Diastolic Pulmonary Artery to Pulmonary Capillary Wedge Pressure Difference: A Predictor of Outcome After Left Ventricular Assist Device Implantation

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At present, implantable left ventricular assist devices (LVADs) represent the only available and effective alternative to heart transplantation for end-stage heart failure, and may be utilized within a broad spectrum of indications, including bridge to heart transplantation or recovery, or destination therapy. Right ventricular (RV) function is an independent prognostic factor in patients with chronic heart failure. RV failure after LVAD implantation for chronic heart failure treatment portends a particularly poor prognosis. However, many aspects of RV failure following LVAD implantation are still uncertain. What has been observed is that immediately after device implantation, the left ventricle is decompressed, causing a leftward shift of the interventricular septum, which reduces its mechanical contractile properties. In addition, RV output must match the flow generated by the device. In this setting, the RV is sensitive to its afterload, which is driven by elevated left atrial pressure and is further increased by elevated small vessel resistance in the setting of preexisting heart failure, operative stress, inflammation, and shear stress. Several hemodynamic parameters have been examined to reflect RV afterload in pulmonary hypertension caused by left heart disease, including the diastolic pulmonary artery to pulmonary capillary wedge pressure difference or gradient (DPG).2

In this issue of the Journal of the American Heart Association (JAHA), Imamura and colleagues3 investigated the impact of a DPG >5 mm Hg on outcomes of LVAD assessed by right heart function measurements with echocardiography and hemocompatibility-related adverse events. While this is a small study (92 patients, with few data on the pre-LVAD hemodynamics), and even fewer data (≈69 patients undergoing complete RV functional measurements), it presents novel, clinically meaningful data.

Research in the area of precapillary pulmonary hypertension has seen major advances over the past years in terms of genetics, vascular biology, and treatments, but PH-LHD has generally remained poorly understood. In the current work, Imamura and colleagues3 have utilized a DPG of >5 mm Hg in a prospective study setting to predict outcomes after LVAD implantation. A threshold of 5 has been described in early work4 to discriminate cardiac from pulmonary causes of increased vascular resistance. Imamura and colleagues3 found that almost half of the patients (48%) had a DPG >5 mm Hg, suggesting a pulmonary vascular disturbance. Of 71 patients who had pre-LVAD hemodynamic data, 33 had post-LVAD DPG >5 mm Hg, with 13 of 33 who had persistent DPG >5 mm Hg before and after LVAD implantation, and 20 of 33 who experienced a de novo elevation of DPG >5 mm Hg. The authors' main finding was a DPG >5 mm Hg irrespective of pulmonary artery wedge pressure in almost 50% of clinically stable LVAD patients. A DPG >5 mm Hg was associated with worsening RV function and a higher incidence of RV failure within 10 months after LVAD implantation, and significantly higher rates of hemocompatibility-related adverse events, which defines any nonsurgical bleeding, thromboembolic event, pump thrombosis, or neurological events.

While, for example, the elevation in the right atrial to pulmonary artery wedge pressure (RA/pulmonary artery wedge pressure) ratio may be a hemodynamic marker for poor postoperative outcomes including length of stay and RV function in patients undergoing LVAD implantation,5 DPG is a novel hemodynamic biomarker for LVAD outcomes. In the past, DPG has mainly been used to diagnose pulmonary causes of heart failure,4 or to prognosticate pulmonary hypertension caused by left heart disease. RV afterload is driven by elevated left atrial pressure in isolated postcapillary PH. When mean pulmonary artery pressure is

The opinions expressed in this article are not necessarily those of the editors or of the American Heart Association.

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J Am Heart Assoc. 2020;9:e016110. DOI: 10.1161/JAHA.120.016110.

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disproportional to left atrial pressure because of a contribution of arterial and venous pulmonary vascular disease, combined post- and precapillary PH is present. According to a large hemodynamic database, combined post- and precapillary PH is predicted by a DPG $\geq 7$ mm Hg, and associated with decreased right ventricular-pulmonary vascular coupling and increased mortality. The prognostic relevance of DPG has been confirmed in some reports, but has also been refuted by others (Table). Because of discordant data sets that are mainly based on discordant populations of patients, the 2018 World Meeting on Pulmonary hypertension groups have redefined postcapillary PH as mean pulmonary artery pressure $>20$ mm Hg and PAWP $>15$ mm Hg; and if these criteria apply, then isolated postcapillary-PH is defined by a PVR $\leq 3$ (Wood Units); and combined post- and precapillary PH is defined when PVR $>3$ WU, thus eliminating DPG from the definition.

While the data of Imamura and colleagues provide new support for the role of pulmonary resistance vessels determining RV afterload and outcomes after LVAD implantation, and for the concept that DPG may serve as a “hemodynamic lung biopsy.”

Table. DPG as Predictor of Survival in PH-LHD

| Study                        | N     | Model        | Predictive Role of DPG |
|------------------------------|-------|--------------|------------------------|
| Gerges C et al Chest 2013    | 1094  | Multivariable| +                      |
| Tedford RJ et al J Heart Lung Transplant 2014 | 16 811 | Univariable  | --                     |
| Tampakakis et al JACC Heart Fail 2015 | 469   | Multivariable| --                     |
| Dragu R et al Eur J Heart Fail 2015 | 164   | Univariable  | +                      |
| Zotter-Tufaro C et al JACC Heart Fail 2015 | 148   | Multivariable| +                      |
| Al-Naamani N et al JACC Heart Fail 2015 | 73    | Univariable  | --                     |
| Gerges M et al AJRCCM 2015  | 1454  | Multivariable| +                      |
| O’Sullivan CJ, et al Circ Cardiovasc Intervent 2015 | 325   | Multivariable| +                      |
| Mazimba S et al Respir Med 2016 | 225   | Multivariable| +                      |
| Rezaee ME et al Clin Cardiol/2016 | 510   | Univariable  | +                      |
| Yamabe S et al Circ J 2016    | 243   | Univariable  | +                      |
| Ibe T et al J Cardiol 2016    | 164   | Univariable  | +                      |
| Naeije R et al Circ Heart Fail 2017 | 636   | Multivariable| +                      |
| Brunner NW et al Catheter Cardiovasc Interv 2017 | 133   | Multivariable| --                     |
| Palazzini M et al Eur J Heart Fail 2018 | 276   | Univariable  | --                     |
| Vanderpool R et al JAMA Cardiol/2018 | 10 023 | Multivariable| +                      |
| Albers EL et al Pediatr Transplant 2018 | 1468  | Multivariable| +                      |
| Ainsasra A et al JAH4 2019   | 268   | Multivariable| +                      |

DPG indicates diastolic pulmonary artery to pulmonary capillary wedge pressure difference or gradient; and PH-LHD, pulmonary hypertension caused by left heart disease.

Disclosures

Lang has relationships with drug companies including AOPOrphan Pharmaceuticals AG, Actelion-Janssen, MSD, Medtronic, and Ferrer. In addition to being investigator in trials involving these companies, relationships include consultancy service, research grants, and membership of scientific advisory boards.
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Key Words: Editorials ● hemodynamics ● pulmonary circulation

DOI: 10.1161/JAHA.120.016110

Journal of the American Heart Association