Decision rule for stratification of patients with chronic heart failure of functional class II and III

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ABSTRACT

The aim of the study was focused on the development of a decision rule for classifying patients as functional class (FC) II or III of chronic heart failure (CHF) by discriminant analysis with inflammatory markers.

Materials and methods. The study included CHF patients (n = 61) of both sexes. According to symptom severity, they were assigned to FC II (n = 20) and III (n = 41). In addition to conventional clinical and biochemical parameters to evaluate a patient’s state, parameters characterizing inflammation (IL-6, soluble IL-6 receptor, sgp130) were used. Statistically significant differences were revealed with the use of Mann–Whitney U test, Student’s t-test, Pearson’s χ² test and Fisher’s exact test. Discriminant analysis was employed to formulate the decision rule. Receiver Operating Characteristic (ROC) analysis was used to evaluate the quality of the developed diagnostic test. The results were considered statistically significant at p < 0.05.

Results. Discriminant analysis included significantly different variables (age, brain natriuretic peptide, sgp130, CHF etiology, ischemic heart disease) and additional clinically important variables (diastolic and systolic arterial blood pressure (BP), IL-6). The decision rule for assigning patients to different CHF FC was developed. The optimum cut-off value was found with the use of the ROC curve with a sensitivity of 75.6% and specificity of 85%.

Conclusion. The decision rule for assigning CHF patients to FC II or III was developed using discriminant analysis. In addition to conventional clinical parameters, the model included the ones reflecting inflammatory processes (IL-6 and sgp130). ROC analysis revealed high quality of the model.

Key words: chronic heart failure, interleukin 6, sgp130, decision rule, discriminant analysis.

Conflict of interest. The authors declare the absence of obvious or potential conflict of interest related to publication of this manuscript.

Source of funding. The study was carried out as a part of the government contract of National Medical Research Center of Cardiology of the Ministry of Health (R&D No. AAAA-A18-118021690089-5).

Conformity with the principles of ethics. The study was approved by the local Ethics Committee at National Medical Research Center of Cardiology of the Ministry of Health of the Russian Federation (Protocol № 240 of 29.10.2018).

For citation: Samoilova E.V., Fatova M.A., Mindzaev D.R., Zhitareva I.V., Nasonova C.N., Zhirov I.V., Tereschenko C.N., Korotaeva A.A. Decision rule for stratification of patients with chronic heart failure of functional class II and III. Bulletin of Siberian Medicine. 2020; 19 (1): 101–107. https://doi.org: 10.20538/1682-0363-2020-1-101–107.
Решающее правило для стратификации больных хронической сердечной недостаточностью II и III функционального класса

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РЕЗЮМЕ
Цель. Разработать решающее правило отнесения пациентов ко II и III функциональным классам (ФК) хронической сердечной недостаточности (ХСН) методом дискриминантного анализа с включением маркеров воспаления.

Материалы и методы. Исследование включало 61 пациента обоего пола с ХСН. В зависимости от выраженности симптомов ХСН пациенты были отнесены ко II (n = 20) и III (n = 41) ФК. В работе помимо общепринятых клинических и биохимических показателей, оценивающих состояние пациентов, дополнительно исследовались параметры, отражающие течение воспалительного процесса (IL-6, растворимый рецептор IL-6, sgp130). Для выявления статистически значимо различающихся переменных в группах использовали U-критерий Манна – Уитни, t-критерий Стьюдента, χ² Пирсона, точный критерий Фишера. Для построения решающего правила применялся метод дискриминантного анализа. Для оценки качества разработанного диагностического теста использовали ROC-анализ. Статistically значимыми считались результаты при уровне значимости 𝑝 < 0,05.

Результаты. В дискриминантный анализ были включены выявленные при сравнении групп II и III ФК ХСН значимо различающиеся переменные – возраст, мозговой натрийуретический пептид, sgp130, этиология ХСН, ишемическая болезнь сердца, а также дополнительные переменные, имеющие существенное значение в клинике (артериальное давление (АД) систолическое, АД диастолическое, IL-6). На основании данных показателей было построено решающее правило для отнесения пациентов к различным функциональным классам ХСН. При оценке качества полученного решающего правила было найдено оптимальное значение точки отсечения с использованием ROC-кривой, которой соответствует чувствительность – 75,6%, специфичность – 85%.

Заключение. С помощью метода дискриминантного анализа разработано решающее правило разделения больных на II и III ФК ХСН. Наряду с общепринятыми клиническими показателями ХСН в модель включены новые параметры, отражающие степень воспалительного процесса (IL-6 и sgp130). ROC-анализ выявил очень хорошее качество полученной модели.

Ключевые слова: хроническая сердечная недостаточность, интерлейкин 6, sgp130, решающее правило, дискриминантный анализ.

Конфликт интересов. Авторы декларируют отсутствие явных и потенциальных конфликтов интересов, связанных с публикацией настоящей статьи.

Источник финансирования. Работа выполнена в рамках субсидии, выделенной на реализацию Государственного задания, НИОКР AAAA-A18-118021690089-5.

Соответствие принципам этики. Исследование одобрено независимым этическим комитетом ФГБУ «НМИЦ кардиологии» Минздрава России (протокол № 240 от 29.10.2018).

Для цитирования: Самойлова Е.В., Фатова М.А., Миндзаев Д.Р., Житарева И.В., Насонова С.Н., Жиров И.В., Терещенко С.Н., Коротаева А.А. Решающее правило для стратификации больных хронической сердечной недостаточностью II и III функционального класса. Бюллетень сибирской медицины. 2020; 19 (1): 101–107. https://doi.org/10.20538/1682-0363-2020-1-101–107.

Bulletin of Siberian Medicine. 2020; 19 (1): 101–107.
INTRODUCTION

Chronic heart failure (CHF) remains a current problem of cardiology, being an unfavorable, progressing cardiovascular disease all over the world. Epidemiological studies demonstrate a constant increase in CHF incidence in Western Europe and the USA, particularly in the aging population [1–3]. Epidemiological studies performed in the Russian Federation indicate a similar increase in CHF incidence [4]. The number of patients with more severe forms of the disease increases considerably. Therefore, identification of the early stages of CHF is an important strategy in the treatment of patients with CHF. Effectiveness of treatment is strongly associated with the choice of a therapeutic scheme based on evaluation of the disease symptoms. Severity of CHF symptoms is characterized according to NYHA functional classification [1]. However, evaluation of the CHF severity and identifying patients' functional class often cause difficulties in medical practice. Decision rules have been widely used for assigning patients to the appropriate functional class. Greater number of clinical parameters reflecting patient’s condition allows for better stratification and minimizes errors in classification according to the functional class (FC). In addition to clinical parameters, biochemical markers that reflect organic damage to the heart and hemodynamic load increase have been used in CHF diagnostics [5]. However, the indicators of inflammatory processes that intensify with CHF progression have not received sufficient attention.

The aim of the study was to develop the decision rule that includes inflammatory markers (IL-6 and sgp130) for assigning CHF patients to FC II or III.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Parameters characterizing the state of 61 patients aged 31–83 years suffering from functional class II–III chronic heart failure [New York Heart Association (NYHA)] with decreased left ventricular ejection fraction are given in Table 1.

| Table 1 | Baseline characteristics of patients |
|---------|------------------------------------|
| Parameter | II FC (n = 20) | III FC (n = 41) | p     |
| Age, y/o, Me (Q1–Q3) | 50.5 (42.75–58.25) | 62 (53–67) | 0.003 |
| Men / Women, abs. (%) | 19/1 (95/5) | 35/6 (85/15) | 0.409 |
| Etiology of CHF (IHD, HT, DCM), abs. (%) | 5/6/9 (25/30/45) | 24/13/4 (58.5/31.7/9.8) | 0.004 |
| LVEF, (%), Me (Q1–Q3) | 27.5 (23–31.75) | 30 (23.5–35) | 0.595 |
| BP systolic, mmHg, Me (Q1–Q3) | 120 (105.25–140) | 120 (110–140) | 0.871 |
| BP diastolic, mmHg, Me (Q1–Q3) | 80 (70–88.75) | 80 (70–85) | 0.374 |
| Heart rate, beats / min, Me (Q1–Q3) | 70 (68.50–92.75) | 85 (70–96) | 0.725 |
| Degree of mitral regurgitation (1, 2, 3), abs. (%) | 4/11/5 (20/55/25) | 5/20/16 (12.2/48.8/39) | 0.490 |
| Congestion Ro, abs. (%) | 15 (75) | 36 (87.8) | 0.205 |
| Hypertension, abs. (%) | 12 (60) | 34 (83) | 0.064 |
| IHD, abs. (%) | 5 (25) | 25 (61) | 0.008 |
| NT-proBNP (pg/ml), Me (Q1–Q3) | 395.5 (224.5–825) | 793 (408.5–1746.5) | 0.009 |
| Creatinine (μmol/l), Me (Q1–Q3) | 88 (74–130) | 101 (72.3–112.25) | 0.432 |
| IL-6, pg/ml, Me (Q1–Q3) | 3.48 (2.34–6.66) | 3.95 (2.57–8.35) | 0.249 |
| pIL-6P, pg/ml, Me (Q1–Q3) | 36.25 (32.46–3.26) | 40.48 (35.22–48.77) | 0.167 |
| Sgp130, pg/ml, Me (Q1–Q3) | 333 (309.5–359.5) | 415 (355–469) | 0.001 |

Note. Data are presented as median (25th percentile–75th percentile) or absolute number (%). LVEF – left ventricular ejection fraction; Congestion Ro – congestion in the lungs according to X-ray; IHD – ischemic heart disease; HT – hypertension; DCM – dilated cardiomyopathy; NT-proBNP – N-terminal pro-brain natriuretic peptide; IL-6 – Interleukin 6; sIL-6R – soluble Interleukin-6 receptor.

Diagnostics and FC assignment were performed according to up-to-date national recommendations. In order to meet the research purpose, CHF etiology was defined as a major disease that, according to the researchers’ opinion and clinical examination, was a main cause
of the heart failure symptom complex. Patients with an acute cardiovascular event within preceding 30-day period, acute and chronic inflammatory diseases requiring specific anti-inflammatory therapy and potentially influencing test parameters, pronounced renal and/or hepatic functional disorders, malignant tumors, or with other chronic diseases of internal organs, or with left ventricular outflow tract obstruction were excluded from the study. All patients who participated in the study signed an informed consent.

Statistical analysis was done with IBMSPSS Statistics 23. Statistically significant differences between quantitative variables for two independent samples with distribution other than normal were revealed with Mann–Whitney U-test. Pearson's $\chi^2$ test and Fischer's exact tests were used to reveal statistically significant differences between qualitative variables in two groups. Discriminant analysis was employed to establish the decision rule for assigning patients to the appropriate FC. The quality of diagnostic test was evaluated by ROC analysis. The results were regarded as statistically significant at $p < 0.05$.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

In order to develop the decision rule, test variables were compared and the following statistically significant variables in patients with CHF of FC II and III were revealed: age, N-terminal pro-brain natriuretic peptide (NT-proBNP), sgp130, etiology of CHF and IHD (Table 1). Clinically important parameters (systolic and diastolic BP, IL-6) were also included in the discriminant analysis.

CHF classification according to FC (NYHA) is based on the severity of clinical manifestations. BP parameters are used in clinical practice to choose pharmacotherapy and control its effectiveness. In addition, BP deviations represent the risk of decompensation of a patient’s condition [5]. Therefore, such variables as diastolic and systolic BP were included in the discriminant analysis.

IL-6 is another variable that was selected as a clinically important one. IL-6 is currently regarded as a major cytokine participating in immune response and inflammatory reaction. High level of IL-6 correlates with more severe CHF and high mortality [6–9]. Pro-inflammatory effects of IL-6 are realized via trans-signaling pathway which is inhibited by plasma sgp130. It was reported that increase and decrease in sgp130 are related to the severity of inflammation [10–12]. This parameter was also included in the development of the decision rule.

The following linear discriminant functions (LDF) were obtained:

$$Z_1 = 0.907X_1 + 27.645X_2 + 33.546X_3 - 0.001X_4 + 0.102X_5 + 0.285X_6 + 0.464X_7 + 0.002X_8 - 115.749$$

for patients with FC II CHF, where $X_1$ – age; $X_2$ – CHF etiology; $X_3$ – IHD; $X_4$ – NT-proBNP; $X_5$ – sgp130; $X_6$ – systolic BP; $X_7$ – diastolic BP; $X_8$ – IL-6. $Z_1$ is the first discriminant function and $Z_2$ is the second discriminant function.

The quality of the discriminant function was assessed with the help of the learning sample and cross-validation (Tables 2, 3). The first method is based on inclusion of each patient from the learning sample in the decision rule. Percentages of correct and incorrect classifications were calculated. Cross-validation implies that each patient is alternately excluded from the sample. An excluded patient was classified with the help of the obtained decision rule and returned to the learning sample.

Table 2

| Coefficients of linear discriminant functions (LDF) for patients with CHF of FC II and III |
|-----------------------------|-----------------------------|-----------------------------|
| Variable                   | Explanation                 | FC                          |
| Used in LDF                |                             | II                          |
|                             |                             | III                         |
| X₁                          | Age                         | 0.828                       |
|                             |                              | 0.907                       |
| X₂                          | Etiology of CHF             | 28.609                      |
|                             |                              | 27.645                      |
| X₃                          | IHD                         | 33.643                      |
|                             |                              | 33.546                      |
| X₄                          | NT-proBNP                   | 0.001                       |
|                             |                              | 0.001                       |
| X₅                          | sgp130                      | 0.088                       |
|                             |                              | 0.102                       |
| X₆                          | BP systolic                 | 0.245                       |
|                             |                              | 0.285                       |
| X₇                          | BP diastolic                | 0.558                       |
|                             |                              | 0.464                       |
When employing cross-validation, sensitivity was $S_e = (30/(30+11))*100% = 73.2\%$ and specificity was $S_p = (14/(14+6))*100% = 70\%$.

The ROC-curve reflecting the correlation between correct and incorrect assignments (Fig.1) was constructed to evaluate the quality of the model [13]. A new variable $Z = Z_1 - Z_2$ was created for this purpose.

An ideal model is a model with 100% sensitivity and specificity. Since this is difficult to achieve in reality, a cut-off value is used, i.e., the most adequate point to cut off one diagnosed group from the other.

The maximum sensitivity and specificity were chosen to determine the cut-off point. Cut-off = 0.07438 corresponds to sensitivity 0.756 (75.6%) and specificity 0.85 (85%). Thus, if $Z \geq 0.07438$, the patient should be assigned to FC III, if $Z < 0.07438$, the patient is assigned FC II.

The decision rule was based on the following principle: predictor variables of a patient were inserted into functions $Z_1$ and $Z_2$ (1.1 and 1.2). The calculated $Z_1$ and $Z_2$ values were compared and if $Z_1 \geq Z_2$, the patient was assigned to FC III, if $Z_1 < Z_2$, the patient was assigned to FC II.

It should be noted that sensitivity and specificity were used to evaluate reliability of the diagnostic test.

Since this study had no objective of classifying patients as sick or healthy, patients with CHF FC III were regarded as sick and those with FC II as healthy. Thus, when using the learning sample, sensitivity of the given model was $Se = (32/(32+9))*100% = 78\%$ and specificity $Sp = (15/(15+5))*100% = 75\%$. When employing cross-validation, sensitivity was $Se = (30/(30+11))*100% = 73.2\%$ ad specificity was $Sp = (14/(14+6))*100% = 70\%$.

The ROC-curve reflecting the correlation between correct and incorrect assignments (Fig.1) was constructed to evaluate the quality of the model [13]. A new variable $Z = Z_1 - Z_2$ was created for this purpose.

Table 3: Classification results for the learning sample method

| Parameter | FC | Predicted Group Membership | Total |
|-----------|----|-----------------------------|-------|
|           | II | III                         |       |
| Count     | 15 | 5                           | 20    |
| Count, %  | 75.0 | 25.0                       | 100   |

Note. 77% of original grouped cases were classified correctly; FC – functional class.

Table 4: Cross-validated classification results

| Parameter | FC | Predicted Group Membership | Total |
|-----------|----|-----------------------------|-------|
|           | II | III                         |       |
| Count     | 14 | 6                           | 20    |
| Count, %  | 70.0 | 30.0                       | 100   |

Note. 72.1% of cross-validated grouped cases were classified correctly; FC – functional class.
CONCLUSION

A comparison of CHF patients of FC II and III was performed so as to develop the decision rule for the assignment of patients to the appropriate FC. The following statistically significant variables were revealed: age, NT-proBNP, sgp130, CHF etiology and IHD. In addition to these parameters, clinically important parameters (systolic and diastolic BP, IL-6) were included in the decision rule. The obtained results allowed for the development of the decision rule for assigning CHF patients to FC II or III. Evaluation of the model by the square under the ROC-curve demonstrated excellent quality (0.8–0.9) of the model. Additional parameters reflecting severity of the inflammatory process (IL-6 and agp130) were used along with conventional clinical parameters.

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Authors contribution

Samoilova E.V. – conception and design, analysis and interpretation of data, critical revision for important intellectual content. Fatova M.A. – analysis and interpretation of data, statistical data processing, graphical representation of data. Mindzaev D.R. – selection and examination of patients, database creation, statistical data processing. Zhitareva I.V. – conception and design, critical revision for important intellectual content. Nasonova S.N. – selection and examination of patients, treatment of patients. Zhirov I.V. – substantiation of the manuscript, critical revision for important intellectual content. Tereshchenko S.N. – substantiation of the manuscript, critical revision for important intellectual content. Korotaeva A.A. – substantiation of the manuscript, critical revision for important intellectual content.

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Received  31.07.2019
Accepted  25.12.2019