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Rigor and Reproducibility of Cytometry Practices for Immuno-Oncology: A Multifaceted Challenge

Tamara J. Laskowski,1* Amy L. Hazen,2 Renata S. Collazo,1 David Haviland3

Abstract
The rapid advancement of immunotherapy strategies has created a need for technologies that can reliably and reproducibly identify rare populations, detect subtle changes in modulatory signals, and assess antigenic expression patterns that are time-sensitive. Accomplishing these tasks requires careful planning and the employment of tools that provide greater sensitivity and specificity without demanding extensive time. Flow Cytometry has earned its place as a preferred analysis platform. This technology offers a flexible path to the interrogation of protein expression patterns and detection of functional properties in cell populations of interest. Mass Cytometry is a newcomer technology that has generated significant interest in the field. By incorporating mass spectrometry analysis to the traditional principles of flow cytometry, this innovative tool promises to significantly expand the ability to detect multiple proteins on a single cell. The use of these technologies in a manner that is consistent and reproducible through multiple sample sets demands careful attention to experiment design, reagent selection, and instrumentation. Whether applying flow or mass cytometry, reaching successful, reliable results involves many factors. Sample preparation, antibody titrations, and appropriate controls are major biological considerations that impact cytometric analysis. Additionally, instrument voltages, lasers, and run quality assessments are essential for ensuring comparability and reproducibility between analyses. In this article, we aim to discuss the critical aspects that impact flow cytometry, and will touch on important considerations for mass cytometry as well. Focusing on their relevance to immunotherapy studies, we will address the importance of appropriate sample processing and will discuss how selection of suitable panels, controls, and antibodies must follow a carefully designed plan. We will also comment on how educated use of instrumentation plays a significant role in the reliability and reproducibility of results. Through this work, we hope to contribute to the effort toward establishing higher standards for rigor and reproducibility of cytometry practices by researchers, operators, and general cytometry users employing cytometry-based assays in their work.

Edward Jenner, in the late 1700s, made the first crucial observations that would lead to the eradication of the plague of their generation, smallpox (1). Regarded as the foundation of immunology, his work paved the way to the understanding that specialized cells in our body, today known as immune cells, have tremendous power to recognize and eliminate threats. Fast-forward a few centuries, the field of immunotherapy is born. Today, the realization that immune cells not only destroy foreign threats, but can be armed and trained to detect and kill cancer cells has fostered new hope that we will indeed win this long-fought battle against cancer. Genetically enhanced T-cells, known as CAR T-cells, have eliminated unrelenting hematological tumors and extended the life of patients once deemed terminal (2,3). Immune checkpoint inhibitors have unleashed the power of killer immune cells against vastly metastatic disease, eradicating all tumors and restoring long-term health (4,5). These unprecedented results boosted new research efforts toward developing strategies that can overcome the complex barriers of more challenging cancers. Flow Cytometry, and more recently also mass cytometry, are used both during the course of research...
and development of new therapies, as well as in clinical studies that monitor the progress of patients enrolled in immunotherapy trials. Important questions are answered with the help of these technologies. Therefore, it is critical that analyses are performed accurately and data interpreted with the highest confidence. In this article, we will discuss best practices related to sample preparation and experiment design, proper use of instrumentation, and potential strategies for overcoming the limitations of these technologies.

**Sample Preparation and Storage: The Crucial First Step**

When planning protein analysis by Flow or Mass Cytometry, the primary considerations researchers often focus on include the sample type to use, number of markers to assay, the choice of antibodies, and antibody conjugate selection. Sample preprocessing and storage are often disregarded. These, however, are of paramount significance to any cytometry-based assay, and variations in sample preprocessing limit potential downstream applications, affect results, and impact assay reproducibility. Therefore, understanding the different methods used for preservation of sample integrity and how these impact the utility of a sample are crucial determinations that should be carefully considered early on in the study.

Implementation of sample preparation protocols is often based on the type of samples that are obtained for a given study. For immuno-oncology research, sample sources primarily consist of blood, tumor tissue (liquid or solid), or bone marrow. Each requires its own optimized processing procedure. Bone marrow and peripheral blood samples often undergo standardized Ficoll gradient separation through which mononuclear cells are harvested. This well-defined procedure is relatively simple and straightforward, yielding large numbers of cells. Solid tumor biopsies, conversely, are more complex tissues that require additional processing steps. The first hurdle is tissue disaggregation, which is highly dependent on successful disruption of extracellular matrix, a mixture of cohesive factors and structural proteins. This can be achieved by a combination of mechanical and enzymatic methods, but should be carefully performed, as excessive exposure to enzymatic digestion may result in destruction of antibody-binding epitopes, thus decreasing the effectiveness of downstream immunostaining for cytometric analysis (6–8). Furthermore, unlike cell isolation from blood samples, tissue dissociation is a multi-step process that involves serial washes for removal of reagents, clumps, and debris in order to produce a single-cell suspension that can subsequently either be prepared for analysis or frozen for later use. Through these steps, cell loss often occurs leading to decreased final yield. Good dissociation techniques are therefore critical to effective cell isolation from tissues. Guidelines for optimal practices are available, such as the Worthington Tissue Dissociation Guide, and can be very useful when generating standard operating procedures.

Subsequent to cell isolation, a fundamental consideration is sample storage, if immediate use is not feasible. Cryopreservation is often the method of choice, and typically consists of re-suspension of cell pellet in 10% Dimethyl sulfoxide (DMSO) either in total fetal bovine serum (FBS) or in a medium formulation comprising high FBS concentration. DMSO serves as a cryoprotectant during the freezing process, and upon thawing and removing DMSO, viable cells can be recovered for analysis or subsequent culture (6,7). It is important to consider, however, that cryopreservation may induce functional and phenotypic changes and may significantly affect the relative frequencies of viable peripheral blood mononuclear cell (PBMC) subpopulations (7–13). From our own experience, subsets such as granulocytes or mast cells often experience greater loss of viability, and therefore, studies focusing on these subpopulations must apply alternative protocols to ensure optimal recovery. One feasible strategy to counter the inherent loss of PBMC heterogeneity due to cryopreservation is to employ a Fix-Freeze method through which mononuclear cells are collected, incubated in paraformaldehyde at room temperature for 10 minutes, and subsequently frozen at ~80°C. Though cells lose viability in the fixation process, the advantage of this approach is that cell morphology, architecture, and protein structures are preserved and stabilized, while proteolytic enzymes are inactivated, protecting the sample from degradation (14,15).

Determining the appropriate sample preservation approach is therefore a critical first step. It is primarily dependent on the desired downstream applications and the longevity of the study. Decisions such as the type of analysis desired (e.g., Flow Cytometry or Mass Cytometry), and whether additional assays will be performed must be considered before samples are processed for storage. For applications such as flow or mass cytometric analysis of phenotypic markers, both cryopreservation with DMSO or fix-freezing are viable options for sample storage. However, if interrogating cells for functional or activation markers that require prior culture time, DMSO-based cryopreservation is the recommended approach. Furthermore, the subpopulation of interest in a study must be considered. As previously mentioned, specific cell populations may exhibit greater sensitivity to freezing-thawing, and appropriate storage is required to ensure maximum sample preservation.

As stated above, longevity of a study is an important factor that may also affect reproducibility. Specifically for clinical trial samples, which are often collected at defined stages during treatment and may be needed for multiple assays, proper planning should dictate the necessary processing approach. If sample size allows, multiple aliquots should be cryopreserved under both protocols, so as to expand sample usefulness and ensure quality standards are met for each designated application.

Finally, operator introduced variability is a significant contributing factor that affects reproducibility. It is also a challenging problem to address. Establishing strict guidelines for isolation of mononuclear cells and characterization of final product (e.g., viability and cell count assessments, flow cytometric analysis to detect frequency of major cell populations), along with well-defined sample thawing and recovery protocols may help to alleviate this problem. Additionally, meeting optimal sample quality requirements for each downstream application helps to minimize assay...
variability. Another potential solution is to integrate automation to the sample processing workflow. Instruments such as liquid handlers offer protocols for automated processing which have been shown to perform as efficiently as the gold-standard Ficoll density gradient method, as measured by overall yield, viability, recovery, white blood cell subpopulation distribution, and gene expression (16–19).

**ANTIBODY VALIDATION**

Designing appropriate panels with adequate controls and well-titrated antibodies is essential for clear interpretation of biological results. Initial titration of antibodies is a well-established criterion for good experimental design. Most researchers will begin with the manufacturer recommended titration and test multiple doses until an optimal stain index is achieved (20–24). Once an initial titration has been established for a particular antibody within a group, the other members tend to move forward with the same values over the course of the life span of that project. However, lot-to-lot variations would indicate that each new lot should be re-optimized. Importantly, when tandem fluorophores are involved, the intensity and stability of the signal may exhibit greater variability, and hence, even a vial-to-vial titration is advisable.

Rarely do we question the specificity of a commercially purchased antibody. If a particular marker is critical to the outcome of our data, user validation is strongly encouraged. Most reliably, a biological negative control can determine antibody come of our data, user validation is strongly encouraged. Most purchased antibody. If a particular marker is critical to the output. In our hands, most of our 17-color staining mixes for Cytometry by time-of-flight (CyTOF), conversely, do not seem have the same stability. Leipold et al. demonstrated that antibody cocktails showed significantly higher background when stored for 2 weeks. This was presumed to be a consequence of antibody aggregation that may likely occur in highly concentrated antibody mixes (26). We have observed that a maximum storage time of 3 days at 4°C for CyTOF staining cocktails is acceptable. It is important to note that efforts continue to be employed toward achieving successful results with premade antibody cocktails in order to minimize variability that is introduced when multiple batch preparations are required. Recently, Schulz et al. demonstrated that 41-antibody mixes were stable for up to 19 weeks when stored at temperatures of ~80°C or lower.

t-SNE mapping of PBMC samples labeled with cryopreserved cocktails showed impressive consistency in staining patterns when compared with PBMC stained with fresh antibodies (27).

Overall, antibody titration and validation are areas where additional rigor needs to be applied in the field of cytometry. Proper education and training of cytometry users in panel design and assay validation for both flow and mass cytometry is highly recommended as a way to help decrease variability and, thus, improve assay reproducibility.

**INSTRUMENT DESIGN**

Another area of opportunity is understanding how instrument design can and should influence experimental design. It is common for researchers to attempt to reproduce panels published by other groups to investigate the same cell phenotypes in their specific model or hypothesis. However, major differences in the optical configurations between instruments, such as laser wavelength, power, band pass filters, and detector efficiency, will alter how the data are collected. Educated use of instrumentation plays a key role in reproducibility of results. When examining rare populations or dimly expressed antigens, for instance, it is crucial to optimize the panel design specifically considering the instrument you intend to use for the study. Frequently, published panels can be altered to achieve optimal performance by adjusting one or two fluorophores to better suit the instrument being used.

In addition, proper quality control and cleaning of instruments affect their stability and the overall ability to generate reproducible data over time. For specific longitudinal studies, such as immune monitoring of patients receiving sequential immunotherapy treatments, the use of a dedicated instrument is strongly recommended, as most facilities have not standardized multiple instruments to each other. Consistency with the same instrument is a key factor, as Cytometer Setup and Tracking (CST) protocols may not always standardize across instrumentation. It is important to note that an additional step can be taken to cross standardize cytometers to generate directly comparable results. BDFACS Diva application settings is a well-defined mechanism to establish and set consistent target voltages to help achieve normalization across various instruments as well as normalize for instrument variance over time, which is especially necessary for longitudinal studies. The use of application settings may not be available on all platforms. In such cases, there are alternate mechanisms that can be used to establish standardization (28–31). One example of an alternative method, which in our experience has been successful, is setting target median fluorescence intensities (MFI) values for eight-peak beads. Overall, whether employing traditional CST measurements or alternative methods, some standardization should be implemented to normalize for instrument changes and minimize the impact of instrument variance on assay results. This process may vary for different platforms (32–34). However, there are guidelines for common measures used to monitor instrument performance over time (34–36). It is important to also note that, if utilizing services from a shared resource facility where instruments are communal, and performance and maintenance are monitored by facility staff, it may be helpful to discuss the nature of the study, whether there is need for dedicated instrument, and the quality controls required over the course of all experiments. Utilizing the expertise of shared resource staff can help to mitigate problems with reproducibility.

**INSTRUMENT SETUP AND OPTIMAL USE**

Proper instrument setup is essential for reliable analysis. Some of the first critical steps include optimizing detector
gains to ensure the positive peak is within the linear range of detection of the photomultiplier tube (PMT) and the negative population is above the noise of the detector.

Inherent to multicolor assays is fluorescence spillover. After proper determination of PMT voltages, a matrix can be generated to determine and remove the effects of spillover. Compensation is gain-dependent and should only be determined after optimal PMT voltages have been established for the experiment (36,37). Compensation must be considered in all multicolor experiments. The use of web resources and antigen density charts is strongly recommended to minimize spectral overlap and reduce compensation. To remove user-induced bias, computer-assisted compensation, whether through the cytometer or third-party analysis software, is highly favored. Properly compensated data can be critical when attempting to distinguish small dissimilarities in positive and negative events (34,37).

Regarding compensation control assays, what is the recommended approach? Most groups rely on capture beads for setting their compensation parameters. Capture beads provide a uniform bright signal independent of antibody specificity (35). This is an especially helpful feature because it allows for a clear signal to be produced for dimly expressed antigens, culminating in a more accurate and well-defined compensation matrix.

Biological controls are often regarded as most relevant and in many cases these are indeed the appropriate sources for compensation controls. However, biological controls become inadequate when the expression of certain antigens is too low for cell-based controls to serve as robust compensation controls. This can result from either low antigen expression or antigen expression that is restricted to rare cellular subsets. In either case, the lack of appropriate controls hinders the ability to develop a precise compensation matrix.

**Panel Design**

Designing the correct panel to interrogate your samples is a fundamental part of any cytometry experiment. There are several criteria one should consider when developing a flow cytometry panel: fluorochrome brightness, antigen expression patterns and density, antigen coexpression, and spread (36).

When targeting multiple populations, including rare subtypes such as immune cell infiltrates in tumor cells, optimized panel design is a critical step that requires basic knowledge of the biological properties of the sample such as cell type frequencies and antigen expression levels, for instance (38). The recommended strategy is to begin your panel design by assigning the brightest fluorophore to the antigen that exhibits lowest expression level, and giving that antigen priority in the panel. It is important to also consider the number of labeled proteins that will be present on the same given cell, and their overall densities. In these cases, careful planning is necessary to ensure selection of fluorochromes that preferably display little-to-no overlap in their emission spectrum patterns.

Without prior understanding of the markers and populations of interest, as well as their estimated frequencies within your sample, the optimization of a multiparameter panel becomes a tremendous challenge, affecting even the ability to estimate the number of data points to collect to reach sample size significance. Because the larger the panel, the more complex its design becomes, many in the field have turned to the idea of minimizing panel design to only include markers critically relevant to answer the biological questions in a given study. Under this premise, panels become smaller but less complex, thus resulting in clearer analyses and increased confidence in data interpretation.

**FMO Controls**

Fluorescence-minus-one (FMO) controls were first introduced by Roederer in 2001 as a strategy for properly defining thresholds for gate boundaries in multiparameter flow cytometry data (35). FMOs provide a method to measure the effects of spillover from individual populations into other channels of interest and are crucial when trying to maximize sensitivity for dim expression (34,36). In addition, FMOs will account for the “spread of the data” in multicolor experiments where single-stained background controls are less than appropriate and will lead to overestimating the actual percentage of a population. To generate appropriate FMO controls, especially in the case of clinical studies, the most comprehensive approach is to build FMO controls for each individual patient to account for sample-specific variability. However, in most cases, the sample size alone is prohibitive, and therefore, sacrificing valuable patient sample for controls is not a viable option. In the instances when cell number is insufficient, one potential strategy is to pool together a small fraction from each sample, creating a mixture that comprises characteristics of all samples included in the analysis set. If running the same analysis several times within the same week (e.g., drug dose–response analysis over the course of a few days) FMO controls can be prepared in advance, fixed, and stored for use over several days. In our experience, FMOs can be used for up to three days with no significant loss of signal.

**Data Acquisition Protocol**

Generating very detailed standard operating protocols (SOP) is a valuable effort that helps to minimize variability between experiments by improving data reproducibility by multiple operators. As protocol variability is minimized, differences can be more confidently attributed to true biological observations, rather than artifacts due to improper practices. Such SOPs should include the experimental layout with gating established in experimental templates. Using previously discussed application settings or instrument controls ensures that gating adjustments are kept to a minimum, thus reducing subjectivity. Once instrument setup is complete, all data should be acquired under the same instrument settings. For long-term studies, having a control sample that is aliquoted to run internally in each experiment over time is advisable. Applying such control serves as an internal check of both instrument and staining consistency over time. Monitoring the MFI fluctuations of an eight-peak bead set using fixed
PMT voltages over time can provide a good internal control for instrument variations. However, it will not reflect errors in the staining protocol. An additional internal biological control such as a normal leukocyte sample from which small aliquots are frozen and used within each sample batch can serve as a way to monitor interassay variability between multiple experiments. Timing of sample acquisition also plays a critical role. MFI can decrease over time; therefore, consistency in protocol timing is critical to reduce variability. The impact of cell frequency should be considered in the acquisition protocol. Special attention should be given to rare cell populations, as these are at greater risk of variation between samples (37–39).

**DATA ANALYSIS**

Despite significant efforts in the field to standardize most aspects of cytometry such as reagents, instruments, and protocols, significant variability is introduced due to subjective gating by independent users. Collectively, the field has focused on moving away from, or minimizing, subjective data analysis. Analysis by iteratively plotting cells as bivariate plots and manually gating introduces subjectivity and variability as the shapes and boundaries of the gates can be modified thus affecting reproducibility over long periods of time. Additionally, subjectivity in the analysis may introduce bias toward the anticipated outcome, obscuring the true meaning of the data.

Manual gating can be a laborious and time-consuming task when dealing with large data sets and may be a source of errors, as the gating strategy and order are critical to resolve the interplay between various markers. Data from studies involving multi-centers, each performing its own supervised analysis, have indicated that manual gating introduces the largest variable in standardized experiments (17–21,40). If no other options are feasible and manual gating is to be performed, it should be centralized to one location of a multisite study to help minimize variability. Furthermore, the use of appropriate controls and templates to standardize gating is encouraged in an effort to ensure analysis has as little user-introduced bias as possible.

As an alternative approach to manual gating, one might consider using computational analysis tools such as Spade and TSNE, which apply mathematical principles to assess all markers simultaneously. These unsupervised algorithms offer far more objective, and therefore reproducible, analysis of data over time (40,41).

**MIFlowCyt**

In an effort to bridge the gap of analysis and data reproducibility, journals such as this one have instituted the requirement for publishing according to the Minimum Information about Flow Cytometry Experiments (MIFlowCyt) standard (42,43). This initiative ensures the sharing of sufficient information to ensure experiment reproducibility, such as antibody details (vendors, clones, and concentrations), instrument description (model, optical configurations), data analysis information (gating strategies, compensation matrices), and so on. As the field increasingly adopts MIFlowCyt, it will enable scientists to more clearly interpret published data and reproduce findings from other groups, thus promoting a better collaborative environment that fosters greater scientific advancements (43,44).

**Mass Cytometry: New Tool, Similar Requirements**

Mass Cytometry, or CyTOF, is quickly becoming an established technology for high-dimensional analysis. Unlike flow cytometry, which requires the labeling of cells with antibodies conjugated to fluorescent proteins, mass cytometry relies on elemental isotope conjugates for detection, a method that permits achievement of greater dimensionality levels (50+ parameters) currently unattainable through flow cytometry (45–48). Just as efforts have been dedicated to the standardization of analysis and interpretation of flow data, similar requirements exist for proper use and reproducibility of mass cytometry analysis. While mass cytometry is not affected by fluorescence spectrum overlap, other sources of background exist, and for markers that do not display clear separation between positive and negative populations (such as CD25 and CD57, for example), it becomes difficult to identify true populations in the absence of controls. One source of background is signal interference due to overlap between mass channels. Though this overlap occurs at low levels, careful planning is recommended when designing mass cytometry panels. Testing panels on a control sample (e.g., healthy donor PBMC) is a good approach for determining whether or not the populations of interest can be clearly resolved. Online tools, such as Fluidigm’s Maspar Panel Designer, allow users to optimize their panels by minimizing signal overlap into low signal targets.

Another potential source of background is isotope impurity (49). Commercially available metal-conjugated antibodies are typically enriched and show greater isotopic purity. However, many groups conjugate antibodies in house, generating a product that is dominated by the desired species of isotope, but often contains trace contaminant impurities. Impurities in antibody conjugation are a major contributor to signal overlap. In flow cytometry, employing FMO controls is particularly important for identification of positive and negative populations when marker expression shows minimal separation. Because mass cytometry data are uncompensated, the use of Mass-minus-one (MMO) controls is a plausible strategy to visualize signal interference and guide the assignment of threshold levels. Takahashi et al. demonstrated the importance of MMO controls for resolving true signal from interfering background. In their experiment, they observed a discrepancy in integrin β7 in immune cells using a 36-marker panel (49). In their experiment, they observed a discrepancy in integrin β7 signal that was most pronounced in a cell population that expressed a marker in an adjacent channel. This discrepancy was confirmed as signal interference by MMO controls.

Similar to flow cytometers, the performance and signal detection accuracy of mass cytometers may also change over
Table 1. A brief guide to cytometry workflow requirements, potential challenges, and best practice recommendations, as discussed in this review

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<tr>
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<td>- Determine sample type and desired downstream applications</td>
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<td>- Extensive enzymatic digestion may cause destruction of epitopes—Multi-step liquid processing may result in loss of cells/decreased cellular yield</td>
<td>- Opt for shorter enzymatic digestion followed by mechanical dissociation when processing solid tissues</td>
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<td>- Consider potential impact of sample storage method on your target proteins prior to sample processing</td>
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<td></td>
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<td>- Consider potential impact of sample storage method on your target proteins prior to sample processing</td>
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<td>- Use a biological negative to confirm antibody specificity</td>
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<td>- When replicating a panel, confirm the fluorophores are optimally excited and emission is optimally collected</td>
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<td></td>
<td>- Try to collect longitudinal data on a dedicated instrument</td>
<td>- Try to collect longitudinal data on a dedicated instrument</td>
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<td>- Regular instrument calibration and performance checks are required to ensure optimal conditions. CV value is an important metric to assess accuracy of detection.</td>
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time and with increased use (50,51). This can be a significant source of variability as it causes experimental noise between sample runs, altering staining patterns. This is of special concern when analyzing clinical samples that must be compared together. One strategy that may allow for more precise comparisons is to barcode individual samples which can then be pooled for batched acquisition. Validated methods that employ different permutations of a panel of metals to create unique barcodes that are assigned to individual samples are widely applied in mass cytometry (51–54). Barcoded samples can be stained and run together, and later be deconvoluted prior to analysis. One important consideration is that sample sizes must be relatively similar in order to ensure all pooled samples have the same level of coverage. Furthermore, for low cell-count samples, our recommendation is that these are run individually, and not barcoded. Barcoding protocols often introduce additional washes that are inevitably accompanied by some loss of cells.

Instrument calibration is another critical aspect to consider. Daily calibration is required to ensure optimal running conditions and minimize problems that may interfere with signal detection and affect instrument accuracy (55). Oxidation due to plasma ionization of isotopes is one such example. Using a tuning solution for calibration helps to minimize this effect (49). It is also critical that regular checks for instrument performance are implemented, as changes can occur even between sample runs within the same day. Calibration beads manufactured by Fluidigm (EQ Four Element Calibration Beads) contain known standards of four elements—cerium, europium, holmium, and lutetium—at natural abundance, and are recommended for daily instrument calibration. EQ bead-derived signal can be used to generate several metrics that allow operators to track instrument performance and to monitor changes between runs. An important metric is the coefficient of variance (CV), which represents the instrument precision of detection of repeated measurements (26,56). User-defined thresholds are typically set for acceptable CV values. We and others use a CV of more than 20 (26). An additional advantage to using EQ calibration beads is that having them as a continuous reference throughout each sample run allows for batch-normalization of raw files. This strategy may be helpful in mitigating variability issues across instruments and even instruments operated at different sites (26).

Table 1. Continued

<table>
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<tr>
<th>WORKFLOW</th>
<th>CONSIDERATIONS/PITFALLS</th>
<th>RECOMMENDATIONS</th>
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<tr>
<td>Panel Design</td>
<td>- Panel design must take into account potential overlap between channels</td>
<td>- The use of tuning solutions and calibration beads with known standard elements allow performance tracking over time</td>
<td>47,48, 50, 52</td>
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<tr>
<td>Antibody cocktail preparation</td>
<td>- Conjugating antibodies in house often leads to increased levels of trace contaminants, thus decreasing overall purity</td>
<td>- Use of Mass-minus-one (MMO) controls is a viable strategy to resolve signal from background</td>
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<td>and storage</td>
<td>- Improper storage of concentrated antibody cocktails leads to antibody aggregation and increased background signal</td>
<td>- Computational tools such as Maspar Panel Designer (Fluidigm) help to predict channel overlap and provide a platform for optimizing panel design</td>
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- Test panel on control sample to ensure target populations can be resolved
- Antibody mixes can be stored for 3–5 days at 4°C
- Recent studies show that antibody cocktails are stable for an extended time when stored at temperatures ≤ −80°C.
Analysis of mass cytometry data is also an area for which clear guidelines have not yet been defined. Analysis of high-dimensional data comprising 30+ markers is complex and a standardized analysis method has not yet been established. The use of computational tools (e.g., software packages such as Cytofit, and Cyt, or analysis platforms such as Cytobank) for supervised or unsupervised clustering of data is common among mass cytometry users. Many of these tools employ viSNE, a dimensionality reduction algorithm that allows for visualization of data in two dimensions, while conserving the high-dimension structure of the data (57–59). Other popular clustering algorithms are Phenograph, SPADE, and X-Shift, which stratify all events into subpopulations with distinct gene expression signatures (58,59).

CLOSING REMARKS

This is an exciting time for immuno-oncology research. The field is prolific with high-quality work that has led to remarkable discoveries. The 2018 Nobel Prize in Physiology and Medicine, awarded to Drs. James Allison and Tasuku Honjo for their groundbreaking work in immunotherapy, is further evidence that this is a game-changing approach in the treatment of cancer. The 2018 Nobel Prize in Physiology and Medicine, awarded to Drs. James Allison and Tasuku Honjo for their discoveries. The 2018 Nobel Prize in Physiology and Medicine, awarded to Drs. James Allison and Tasuku Honjo for their discoveries.

LITERATURE CITED

43. Minimum information about a flow cytometry experiment (MIFlowCyt) checklist (numbered in accordance with MIFlowCyt 1.0 document). Cytometry A 2010;77(9):813.