Association of Electrochemical Skin Conductance by Sudoscan and Cardiovascular Outcomes in Hemodialysis Patients

Maxime Touzot1,7, Pauline Reach2,7, Angela Mobio1, Emmanuelle Sacco3, Audrey Fels3, Hélène Beaussier4, Pablo Urêña-Torres4, Gilles Chatellier5,6, Christophe Ridel1,8 and Mathieu Zuber2,6,8

1AURA Paris Plaisance, Dialyse et apheresèse thérapeutique, Paris, France; 2Service de neurologie, Groupe Hospitalier Saint-Joseph, Paris, France; 3Centre de recherche Clinique, Groupe Hospitalier Saint-Joseph Paris, France; 4AURA Saint-Ouen, Dialyse, Saint-Ouen, France; 5CIC 1418, Hôpital Européen Georges Pompidou Paris France; and 6Université de Paris, Paris, France

Correspondence: Maxime Touzot, AURA Paris Plaisance, Dialyse et apheresèse thérapeutique, Paris, France. E-mail: mtouzot@gmail.com; or Pauline Reach, Service de neurologie, Groupe Hospitalier Saint-Joseph, Paris, France. E-mail: preach@ghpsj.fr

7The authors contributed equally to this work as co-first authors.
8co-senior authors.

Received 5 June 2022; revised 18 August 2022; accepted 12 September 2022; published online 16 September 2022

Kidney Int Rep (2022) 7, 2734–2736; https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ekir.2022.09.013
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INTRODUCTION

Autonomic dysfunction, especially cardiac autonomic neuropathy (CAN) is a common complication in patients with end stage renal disease, and a well-known risk factor for sudden death.1 Diabetes mellitus is known to be the main cause, but other factors such as obesity, cardiovascular disease, uremia has been linked to CAN pathogenesis.2

CAN is a microvascular condition that results from lesions of the sympathetic and parasympathetic nerve fibers which innervate the heart and blood vessels. At the early stage, CAN is a subclinical disease demonstrated by a reduction in heart rate variability (HRV). The parasympathetic activity decreases leading to sympathetic nervous system predominance and resting tachycardia. In advanced stage, CAN is characterized by orthostatic hypotension, exercise intolerance, and silent myocardial ischemia that contributes to morbidity and mortality.3

A battery of cardiovascular autonomic reflex tests (HRV, Valsalva maneuver, and postural blood pressure testing) are recommended for longitudinal testing of the CAN.3 However, all these tests are time-consuming and not easily performed at bedside in routine, even the HRV.

In chronic kidney disease, patients, including hemodialysis (HD) patients, CAN has been associated with all-cause mortality rate but its relationship with major adverse cardiovascular event (MACE) is still controversial.5-8

We recently reported for the first time, the clinical pertinence of the Sudoscan (Impeto, Paris, France) to assess dysautonomia to predict intradialytic hypotension.9 Briefly, Sudoscan is a simple noninvasive device that allows the measurement of electrochemical skin conductance (ESC) by chloride ions, and directly reflects the activity of small nonmyelinated C nervous fibers which innervate the sweat glands. In a 24-month follow-up of the original cohort, we have now assessed the potential of Sudoscan to predict cardiovascular events and overall mortality in a single cohort of HD patients.

RESULTS

A total of 176 patients were included in the analysis. During the 24-month study, a first MACE occurred in 41 patients that included 3 strokes, 4 acute myocardial infarctions, and 37 deaths. The baseline demographic and biological characteristics according to the presence of patients with MACE are compared to those of patients without MACE (Supplementary Table S1).

Briefly, patients with MACE were older (73±12 vs. 62±14 years old, P < 0.001), with more diabetes mellitus (56 vs. 34%, P < 0.01), and had a higher rate of
The graph represents the cumulative incidence risk for death during the 24-month follow-up, according to the presence (red) or not (black) of a pathological foot ESC. HR, hazard ratio.

Figure 1. Cumulative incidence risk of death according to the presence of a pathological Foot ESC. The graph represents the cumulative incidence risk for death during the 24-month follow-up, according to the presence (red) or not (black) of a pathological foot ESC. HR, hazard ratio.

Our results are consistent with previous reports that underline the strong relationship between dysautonomia assessed by a decrease HRV (e.g., low frequency) and overall mortality. In both nondialysis and dialysis chronic kidney disease, studies have showed that some HRV measures were independent predictors of cardiac death.5,51 HRV is a noninvasive measure that is best assessed by continuous electrocardiography over a 24-hour period, although shorter recordings have also been utilized. The Sudoscan device has several advantages as compared to the other classical tests to evaluate CAN. The procedure is an easy-to-perform evaluation and reliable method. It can be performed either before or after the dialysis session in less than 2 minutes.9

Furthermore, although Sudoscan was not validated specifically in patients with atrial fibrillation, it could be a new tool to examine the autonomous nervous system in this population.

We find a strong relationship between MACE and foot ESC, but not hand ESC. Diabetic neuropathy is typically a distal symmetric cause by a length-dependent axonopathy. Thus, the foot ESC may be more representative of the severity of the diabetic induced dysautonomia as compared to the hand ESC. Moreover, the presence of the arterio-venous fistula and/or a carpal tunnel syndrome may modify the hand ESC values. This is the subject of an ongoing study.

Our study has several limitations that has been already described previously.9 Finally, our results are based on a prevalent cohort and should be validated ultimately in an incident cohort of HD.

In conclusion, besides its capacity to predict intradialytic hypotension, the Sudoscan appears as a promising, simple, noninvasive, and quick test that can be used in routine to predict mortality and cardiac events in HD patients.
PATIENT CONSENT

The authors declare that they have obtained consent from the patients discussed in the report.

SUPPLEMENTARY MATERIAL

Supplementary File (PDF)

Figure S1. Cumulative incidence risk of MACE according to the presence of a pathological foot ESC.

Table S1. Patient characteristics and dialysis parameters.

Table S2. MACE independent risk factors according to several predictors and foot ESC.

Table S3. MACE independent risk factors according to several predictors and hand ESC.

Table S4. Death independent risk factors according to several predictors and hand ESC.

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