-mFC) – a receptor that binds myostatin to activate the TGF- β pathway, which regulates cell cycle and myofiber size in skeletal and cardiac muscle, yielded only mild improvement in KO mice. This treatment did not significantly improve antigravity hanging performance or grip strength, nor did it rescue the abnormalities in the triad structure. Additionally, it provided only a transient histological improvement and increased median survival to just 65 days [140]. The limited effect may be due to the already significantly reduced myostatin levels inherent to XLMTM, making further suppression challenging, even when the inhibition is reversible [81,140,141].

5.2.3. NMJ modulators

Acetylcholinesterase inhibitors and β -adrenergic agonists have been extensively used in the clinic to address NMJ dysfunction, with myasthenia gravis serving as the most illustrative example [85,142]. Acetylcholinesterase inhibitors, such as pyridostigmine, have demonstrated efficacy in improving NMJ dysfunction in zebrafish and murine models of XLMTM, showing modest improvements in grip fatigue and significant enhancements in treadmill endurance in mice, as well as improved touch-evoked movement in zebrafish models [31,37].

In human cases, this treatment has led to mild improvements in muscle strength, though responses have varied considerably among patients. This therapeutic approach is not expected to interfere with other strategies, such as gene therapy [37]. Nevertheless, these results require further confirmation, as they were derived from small patient cohorts. There is no report of respiratory improvements.

An additional off-label therapeutic strategy that may hold potential for patients living with XLMTM is the use of 3,4-Diaminopyridine (3,4-DAP). This compound blocks voltage-gated potassium channels, thereby enhancing acetylcholine release and potentially improving NMJ function and muscle performance. It has shown efficacy in patients with Lambert Eaton myasthenia, in congenital myasthenia and in myasthenia gravis [143,144].

Remarkably, β 2-Adrenergic receptor agonists, such as ephedrine and salbutamol/albuterol, can act as a compensatory mechanism and partially mitigate the disruption of this pathway by enhancing NMJ structure, improving muscle strength and reducing fatigue [38–40,142]. The efficacy and safety of oral salbutamol are currently being investigated in a Phase IV clinical trial for congenital myopathy (NCT05099107).

5.2.4. PI3KC2 β kinase

Inhibition of PI3KC2 β has been shown to counteract the elevated levels of PtdIns(3,5)P₂, leading to significant improvements in motor function, extended survival and reversal of histopathological abnormalities in various animal models. These improvements were achieved by crossing *MTM1* KO mice with *PI3KC2 β* -deficient mice, resulting in the normalization of PtdIns3P levels and the restoration of mTOR1C activity [51,145,146].

Although the broad-spectrum PI3K inhibitor wortmannin has demonstrated some efficacy in extending lifespan and improving muscle function and histology in *MTM1* KO mouse models [51,147], its therapeutic outcome remains limited. It has been hypothesized that a more targeted approach, using a selective PI3KC2 β inhibitor, with minimal off-target effects on other PI3K isoforms, may provide a more effective therapeutic strategy [51].

5.2.5. Histone deacetylases

A recent study showed that inhibiting histone deacetylases may represent a promising therapeutic approach for XLMTM. Following a screening process, valproic acid, an anti-epileptic drug, was identified as a potential candidate. Treatment with valproic acid ameliorates several phenotypic features of XLMTM in both *MTM1* KO zebrafish and mouse models [148]. However, further studies are necessary to establish the optimal dosing and assess safety in preclinical models. Although no adverse events were observed during the study, the potential hepatotoxicity associated with valproic acid should be carefully evaluated given the liver dysfunction frequently detected in patients living with XLMTM [10–12,127,148].

This therapeutic strategy has also been explored for other muscular diseases, such as DMD, where the histone deacetylase inhibitor givinostat was recently approved by the FDA following a successful phase 3 trial [154].

5.2.6. mTORC1

The use of the ATP-competitive inhibitor AZD8055, a selective mTOR antagonist, has shown to restore autophagy through pharmacologic inhibition, thereby increasing muscle mass and improving mitochondrial function by reducing desmin accumulation in *MTM1*gt/y mouse models [34,36]. However, it is important to note that chronic administration of mTOR-selective antagonists can induce immunosuppression, hyperglycemia and hyperlipidemia [149]. Therefore, their potential toxicity should be carefully evaluated.

5.2.7. Estrogen modulation

Tamoxifen, an European Medical Agency (EMA- and FDA-approved drug, primarily acts through the estrogen receptor pathway and has also been shown to normalize levels of DNM2, desmin and BIN1. High dose treatment demonstrated effectiveness in extending mice lifespan, improving muscle function and enhancing both the structure and function of the triad, although it does not fully correct all pathogenic features [150,151]. This therapeutic approach has also been used in a phase 3 trial (NCT03354039) for the treatment of DMD, though no significant differences in efficacy have been observed between the treated and untreated groups [155].

It is important to highlight that some *MTM1* KO mice treated with the high dose of tamoxifen during the late stages of the disease succumbed to pulmonary hemorrhage, consistent with lung injury reported in a few treated patients [151,152]. Therefore, pulmonary complications should be closely monitored in clinical studies. Recently, a phase 1/2, randomized, double-blinded trial (TAM4MTM; NCT04915846) was

terminated due to safety issues, with further details yet to be published [43].

5.2.8. Cell therapy

Injection of syngeneic skeletal muscle-derived myoblasts was used for the treatment of XLMTM in MTM1R69C/y mouse model [153]. This approach has been also tested for the treatment of other myopathies, such as DMD, with variable results associated to cell survival, cell migration, apoptosis and delayed proliferation [156]. This transplantation led to increased muscle mass, function, and regeneration of the NMJ function. According to the observations, there were no cells that migrated out of the targeted tissue [153].

5.2.9. Enzyme replacement therapy

This strategy involves the use of the fusion protein 3E10Fv-MTM1, also known as 4s3-001, which combines the mouse monoclonal antibody 3E10Fv with the full-length MTM1 protein. This fusion protein can penetrate the cells and be expressed in the skeletal muscle. In the MTM1R69C/y mouse model, systemic administration of 3E10Fv-MTM1 led to improved muscle function. However, the study was limited in terms of time and dosage, necessitating further investigation to validate this proof of concept. Additional research is also needed to evaluate the potential immune response associated with its administration, as well as to determine the effects of 3E10Fv fragment alone [64].

6. Conclusions

Despite significant progress in identifying therapeutic targets for XLMTM, various disease-modifying treatments have encountered challenges related to efficacy or safety, reflecting the complex nature of the disorder. This underscores the critical need for a deeper understanding of the disease, not only through the refinement of clinical models but also by exploring the potential of combination therapies. Furthermore, close patient monitoring during clinical trials will be essential to enhance safety and optimize therapeutic outcomes.

7. Expert opinion

A wide array of therapeutic strategies has been developed to target different proteins and pathways implicated in XLMTM. While most of these approaches are still in the preclinical or early clinical stages, significant challenges have arisen in translating these experimental therapies into safe and effective treatments.

Among the most promising advances is the gene replacement therapy approach (AT132), delivering functional copies of *MTM1*. This approach demonstrated transformative efficacy in ameliorating the disease phenotype, reducing ventilator dependence and significantly enhancing motor function in the ASPIRO clinical trial. Some patients have even achieved milestones such as sitting, standing and walking independently, representing a substantial gain in their quality of life. This tremendous level of functional recovery in a previously

non-ambulatory population underscores the therapeutic potential of gene therapy in XLMTM.

However, the death of four patients due to hepatobiliary disease led to the FDA's clinical hold on the gene therapy clinical development. These patients exhibited evidence of preexisting cholestasis, a complication previously underrecognized in patients living with XLMTM. While neuromuscular defects are well characterized, non-muscular impact should be further investigated. This also highlights the necessity for a deeper understanding of full phenotypic spectrum of XLMTM, particularly given its phenotypic complexity.

Additionally, it underscores the need for more representative models that can better capture the wide range of phenotypes observed in patients living with XLMTM. Although a zebrafish model with a cholestatic phenotype has been recently developed, it presents some limitations, such as its unsuitability for gene therapy testing. Therefore, the generation of new, more comprehensive animal models is crucial to better predict therapeutic outcomes in human patients and to further investigate the pathophysiology of the disease. More generally, this illustrates the limitation of small and even large animal models to fully predict gene therapy safety issues in humans. It must be noted that severe and sometimes lethal adverse reactions like thrombomicroangiopathy-pseudo hemolytic uremic syndrome or chronic liver toxicity that have been observed following gene therapy in SMA or in DMD were not observed in pre-clinical studies [122].

In parallel, two other therapeutic approaches have undergone clinical testing. ASO therapy targeting dynamin 2 overexpression has demonstrated preclinical success by extending lifespan and restoring muscle mass. Tamoxifen, a well-tolerated FDA-approved medication, has also been assessed and shown to improve muscle function. Although these treatments presented promising pre-clinical data, safety events have stopped their development in XLMTM.

Short and middle term safety constitute an interesting and important ethical question when it comes to a severe neuromuscular condition. In surveys performed for DMD, which has a better life and quality of life expectancy than XLMTM, it was reported that patients consider 1:10 risk of death acceptable [157]. Consequently, risks and benefits associated with clinical trials should be thoroughly assessed with the input of patients and the patients' community. In the context of XLMTM, it must be noted that four patients died following gene therapy, while in the untreated group enrolled in the natural history study INCEPTUS, 3 out of 34 patients, aged from 2.3 to 3.5 years, died from complications associated to the disease [12,42].

Beyond safety, this XLMTM rAAV-based gene therapy approach presents some limitations. The long-term durability of the clinical benefit is still unknown. Redosing, which potentially involves strong immunosuppression, is still in early stages of development.

It is important to continue investigating further alternatives and eventually, the combination of different treatments, such as gene therapy with ASOs or small molecules as there is a risk of chronic loss of efficacy for one-shot gene therapy. This necessitates first the demonstration of safety and efficacy of these approaches individually. In addition, the standard of care, including mobility

support, physical therapy and respiratory management, remains essential to prevent irreversible orthopedic, functional or respiratory complications [158]. This standard of care comes with a very significant cost estimated to be nearly \$1.5 million of direct medical expenses for patients who survive beyond four years of age [159]. This underscores the potential cost/effectiveness of innovative therapies.

A reduction of these costs could be also achieved by prevention, including rapid diagnosis of patients to avoid recurrence in siblings, but also systematic screening of carriers in the general population [160]. The availability of an effective treatment could also lead to the inclusion of XLMTM in genomic newborn screening programs [161], allowing early detection and treatment of all mutations including neomutations. In conditions like SMA where effective treatments are available, newborn screening has been demonstrated to be highly cost/effective [162,163]. Recent studies on carrier screening and genomic newborn screening have demonstrated high acceptance rates [160,164].

The implementation of advanced tools, such as artificial intelligence, sensors, in-silico models and omics analyses, could also play a transformative role in deepening our understanding of the disease. These technologies could help identify new biomarkers and therapeutic targets. Additionally, other innovative clinical approaches, such as Bayesian modeling, can leverage individual patients' natural history study data to predict disease progression in the absence of treatment, and thus reducing the number of patients needed to formally demonstrate efficacy [165]. Despite their potential, these emerging approaches are still under evaluation and require further dialogue with regulatory agencies. Enhancing this understanding will not only improve patients selection but may also mitigate some safety concerns identified in the clinical trials.

Although the therapeutic landscape for XLMTM has evolved significantly, it remains crucial to prioritize a thorough evaluation of safety profiles of therapeutic approaches and deepen our understanding of the disease's full phenotypic spectrum. The generation of more robust preclinical models, the introduction of innovative tools, and the refinement and development of therapeutic strategies are essential to achieving successful outcomes in future treatments. Moreover, the promising efficacy offers a hopeful perspective for managing congenital myopathies caused by muscle disorganization, rather than muscle dystrophy. Given the severe nature of XLMTM, the gains in motor function and ventilator independence achieved so far provide substantial optimism that future therapies will further improve the quality of life for patients.

Declaration of interest

C Martin is currently an employee of Viralgen, the present work has been conducted outside of her working time and does not reflect the position or opinion of Viralgen. L Servais has conducted consultancy for Astellas, Italfarmaco, BioHaven, Scholar Rock and Roche. The authors have no other relevant affiliations or financial involvement with any organization or entity with a financial interest in or financial conflict with the subject

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Author contributions

C Martin reviewed the literature. C Martin and L Servais contributed to different sections of the initial draft, and both approved the final version of the manuscript. Both authors are accountable for all aspects of the work, ensuring that questions related to the accuracy or integrity of any part of the work are appropriately investigated and resolved.

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