Comparable prognosis in different neonatal histidine-tryptophan-ketoglutarate dosage management

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Abstract

Background: Histidine-tryptophan-ketoglutarate (HTK) is a solution commonly used for organ transplantation. However, there is no certified fixed regimen for on-pump heart surgery in neonates. We aimed to retrospectively evaluate the outcomes related to different HTK dosages and to analyze the safety of high-dosage perfusion.

Methods: A total of 146 neonates who underwent on-pump heart surgery with single-shot HTK perfusion were divided into two groups according to HTK dosages: a standard-dose (SD) group (n = 63, 40 mL/kg < HTK ≤ 60 mL/kg) and a high-dose (HD) group (n = 83, HTK > 60 mL/kg). Propensity score matching (PSM) was performed to control confounding bias.

Results: The SD group had a higher weight (3.7 ± 0.4 vs. 3.4 ± 0.4 kg, P < 0.0001), a lower proportion of complete transposition of the great artery (69.8% vs. 85.3%, P = 0.022), a lower cardiopulmonary bypass (CPB) time (123.5 [108.0, 136.0] vs. 132.5 [114.8, 152.5] min, P = 0.034), and a lower aortic x-clamp time (82.9 ± 27.1 vs. 95.5 ± 26.0 min, P = 0.005). After PSM, 44 patients were assigned to each group; baseline characteristics and CPB parameters between the two groups were comparable. There were no significant differences in peri-CPB blood product consumption after PSM (P > 0.05). The incidences of post-operative complications were not significantly different between the two groups. There were no significant differences in ventilation time, intensive care unit stay, and post-operative hospital stay (P > 0.05). Follow-up echocardiography outcomes at 1 month, 3 to 6 months, and 1 year showed that left ventricular ejection fraction and end-diastolic dimension were comparable between the two groups.

Conclusions: In neonatal on-pump cardiac surgery patients, single-shot HD (>60 mL/kg) HTK perfusion had a comparable heart protection effect and short-term post-operative prognosis as standard dosage perfusion of 40 to 60 mL/kg. Thus, this study provides supporting evidence of the safety of HD HTK perfusion.

Keywords: Histidine-tryptophan-ketoglutarate; Neonate; Perfusion dosage; Cardiac recovery; Prognosis

Introduction

Cardioplegia solutions are essential for myocardial protection during cardiac surgery. Heart protection in the neonate population is especially difficult and important due to immature organ systems.[1] Histidine-tryptophan-ketoglutarate (HTK; Custodiol HTK solution; Koehler Chemi, Alsbach-Hähnlein, Germany) was initially proposed by Bretschneider[2] in the 1970s, and it is now widely used in clinical practice for long-duration cardiopulmonary bypass (CPB) surgeries. Many studies recommend a single shot of 40 to 60 mL/kg HTK perfused into the aortic root for 5 to 6 min, with an initial pressure of 80 to 100 mmHg. When the myocardium is at standstill, perfusion pressure should be reduced to 40 to 60 mmHg.[3-7] However, all these studies were based on adult or older pediatric patients. Due to the different physiology of neonatal patients, it is difficult to maintain perfusion time, pressure, and dosage simultaneously.

In our center, HTK perfusion in neonate on-pump cardiac surgery is generally based on two different considerations: (1) If the perfusion time and dosage of 40 to 60 mL/kg are used as the controlling factor according to HTK guidelines, the pump moves very slowly and the actual perfusion pressure is lower than the expected. (2) If initial perfusion pressure is increased, HTK dosage will increase to >60 mL/kg. Current research shows that aortic root perfusion pressure plays an important role by promoting penetration to poorly perfused tissue. Adequate infusion
pressure improves penetration and provides rapid and complete cardioplegia. High-dose HTK perfusion may result in hemodilution and blood ion fluctuation. Unfortunately, there is no early outcome data for neonatal congenital heart disease patients based on dose selection.

The purpose of this study is to retrospectively compare the short-term prognosis between standard-dose and high-dose HTK perfusion in neonatal cardiac surgery and evaluate the safety of HD HTK perfusion on heart protection and short-term clinical outcomes.

Methods

Ethics approval

The study was approved by the Ethics Committee of Fuwai Hospital (No. 2014-600), and all data were collected from electronic medical records.

Study population and design

We retrospectively reviewed neonates (aged ≤28 days at the time of surgery) who underwent on-pump congenital heart surgery in Fuwai Hospital from January 2012 to December 2018. All patients received single-shot HTK perfusion to achieve intra-operative cardioplegia. The patients were divided into two groups according to HTK dosage: a standard-dose group (n = 63, 40 mL/kg ≤ HTK ≤ 60 mL/kg) and a high-dose group (n = 83, HTK > 60 mL/kg) [Figure 1]. Exclusion criteria were: (1) non-HTK cardioplegia; (2) re-CPB during a single surgery which required secondary perfusion of cardioplegia solution; (3) reoperation patients; (4) heart transplantation patients; (5) pre-operative history of renal or hepatic dysfunction or coagulopathy; (6) failure to wean from CPB; and (7) missing data.

Patient demographics, perioperative echocardiography parameters, blood routine, blood biochemistry test, intra-operative data, blood product consumption, ventilation time, length of intensive care unit (ICU) stay, post-operative hospitalization time, 30-day mortality, and incidences of early post-operative adverse events were collected from the clinical database. The complexity of surgeries was assessed by Risk Adjustment for Congenital Heart Surgery-1 (RACHS-1).

Anesthesia and CPB strategies

Intravenous anesthesia and oral endotracheal intubation were routinely performed in all patients. Radial or femoral artery catheterization was used to continuously monitor arterial blood pressure. An internal right jugular vein catheter was inserted to monitor central venous pressure.
Cardiac output syndrome (LCOS) were considered complications. Cardiac enzymes including creatine kinase, diastolic dimension, cardiac enzymes, and cardiac complications. Left ventricular ejection fraction, left ventricular end-diastolic dimension, cardiac enzymes, and cardiac complications were assessed by post-operative early adverse events, and overall recovery indicators. Post-operative hospital stay, and hospital stay. Incidence of in-hospital mortality, multiple organ dysfunction syndrome, re-intubation, pneumothorax, hydrothorax, infection, and peritoneal dialysis. Overall recovery indicators included ventilation duration, ICU stay, post-operative hospital stay, and hospital stay.

Clinical outcomes
Clinical outcomes included post-operative heart function, early adverse events, and overall recovery indicators. Post-operative cardiac function was assessed by post-operative left ventricular ejection fraction, left ventricular end-diastolic dimension, cardiac enzymes, and cardiac complications. Cardiac enzymes including creatine kinase (CK), CK-MB, and lactate dehydrogenase were analyzed during the perioperative period. Delayed sternal closure, supraventricular tachycardia, cardiac arrest, hydropericardium, re-intubation, pneumothorax, hydrothorax, infection, and peritoneal dialysis. Overall recovery indicators included ventilation duration, ICU stay, post-operative hospital stay, and hospital stay.

Statistical analysis
As a retrospective observational study comparing the prognosis of two different HTK dosage perfusion groups, some baseline variables were not comparable. Therefore, it was necessary to use propensity score matching (PSM) to control confounding bias. PSM produced a balanced match of standard-dose to high-dose HTK perfusion cases in a 1:1 ratio with a caliper (match tolerance) of 0.02. The propensity score was calculated from the following baseline characteristics: weight, age, RACHS-1, CPB time, and aortic x-clamp (AC) time. All of these variables were statistically different between the two groups before PSM. A total of 88 patients were propensity-score-matched, and 44 pairs of patients were generated. All the data extraction and analyses were performed using Statistical Package for Social Sciences 26.0 software (SPSS Inc., Chicago, IL, USA). Quantitative variables were presented as mean ± standard deviation using a t-test, or median and interquartile range, and Mann-Whitney U test. Categorical variables were compared with the Chi-squared test and Fisher exact test. For all calculations, statistical significance was defined as \( P < 0.05 \).

Results

Baseline characteristics and CPB parameters
A total of 146 neonates were included in this study: 63 standard-dose and 83 high-dose HTK recipients. Forty-four pairs were found through PSM analysis. Baseline characteristics and CPB parameters are shown in Table 1. The median dosage of HTK was 54.4 (51.3, 57.1) mL/kg in the standard-dose group, while it was 70.3 (66.7, 78.1) mL/kg in the high-dose group \(( Z = -10.333, P < 0.0001)\). There were several statistically significant differences between the two groups before PSM. The standard-dose group had a higher body weight \( (3.7 ± 0.4 \text{ vs. } 3.4 ± 0.4 \text{ kg}, t = 3.219, P < 0.0001)\) and a lower incidence of complete transposition of the great artery \( (69.8\% \text{ vs. } 85.5\%, \chi^2 = 5.279, P = 0.022)\). CPB time \( (123.5 [108.0, 136.0] \text{ vs. } 132.5 [114.8, 152.5] \text{ min}, Z = -2.120, P = 0.034)\) and AC time \( (82.9 ± 27.1 \text{ vs. } 95.5 ± 26.0 \text{ min}, t = 2.862, P = 0.005)\) were both statistically lower in the standard-dose group compared with the high-dose group. After PSM, all baseline characteristics, as well as CPB parameters, were comparable between the two groups.

Cardiac protection indicators
As shown in Table 2, there were no significant pre-operative and early post-operative differences in cardiac enzyme release, for CK, CK-MB, and lactic dehydrogenase \(( P > 0.05)\). Pre-discharge cardiac enzymes were also comparable between the two groups \(( P > 0.05)\). There were no significant differences in early cardiac complications, such as delayed sternal closure, supraventricular tachycardia, cardiac arrest, hydropericardium, LCOS, and the usage of a permanent pacemaker \(( P > 0.05)\).

Peri-CPB blood gas monitoring
The differences in peri-CPB concentration of \( Na^+ \) (mmol/L), \( K^+ \) (mmol/L), \( Cl^- \) (mmol/L), \( Ca^{2+} \) (mmol/L), hematocrit (%), glucose (mg/dL), and lactic acid (mmol/L) between the two groups were not significant before and after PSM \(( P > 0.050)\) [Figure 2]. The only significant difference of peri-CPB ion concentrations between the two groups before PSM was the glucose level during the rewarming period \( (178.7 ± 49.5 \text{ vs. } 153.0 ± 44.6 \text{ mg/dL}, t = 2.223, P = 0.030)\). The concentration of \( Mg^{2+} \) in the SD group was lower at pediatric intensive care unit (PICU) arrival \( (0.7 ± 0.1 \text{ vs. } 0.8 ± 0.2 \text{ mmol/L}, t = -2.487, P = 0.015)\) [Supplementary Table 1, http://links.lww.com/CM9/A669].

Peri-CPB blood products consumption
Blood product consumption during the peri-CPB period is shown in Table 3. Before PSM, intra-operative platelet usage was higher for the SD group \( (56.6 ± 107.1 \text{ vs.}) \)
Table 1: Baseline characteristics of neonates with different HTK dose management and their cardiopulmonary bypass parameters (n = 146).

| Variables                        | Before PSM | After PSM | Statistics | P value |
|----------------------------------|------------|-----------|------------|---------|
|                                  | SD group   | HD group  |            |         |
|                                  | (n = 63)   | (n = 83)  |            |         |
| HTK, mL/kg                       |            |           |            |         |
|                                  | 54.4       | 70.3      | −10.333    | <0.0001 |
|                                  | (51.3, 57.1)| (66.7, 78.1)|            |         |
| Male, n (%)                      |            |           |            |         |
|                                  | 52 (82.5)  | 61 (73.5) | 1.675      | 0.196   |
| Age, days                        |           |           |            |         |
|                                  | 16.7 ± 6.3 | 16.9 ± 6.6| 0.169      | 0.866   |
| Weight, kg                       |           |           |            |         |
|                                  | 3.7 ± 0.4  | 3.4 ± 0.4 | −3.219     | 0.000   |
| Body length, cm                  |           |           |            |         |
|                                  | 50.8 ± 2.8 | 50.0 ± 3.1| −1.592     | 0.114   |
| RACHS-1                          |           |           |            |         |
|                                  | 3 (3, 4)   | 3 (3, 4)  | 1.586      | 0.742   |
| Diagnosis, n (%)                 |           |           |            |         |
| Aortic coarctation               |           |           |            |         |
|                                  | 3 (4.8)    | 2 (2.4)   | −3         | 0.652   |
| Interrupted aortic arch          |           |           |            |         |
|                                  | 3 (4.8)    | 3 (3.6)   | −3         | 1.000   |
| Complete transposition of great artery| 44 (69.8) | 71 (85.5) | 5.279      | 0.022   |
| Patent foramen ovale             |           |           |            |         |
|                                  | 16 (25.4)  | 21 (25.3) | <0.0001    | 0.990   |
| Patent ductus arteriosus         |           |           |            |         |
|                                  | 48 (76.2)  | 64 (77.1) | 0.017      | 0.897   |
| Atrial septal defect             |           |           |            |         |
|                                  | 39 (61.9)  | 58 (69.9) | 1.022      | 0.312   |
| Ventricular septal defect        |           |           |            |         |
|                                  | 21 (33.3)  | 27 (32.9) | 0.003      | 0.959   |
| Pulmonary artery hypertension    |           |           |            |         |
|                                  | 17 (27.0)  | 31 (37.3) | 1.744      | 0.187   |
| Anomalous pulmonary venous       |           |           |            |         |
| connection                       |           |           |            |         |
| Preoperative ICU entrance        |           |           |            |         |
|                                  | 13 (20.6)  | 14 (16.9) | 0.337      | 0.668   |
| Preoperative intubation          |           |           |            |         |
|                                  | 7 (11.1)   | 7 (8.4)   | 0.296      | 0.586   |
| CPB parameters                   |           |           |            |         |
| CPB time, min                    |           |           |            |         |
|                                  | 123.5 (108.0, 136.0) | 132.5 (114.8, 152.5) | −2.120   | 0.034   |
|                                  | 82.9 ± 27.1 | 95.5 ± 26.0 | 2.862    | 0.005   |
| Lowest nasopharyngeal temperature, °C |           |           |            |         |
|                                  | 27.8 ± 1.7 | 27.6 ± 1.7| −0.543     | 0.588   |
| Lowest rectal temperature, °C    |           |           |            |         |
|                                  | 29.1 ± 1.7 | 28.9 ± 1.8| −0.687     | 0.493   |
| Mean arterial pressure, mmHg     |           |           |            |         |
| Spontaneous re-beating, n (%)    |           |           |            |         |
|                                  | 62 (98.4)  | 83 (100.0)| 1.327      | 0.432   |

Data are presented as median (Q1, Q3) or mean ± standard deviation. *Z values. †χ² values. ‡t test. §Fisher exact test. <: Not applicable; AC: Aortic x-clamp; CPB: Cardiopulmonary bypass; HD: High-dose; HTK: Histidine-tryptophan-ketoglutarate; ICU: Intensive care unit; PSM: Propensity score matching; RACHS-1: Risk Adjustment for Congenital Heart Surgery-1; SD: Standard-dose.

26.8 ± 25.4 mL, t = 2.162, P = 0.034). However, there were no significant differences in peri-CPB blood product consumption in the two groups after PSM.

Recovery parameters and extracardiac complications
Between the two groups, ventilation duration, ICU stay, and post-operative hospital stay before and after PSM were similar (P > 0.05), as was the incidence of extracardiac complications (P > 0.05) [Table 4].

Post-operative follow-up echocardiography parameters
Post-operative follow-up echocardiography parameters are shown in Figure 3. The follow-up echocardiography frequency between the two groups was comparable.
Table 2: Cardiac protection indicators measurement for neonates in different HTK dose management group before and after PSM (n = 146).

| Variables                  | SD group (n = 63) | HD group (n = 83) | Statistics | P value  | SD group (n = 44) | HD group (n = 44) | Statistics | P value  |
|----------------------------|------------------|-------------------|------------|----------|------------------|-------------------|------------|----------|
| Cardiac function enzymes   |                  |                   |            |          |                  |                   |            |          |
| Pre-operative CK (IU/L)    | 199 (125, 366)   | 191 (104, 374)    | -0.464*    | 0.642    | 171 (121, 239)   | 208 (128, 548)   | -0.700*    | 0.484    |
| Pre-operative CK-MB (IU/L) | 37 (24, 55)      | 34 (25, 60)       | -0.177*    | 0.860    | 39 (26, 57)      | 36 (25, 56)      | -0.099*    | 0.921    |
| Pre-operative LDH (IU/L)   | 407 (345, 507)   | 447 (330, 637)    | -1.561*    | 0.118    | 431 (351, 532)   | 468 (352, 654)   | -0.821*    | 0.412    |
| Post-operative day 1       |                  |                   |            |          |                  |                   |            |          |
| CK (IU/L)                  | 833 (660, 1002)  | 877 (691, 1120)   | -1.215*    | 0.224    | 898 ± 345        | 938 ± 374        | -0.604*    | 0.611    |
| Pre-discharge              |                  |                   |            |          |                  |                   |            |          |
| Delayed sternal closure    | 5 (7.9)          | 9 (10.8)          | 0.349*     | 0.778    | 4 (9.1)          | 7 (15.9)         | 0.935†     | 0.521    |
| Supraventricular tachycardia | 3 (4.8)         | 7 (8.4)           | 0.757*     | 0.515    | 1 (2.3)          | 5 (11.4)         | -          | 0.202    |
| Cardiac arrest              | 0 (0.0)          | 1 (1.2)           | -          | 1.000    | 0 (0.0)          | 0 (0.0)          | -          | -        |
| Hydropericardium            | 1 (1.6)          | 1 (1.2)           | -          | 1.000    | 0 (0.0)          | 1 (2.3)          | -          | 1.000    |
| Permanent pacemaker         | 0 (0.0)          | 1 (1.2)           | -          | 1.000    | 0 (0.0)          | 1 (2.3)          | -          | 1.000    |
| LCOS                       | 4 (6.3)          | 7 (8.4)           | 0.223*     | 0.758    | 2 (4.5)          | 5 (11.4)         | -          | 0.434    |
| Echocardiology parameters   |                  |                   |            |          |                  |                   |            |          |
| Pre-operative EF (%)        | 65.1 (65.0, 75.2) | 65.0 (63.0, 71.2) | -1.134*    | 0.257    | 66.2 (61.2, 70.2) | 64.5 (60.0, 67.7) | -1.165†    | 0.244    |
| Pre-operative LVEDD (mm)    | 18.4 ± 4.5       | 17.7 ± 3.9        | 0.849*     | 0.397    | 18.1 ± 4.5       | 17.7 ± 3.9       | 0.479†     | 0.633    |
| Pre-discharge EF (%)        | 65.5 ± 5.5       | 65.0 ± 6.2        | -0.485*    | 0.629    | 66.0 ± 5.4       | 63.9 ± 6.5       | 1.552†     | 0.125    |
| Pre-discharge LVEDD (mm)    | 18.2 ± 2.5       | 18.1 ± 2.4        | 0.329*     | 0.742    | 17.8 ± 2.4       | 18.7 ± 2.2       | -1.739†    | 0.086    |

Data are presented as median (Q1, Q3) or mean ± standard deviation. *Z values. †χ² values. ‡t values. ‡ Fisher exact test. – Not applicable; CK: Creatine kinase; CK-MB: Creatine kinase-MB; EF: Ejection fraction; HD: High-dose; LCOS: Low cardiac output syndrome; LDH: Lactic dehydrogenase; LVEDD: Left ventricular end-diastolic dimension; POD: Post-operative day; PSM: Propensity score matching; SD: Standard-dose.

Figure 2: Perioperative blood gas monitoring between the two groups. (A) Na⁺ before PSM; (B) Na⁺ after PSM; (C) Hct before PSM; (D) Hct after PSM; (E) Lac before PSM; (F) Lac after PSM. CPB: Cardiopulmonary bypass; Hct: Hematocrit; HD: High-dose; ICU: Intensive care unit; Lac: Lactate; PSM: Propensity score matching; SD: Standard-dose.
Table 3: Peri-CPB blood products consumption for neonates in different HTK dose management group before and after PSM (n = 146).

| Variables | Before PSM | After PSM |
|-----------|------------|-----------|
| RBC, mL   |            |           |
| SD group  | HD group   | t value   | P value  |
| (n = 63)  | (n = 83)   |           |          |
| Intra-operation | 303.8 ± 118.0 | 301.7 ± 172.2 | 0.162 | 0.871 |
| Priming   | 184.1 ± 54.5 | 173.5 ± 68.2 | 1.047 | 0.297 |
| During CPB | 69.8 ± 108.7 | 81.9 ± 103.8 | 0.683 | 0.496 |
| Anesthesia | 1.0 ± 56.6 | 6.5 ± 26.4 | -1.836 | 0.070 |
| POD 0     | 34.9 ± 69.9 | 19.3 ± 78.8 | 1.246 | 0.215 |
| POD 1     | 15.9 ± 44.7 | 20.5 ± 55.8 | 0.537 | 0.592 |
| FFP, mL   |            |           |
| Intra-operation | 26.8 ± 64.7 | 14.109 ± 39.9 | 1.455 | 0.148 |
| Priming   | 0.0 ± 0.0  | 1.0 ± 6.4  | -1.379 | 0.172 |
| During CPB | 1.6 ± 12.6 | 1.8 ± 12.2 | 0.474 | 0.636 |
| Anesthesia | 7.7 ± 39.2 | 1.5 ± 7.2  | 1.248 | 0.216 |
| POD 0     | 15.9 ± 44.7 | 7.2 ± 26.1 | 1.367 | 0.175 |
| POD 1     | 1.6 ± 12.6 | 3.6 ± 24.4 | -0.601 | 0.549 |
| Platelet, mL |            |           |
| Intra-operation | 56.6 ± 107.1 | 26.8 ± 25.4 | 2.162 | 0.034 |
| Anesthesia | 42.3 ± 92.4 | 26.8 ± 25.4 | 1.294 | 0.200 |
| POD 0     | 4.8 ± 37.8 | 0.0 ± 0.0  | 1.000 | 0.321 |
| POD 1     | 9.5 ± 53.0 | 0.0 ± 0.0  | 1.426 | 0.159 |
| Fibrinogen, g |            |           |
| Intra-operation | 0.3 ± 0.3 | 0.3 ± 0.2 | 0.250 | 0.803 |
| Anesthesia | 0.3 ± 0.2 | 0.3 ± 0.2 | 0.049 | 0.961 |
| POD 0     | 0.0 ± 0.1 | 0.0 ± 0.0  | 1.149 | 0.252 |
| Prothrombin complex, IU |            |           |
| Intra-operation | 133.7 ± 111.3 | 138.3 ± 107.5 | 1.000 | 0.321 |
| Anesthesia | 133.7 ± 111.3 | 138.3 ± 107.5 | -0.252 | 0.801 |
| POD 0     | 0.0 ± 0.0  | 0.0 ± 0.0  | -0.252 | 0.801 |

Data are presented as mean ± standard deviation. CPB: Cardiopulmonary bypass; FFP: Fresh frozen plasma; HD: High-dose; POD: Post-operative day; PSM: Propensity score matching; RBC: Red blood cell; SD: Standard-dose; –: Not applicable.

Table 4: Recovery parameters and extracardiac complications for neonates in different HTK dose management group before and after PSM (n = 146).

| Variables                  | Before PSM | After PSM |
|----------------------------|------------|-----------|
|                           | SD group   | HD group  | Statistics   | P value |
|                           | (n = 63)   | (n = 83)  |             |          |
|                           | SD group   | HD group  |             |          |
|                           | (n = 44)   | (n = 44)  |             |          |
| Recovery parameters       |            |           | t value     | P value  |
| Ventilation duration, h   | 51.0 (27.6, 89.8) | 48.1 (27.0, 76.3) | -0.235 | 0.814 |
| ICU stay, days            | 5.9 (3.9, 9.9) | 4.9 (3.0, 7.8) | -1.148 | 0.251 |
| Post-operative hospital stay, days | 14 (10, 19) | 13 (10, 15) | -1.201 | 0.230 |
| Extracardiac complications, n (%) |            |           |             |          |
| Re-intubation             | 6 (9.5)    | 5 (6.0)   | 0.603 | 0.427 |
| Pneumothorax              | 1 (1.6)    | 6 (7.2)   | -       | 0.141 |
| Hydrothorax               | 3 (4.8)    | 1 (1.2)   | -       | 0.315 |
| Infection                 | 2 (3.2)    | 0         | -       | 0.185 |
| Peritoneal dialysis       | 6 (9.5)    | 11 (13.3) | 0.484 | 0.487 |
| Multiple organ dysfunction syndrome | 2 (3.2) | 2 (2.4) | -       | 1.000 |
| In-hospital death         | 4 (6.4)    | 4 (4.8)   | -       | 0.726 |

Data are presented as median (Q1, Q3). *Z values. †χ² values. ‡t values. §Fisher exact test. HD: High-dose; ICU: Intensive care unit; PSM: Propensity score matching; SD: Standard-dose.
(P > 0.05). After PSM, LVEDD at 1-month post-discharge showed a difference between the standard-dose and high-dose groups (20.0 ± 2.8 vs. 21.5 ± 3.8 mm, t = −2.085, P = 0.041), but other post-operative echocardiography parameters were comparable (P > 0.05).

**Discussion**

HTK is increasingly used for the protection of neonatal hearts during the cardioplegic arrest. It protects the organs by removing extracellular sodium and calcium ions, while a highly concentrated buffer histidine/histidine hydrochloride solution strengthens the extracellular environment to prolong the organ’s resistance to blood oxygenation interruptions. The buffer captures H+ ions, which are produced during ischemia by anaerobic glycolysis. Consequently, the development of myocardial acidosis is reduced, and the myocardium needs less frequent cardioplegically re-perfusion. A single-dose HTK perfusion regimen is becoming more frequent in technically complex heart surgeries requiring a long AC. The median AC time in this study cohort was above 80 min, which is consistent with previous studies where AC time exceeded 60 min. This retrospective study aimed to investigate the clinical influence of high dosage HTK perfusion on neonatal patients. The HTK dosage in the high-dose group was significantly higher than in previous studies.

Perioperative heart-related events and parameters were thoroughly compared between the two groups. One of the most commonly reported complications of HTK protection is related to intra-operative and post-operative arrhythmias. One prospective randomized study found a higher frequency of spontaneous ventricular fibrillation after aortic clamp removal in the single-dose HTK (30 mL/kg) group compared with repetitive cold blood cardioplegia in adults. The result was confirmed by Gaudino et al. when they compared the same dosage of HTK solution with warm blood cardioplegia. However, HTK solution perfusion did show a higher spontaneous resumption rate when compared with St Thomas crystalloid cardioplegia. The resumption rate in our study reached 100% after the PSM adjustment of both groups. A post-operative arrhythmia study by Scrascia et al. reported comparable rates between a single-dose HTK perfusion (20–25 mL/kg) and cold blood cardioplegia during aortic surgery. The incidence of supraventricular tachycardia, as well as post-operative ventricular function by echocardiography, showed no differences in either group, indicating that standard dosage vs. higher dosage showed comparable cardiac protective effects. Additionally, the blood lactate concentrations at different periods during CPB showed no differences between either group, which indicates that perfusion was comparable between the two groups, and gave adequate protection. Early post-operative echocardiography parameters and myocardial enzyme fluctuation were all no different in low and high perfusion volume patients. Follow-up echocardiography parameters showed no differences in either group, indicating that the cardiac function recovery of the late post-operative period was comparable.

Previous studies suggested that HTK cardioplegia may cause electrolyte imbalances and their related adverse outcomes in pediatric cardiac surgery, especially hyponatremia that may result from large perfusion volume. Kim et al. reported that the use of HTK in pediatric patients during CPB frequently causes fluctuations of sodium concentration, and hyponatremia, which is associated with post-operative seizure. However, Lueck et al. found that only non-physiological hyponatremia together with low osmotic pressure will cause cerebral swelling, by shifting water from extracellular spaces to intracellular spaces. HTK is an iso-permeable low sodium solution and has no negative impact on patients’ osmotic pressure-related results. Over-treatment of hyponatremia in pediatrics must be avoided due to poor post-operative outcomes from increased serum sodium concentration (≥145 mmol/L) at the end of CPB. In our cohort study, intra-operative serum sodium concentration was comparable in the two groups; a high dose of HTK did not result in a significant intra-operative low sodium level. Compared with the sodium concentration range in a previous study, we can demonstrate that peri-CPB serum sodium concentration did not fluctuate significantly in our cohort, and it returned to normal by the time patients arrived at PICU. Furthermore, no neurologic complications were reported after surgery in either group.

Hemodilution is another common concern when crystalloid cardioplegia is used. In this study, hematocrit was <35% during the cooling and re-warming period and elevated to a normal level at the end of CPB. Hematocrit in both groups was comparable despite the higher HTK perfusion levels in the HD group. Perioperative blood consumption did not indicate any different hemodilution effects between the two groups. Hemodilution can be reduced by pumping cardioplegic solution from the...
coronary sinus, spontaneous diuresis, or ultrafiltration.\textsuperscript{122}

In our center, we routinely open the right atrium during HTK perfusion. Extra cardioplegia is collected by blood salvage through the coronary sinus to avoid hemodilution. All neonates who underwent surgery received routine ultrafiltration during the rewarming period and modified ultrafiltration before CPB weaning.

A comprehensive comparison of post-operative systemic organ recovery and extracardiac complications was investigated in this cohort study to reveal any possible potential risks in long-term prognosis between the two groups. There were no significant differences found in ICU stay, post-operative hospital stay, and extracardiac complications between the two groups. These results provide supporting evidence that standard-dose and high-dose HTK perfusion regimens are equally effective.

There are some limitations to our study. Since this study was not a randomized controlled trial (RCT), patient selection criteria are not completely random; thus, the inherent bias associated with a retrospective study exists. Although we applied PSM to balance the influence of selection bias and potential confounding factors, bias associated with pre-operative factors could not be completely excluded. An RCT study comparing standard-dose and high-dose HTK perfusion in neonates is necessary. Second, limited data restricted us from comparing the exact perfusion time and pressure between the two groups. Third, this study was a single-center study and the sample size was not large. The conclusions of our study need to be verified in a larger population and/or multiple-center study.

Funding
This study was supported by a grant from the National Natural Science Foundation of China (No. 81670375).

Conflicts of interest
None.

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