Sudden Cardiac Death-Relevant Events of Hypertrophic Cardiomyopathy in a Regional Japanese Cohort
— Results From the Kochi RYOMA Study —

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**Background:** Sudden cardiac death (SCD) is a most devastating complication of hypertrophic cardiomyopathy (HCM). The aim of this study was to clarify the clinical features of HCM in patients who experienced SCD-relevant events in an aged Japanese community.

**Methods and Results:** In 2004, we established a cardiomyopathy registration network in Kochi Prefecture, and herein report on 293 patients with HCM who are followed as part of the registry. The mean (±SD) age at registration and diagnosis was 63±14 and 56±16 years, respectively. SCD-relevant events occurred in 19 patients during a mean follow-up period of 6.1±3.2 years (incidence rate 1.0%/year): sudden death in 9 patients, successful recovery from cardiopulmonary arrest in 4 patients, and appropriate implantable cardioverter-defibrillator discharge in 6 patients. At registration, 13 patients were in the dilated phase of HCM (D-HCM). During the follow-up period, HCM developed to D-HCM in 21 patients; thus, 34 patients in total had D-HCM. Multivariate analysis revealed that D-HCM at registration or during follow-up and detection of non-sustained ventricular tachycardia (NSVT) during follow-up were significant predictors of SCD-relevant events.

**Conclusions:** In this HCM population in an aged Japanese community, the annual rate of SCD-relevant events was 1.0%. HCM developed to D-HCM in a considerable number of patients, and D-HCM and NSVT were shown to be independently associated with an increased risk of SCD-relevant events.

**Key Words:** Arrhythmia; Dilated phase; Hypertrophic cardiomyopathy; Sudden cardiac death

**Hypertrophic cardiomyopathy (HCM)** is a primary myocardial disorder with heterogeneous morphologic, functional, and clinical features.1 5 Sudden cardiac death (SCD) is the most devastating complication of HCM. Although several predictors of SCD have been reported,6 8 there have been few studies on the risk factors for SCD in Japanese community-based HCM cohorts. In 2004 we established the Kochi Cardiomyopathy Network, the named Kochi RYOMA (Registry of Myocardial Diseases) Study, to provide detailed information on the clinical features of HCM in a prospectively assembled regional patient cohort in an aged Japanese community.9 We recently reported the patients’ characteristics and clinical course of HCM in this unselected cohort.10 In the present study, we assessed the clinical features of HCM in patients who experienced SCD-relevant events.

**Methods**

**Subjects**
In 2004 we established the Kochi Cardiomyopathy Network, which consists of 9 hospitals serving as primary, secondary,
and tertiary referral medical centers for cardiovascular patients in Kochi Prefecture, Japan, home to approximately 800,000 inhabitants. Between February 2004 and December 2013, 305 patients with a diagnosis of HCM were registered in the Kochi Cardiomyopathy Network. The diagnosis of HCM was based on echocardiographic demonstration of unexplained left ventricular hypertrophy (LVH; i.e., maximum left ventricular [LV] wall thickness ≥15 mm). Shortly after a diagnosis of HCM was made, 3 patients were diagnosed as having specific cardiomyopathy (1 patient with cardiac amyloidosis and 2 patients with cardiac involvement of Fabry disease) and excluded from this study, leaving 302 registered patients. In this longitudinal study, further 9 patients with no follow-up data were excluded; thus, the final study population consisted of 293 patients.

This study was approved by the Ethics Committee on Medical Research of Kochi Medical School, and followed the Declaration of Helsinki and the ethical standards of the responsible committee on human experimentation at each participating institution. Informed consent was obtained from all patients or their parents, in accordance with the guidelines of the Ethics Committee on Medical Research of Kochi Medical School.

**Clinical Evaluation**

Patient evaluation included a medical history, clinical examination, 12-lead electrocardiography (ECG), M-mode, 2-dimensional (2D), and Doppler echocardiography, and ambulatory 24-h Holter ECG analysis. The severity and distribution of LVH were assessed in the parasternal short-

| Table 1. Clinical Characteristics of the 293 Patients With HCM at Registration |
|---------------------------------|-------|
| **Age at registration (years)** | 63±14 |
| **Male sex**                    | 197 (67) |
| **Age at diagnosis (years)**    | 56±16 |
| **Age at diagnosis <40 years**  | 40 (14) |
| **Reason for diagnosis: symptoms** | 136 (46) |
| **Family history of HCM**       | 76 (26) |
| **Family history of SCD**       | 52 (18) |
| **Presence of symptoms at registration** | 185 (63) |
| **NYHA functional class**       |       |
| Class I                         | 163 (56) |
| Class II                        | 109 (37) |
| Class III                       | 21 (7)  |
| Class IV                        | 0 (0)   |
| **Syncope**                     | 12 (4)  |
| **Presence of AF at registration** | 86 (29) |
| **ICD implantation**            | 4 (1)   |
| **PM implantation**             | 13 (4)  |
| **Presence of NSVT**            | 60 (28) |
| **ECG data at registration**    |       |
| **Subtype**                     |       |
| HOCM                            | 40 (14) |
| MVO                             | 8 (3)   |
| D-HCM                           | 13 (4)  |
| Apical HCM                      | 52 (18) |
| Others                          | 180 (61) |
| **Presence of LVOT obstruction**| 36 (12) |
| **Maximum LVWT (mm)**           | 19.0±3.9 |
| **LVEDD (mm)**                  | 46.3±6.0 |
| **FS (%)**                      | 40.9±8.5 |
| **Left atrial diameter (mm)**   | 44.3±7.5 |
| **Medications at registration** |       |
| β-blocker                       | 119 (41) |
| Calcium antagonist               | 79 (27) |
| ACEI or ARB                     | 78 (27) |
| Diuretics                       | 50 (17) |
| Antiarrhythmic drugs            | 64 (22) |
| Anticoagulation therapy         | 79 (27) |

Data are presented as the mean±SD or n (%). Holler echocardiography (ECG) was performed in 213 patients during the follow-up period. ACEI, angiotensin-converting enzyme inhibitor; AF, atrial fibrillation; ARB, angiotensin II receptor blocker; D-HCM, dilated phase of HCM; FS, fractional shortening; HCM, hypertrophic cardiomyopathy; HOCM, hypertrophic obstructive cardiomyopathy; ICD, implantable cardioverter-defibrillator; LV, left ventricular; LVEDD, LV end-diastolic pressure; LVOT, LV outflow tract; LVWT, LV wall thickness; MVO, midventricular obstruction; NSVT, non-sustained ventricular tachycardia; NYHA, New York Heart Association; PM, pacemaker; SCD, sudden cardiac death.
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axial plane at the level of the mitral valve and papillary muscle. LV end-diastolic diameter (LVEDD) and end-systolic diameter (LVESD) were measured from M-mode and 2D images obtained from parasternal long-axis views, and fractional shortening (FS) was calculated as follows:

$$FS = \frac{(LVEDD - LVESD)}{LVEDD} \times 100$$

The LV outflow tract gradient was calculated from continuous-wave Doppler using the simplified Bernoulli equation. Non-sustained ventricular tachycardia (NSVT) was defined as ≥3 consecutive ventricular beats at a rate of ≥120 beats/min, lasting for <30 s.

Based on morphologic and hemodynamic assessments by echocardiography, patients were divided into the following 5 groups: (1) hypertrophic obstructive cardiomyopathy (HOCM), defined as the presence of basal LV outflow tract (LVOT) obstruction (gradient ≥30 mmHg at rest); (2) midventricular obstruction (MVO), defined as the presence of systolic LV cavity obliteration at the midventricle creating MVO with a peak systolic gradient ≥30 mmHg at rest; (3) dilated phase of HCM (D-HCM), defined as LV systolic dysfunction of global ejection fraction (EF) <50% (global EF was determined using the modified Simpson's method); (4) apical HCM, defined as hypertrophy confined to the LV apex; and (5) others, which included HCM without obstruction other than D-HCM and apical HCM.

For prognostic analysis, 3 modes of HCM-related adverse cardiovascular events were defined as follows: (1) SCD-relevant events were defined as a composite of sudden death, in which unexpected sudden collapse occurred in patients who had previously experienced a relatively stable or uneventful clinical course, successful recovery from ventricular fibrillation or spontaneous sustained ventricular tachycardia associated with hemodynamic instability, and appropriate implantable cardioverter-defibrillator (ICD) discharge; (2) composite heart failure (HF) events included HF-related death and hospitalization for HF; and (3) thromboembolic events were the composite of embolic stroke-related death and admission for arterial thromboembolic events. Data on survival and the clinical status of patients were obtained during serial clinic visits or from records on the patients’ clinical charts, including information from other institutes. The study closed on December 31, 2014.

Data Analysis
All data are expressed as mean±SD or frequency (percentage). The significance of differences in continuous variables was assessed using Student’s t-test or the Mann-Whitney’s U-test. Pearson’s Chi-squared test was used for comparisons between non-continuous variables, and Fisher’s exact test was used when the expected frequency was <5. Event-free estimate curves were calculated by the Kaplan-Meier method, and the log-rank test was used for comparison. The multivariate Cox proportional hazards model was used to analyze the relationships between SCD-relevant events and prognostic parameters including some variables with P≤0.05 in univariate analysis and conventional risk factors for SCD. Statistical significance was defined as 2-sided P≤0.05. Statistical analyses were performed using SPSS version 14.0J (SPSS Inc., Chicago, IL, USA).

Results

Clinical Characteristics at Registration
The clinical characteristics of the 293 patients with HCM at registration are summarized in Table 1. Mean patient age at registration and diagnosis was 63±14 (range 7–88) and 56±16 (range 6–87) years, respectively; 197 patients (67%) were men. Forty patients (14%) were diagnosed with HCM at <40 years of age. Seventy-six patients (26%) had proven familial HCM and 52 patients (18%) had a family history of sudden death. Most of the 293 patients were asymptomatic or mildly symptomatic at registration: 163 (56%) were New York Heart Association (NYHA) Class I, 109 (37%) were NYHA Class II, and only 21 (7%) were...
mortality rate was 0.5%.

With regard to HCM-related adverse events, a total of 77 cardiovascular events occurred in 70 patients during the follow-up period. SCD-relevant events occurred in 19 patients, including sudden death in 9 patients, successful recovery from cardiopulmonary arrest in 4 patients, and appropriate ICD discharge in 6 patients; HF events occurred in 35 patients, including 11 HF deaths; and thromboembolic events occurred in 23 patients, including 3 embolic stroke deaths. The distribution of ages at the time of HCM-related adverse events is shown in Figure 2. Patients in whom SCD-relevant events occurred were younger than patients with HF or embolic events. Figure 1B shows the incidence of SCD-relevant events. The 5-year SCD-relevant event rate was 5.2% and the rate of SCD-relevant events was 1.0% per year.

Table 2. Clinical Characteristics at Registration of Patients With and Without SCD-Relevant Events

| SCD-relevant events | Yes (n=19) | No (n=274) | P-value |
|---------------------|-----------|-----------|---------|
| Age at registration (years) | 57±15 | 64±14 | 0.066 |
| Male sex | 11 (58) | 186 (68) | 0.370 |
| Age at diagnosis (years) | 49±17 | 57±13 | 0.044 |
| Reason for diagnosis: symptoms | 10 (53) | 126 (46) | 0.574 |
| Family history of HCM | 10 (53) | 66 (24) | 0.012 |
| Family history of SCD | 6 (32) | 46 (17) | 0.119 |
| Presence of symptoms at registration | 15 (79) | 170 (62) | 0.140 |
| NYHA Class III | 3 (16) | 18 (7) | 0.146 |
| Syncope | 2 (11) | 10 (4) | 0.178 |
| Presence of AF at registration | 9 (47) | 77 (28) | 0.075 |
| Presence of NSVT^A | 12 (63) | 48 (18) | <0.001 |

ECG data at registration

| Subtype | Yes (n=19) | No (n=274) | P-value |
|---------|-----------|-----------|---------|
| HOCM | 3 (16) | 37 (14) | 0.002 |
| MVO | 0 (0) | 8 (3) | |
| D-HCM | 4 (21) | 9 (3) | |
| Apical HCM | 0 (0) | 52 (19) | |
| Others | 12 (63) | 168 (61) | |
| LVOT obstruction | 3 (16) | 33 (12) | 0.716 |
| Maximum LWWT (mm) | 19.7±3.0 | 19.0±4.0 | 0.414 |
| LVEDD (mm) | 49.5±6.3 | 46.1±6.0 | 0.019 |
| FS (%) | 35.4±10.3 | 41.3±8.2 | 0.003 |
| Left atrial diameter (mm) | 49.6±8.6 | 43.9±7.3 | 0.002 |
| D-HCM at final follow-up | 10 (52) | 24 (9) | <0.001 |

Medications at registration

| β-blocker | Yes (n=19) | No (n=274) | P-value |
|-----------|-----------|-----------|---------|
| Calcium antagonist | 3 (16) | 76 (28) | 0.256 |
| ACEI or ARB | 7 (37) | 71 (26) | 0.297 |
| Diuretic | 8 (42) | 42 (15) | 0.007 |
| Antiarrhythmic drugs | 8 (42) | 56 (20) | 0.041 |
| Class Ia | 5 (26) | 36 (13) | 0.160 |
| Class Ib | 0 (0) | 6 (2) | 1.000 |
| Class Ic | 0 (0) | 5 (2) | 1.000 |
| Class III | 3 (16) | 8 (3) | 0.027 |
| Class IV | 0 (0) | 1 (1) | 1.000 |
| Anticoagulation therapy | 9 (47) | 70 (26) | 0.038 |

Data are presented as the mean±SD or n (%). *Holter ECG was performed in 213 patients during the follow-up period. Abbreviations as in Table 1.

NYHA Class III. At registration, 86 patients (29%) had documentation of atrial fibrillation (AF). Of all 293 patients, 40 were in the HOCM group, 8 were in the MVO group, 13 were in the D-HCM group, 52 were in the apical HCM group, and 180 were in the “other” group.

SCD-Relevant Events

The mean follow-up period from registration of the patient cohort was 6.1±3.2 years, and 44 patients died. Of these 44 patients, HCM-related deaths occurred in 23: SCD in 9 patients, HF deaths in 11 patients, and embolic stroke deaths in 3 patients. In the 9 patients with SCD, unexpected death occurred during physical labor in only 1 patient. The remaining 8 patients died in a situation of no physical stress (8 patients while sleeping, 2 patients while relaxing after dinner). Figure 1A shows the incidence of SCD events. The 5-year SCD rate was 2.5% and the annual SCD.
SCD-relevant events. There was no sex difference between the 2 groups. The prevalence of a family history of HCM and detection of NSVT in patients with SCD-relevant events were significantly higher in patients with than without SCD-relevant events. Echocardiography showed that the prevalence of HOCM was comparable between the 2 groups. Patients in the SCD-relevant event group had a higher prevalence of D-HCM and a lower prevalence of apical HCM. Patients with SCD-relevant events had a larger LVEDD and left atrial size and lower LV FS than did patients without SCD-relevant events.

Regarding the prevalence of D-HCM, 13 patients were in D-HCM at registration. During the follow-up period, development of HCM to D-HCM occurred in an additional 21 patients, with the annual incidence of D-HCM being 1.2%; thus, in all, 34 patients had D-HCM. Of these 34 patients, 10 experienced an SCD-relevant event. Of particular note is that 7 of these 10 patients had lethal arrhythmic events as the first HCM-related events without a prior HF event.

**Predictors of SCD-Relevant Events**

Multivariate Cox proportional hazards models are shown in Table 3. Model 1 included parameters that were statistically significant according to univariate analysis (age at diagnosis, sex, family history of HCM, left atrial diameter, D-HCM) and conventional risk factors (family history of SCD, syncope, presence of NSVT, maximum LV wall thickness, presence of LVOT obstruction); Model 2 included only the conventional risk factors for SCD and D-HCM. Detection of NSVT and progression to D-HCM at registration or during follow-up were significant predictors of SCD-relevant events in our regional Japanese HCM cohort. Figure 3A shows SCD-relevant events in HCM patients with and without NSVT. For SCD-relevant events, NSVT on Holter ECG had negative and positive predictive values of 97% and 20%, respectively, and sensitivity and specificity of 63% and 82%, respectively. Figure 3B shows SCD-relevant events in HCM patients with and without the progression of HCM to D-HCM. Of 19 patients with SCD-relevant events, 10 (53%) had D-HCM. D-HCM had negative and positive predictive values of 97% and 29%, respectively, and sensitivity and specificity of 53% and 91%, respectively, for predicting SCD-relevant events. In the remaining 9 patients without D-HCM, 7 had one or more conventional SCD risk factor, and the remaining 2 patients had no conventional risk factors (they had only paroxysmal AF).

**Discussion**

HCM is a primary myocardial disorder with a heterogeneous clinical presentation and course.1, 4 The natural history of HCM varies from an asymptomatic and benign clinical course to sudden premature death and advanced
patients in HCM cohorts may have NSVT. With NSVT increased with age, and up to 20–30% of previous studies showed that the proportion of patients be identified by the presence of NSVT, confirmation of the absence of NSVT using Holter ECG monitoring is considered useful for identifying patients at low risk of SCD. Second, it is well known that HCM in a subset of patients progresses to the ‘dilated’ or ‘end-stage’ phase characterized by LV systolic dysfunction and that patients with D-HCM have a poor prognosis. In patients with D-HCM, the poor clinical course is due not only to refractory HF, but also SCD. Regarding the severity of cardiac fibrosis evaluated by late gadolinium enhancement (LGE) in cardiac magnetic resonance (CMR) imaging, D-HCM is typically associated with extensive LGE (25–50% of the whole LV), and more severe fibrosis is related to a greater risk of lethal arrhythmic events. Kawarai et al reported that patients with D-HCM had a high incidence of SCD-relevant events: SCD occurred in 47% of patients over a mean follow-up period of 5±3 years after progression to D-HCM. In the present HCM population, 10 of 34 D-HCM patients experienced SCD-relevant events. Furthermore, it is notable that 7 of these 10 patients had a lethal arrhythmic event as the first HCM-related event without a prior HF event. Considering the frequent SCD events preceding refractory HF status in D-HCM patients, early intervention with ICD implantation should be considered for these patients. However, the high risk of SCD in D-HCM patients has not been directly reflected in the 2011 ACCF/AHA and 2014 ESC guidelines for HCM management. Nakagawa et al reported that the recommendation for ICD implantation by the 2003 ACC/ESC, 2011 ACCF/AHA, and 2014 ESC guidelines was not based on appropriate SCD risk stratification in D-HCM patients. According to the latest 2018 JCS guidelines published, D-HCM itself is regarded as an important SCD risk modifier. We would like to emphasize the clinical effect of D-HCM concerning SCD-relevant events in HCM.

Study Limitations
This study has several limitations that need to be acknowledged. First, the number of SCD-relevant events was small. Therefore, some of the statistical analyses may have been affected, and we may have missed other independent markers for stratification of SCD risk in patients with HCM. Second, Holter monitoring should have been performed in all patients at registration. Only approximately 70% of patients had Holter ECG monitoring during the follow-up period. There may be measurement bias in diagnosis of NSVT. Holter ECG may not have been performed uniformly, but rather in patients with severe symptoms, such as syncope. Third, CMR imaging data were not included in this study. Several studies demonstrated that extensive LGE in CMR was associated with the risk of SCD events in HCM. Therefore, further studies on prognostic factors for SCD in patients with HCM are needed. In 2015, we established a large-scale registration survey of patients with HCM throughout Japan, named the J-HCM Registry Study. This prospective registration study is ongoing, and we believe that this multicenter project will provide important information on prognostic factors in HCM patients, particularly for SCD.

Conclusions
In the unselected Kochi RYOMA registry in an aged Japanese community, the annual rate of SCD-relevant events was 1.0%. In this HCM population, HCM developed to the dilated phase in a considerable number of patients, and D-HCM and NSVT were shown to be independently associated with an increased risk of SCD-relevant events.
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Acknowledgments
The participating investigators from the study hospitals are: Kazuya Kawai, MD, Masahiko Fukatani, MD, Shoichiro Kubokawa, MD, Yoko Nakaoka, MD (Chikamori Hospital); Takashi Yasamaki, MD (National Hospital Organization Kochi National Hospital); Yoko Hirakawa, MD (Tosa Municipal Hospital); Masanori Kuwabara, MD (Kochi Prefectural Aki General Hospital); and Katsutoshi Tanioka, MD, Tatsuya Noguchi, MD, and Kazuya Miyagawa, MD (Kochi Medical School). The authors thank the physicians who made this study possible.

Sources of Funding
This study did not receive any specific funding.

Disclosures
H.K. is a member of Circulation Reports’ Editorial Team. The remaining authors have no conflicts of interest to declare.

IRB Information
This study was approved by the Ethics Committee on Medical Research of Kochi Medical School (Reference no. ERB-002382).

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