Can asthma incidence be reduced by attention to sleep disorders?

BY WALTER ALEXANDER

Early detection and management of sleep disorders could reduce asthma incidence, according to a large-scale prospective study that included nearly half a million participants. The study was published in BMJ Open Respiratory Research (2023. doi: 10.1136/bmjresp-2022-001535).

The population-attributable risk analysis indicated that 19% of asthma cases could be prevented through improving sleep traits. The investigators took into consideration polygenic risk scores (PRSs) for asthma and comprehensive sleep scores encompassing five sleep traits.

Sleep quality is generally recognized as a non-genetic driver of asthma. Poor sleep quality and obstructive sleep apnea have been reported particularly among those with severe disease. In addition, asthma is known to adversely affect sleep duration, sleep quality, napping, and daytime sleepiness.

The researchers suggest that the relationship between sleep and asthma is bidirectional, given that sleep disorders (sleep of short duration, insomnia, evening chronotype [“night owl”], snoring, excessive daytime sleepiness) are associated with specific chronic inflammatory reactions. It has remained unclear, however, whether poor sleep reflects a higher risk of early asthma progression.

SBRT seen as alternative to surgery for some in early-stage NSCLC

BY MEGAN BROOKS

Stereotactic body radiation therapy (SBRT) and surgery offer nearly equal overall survival rates for patients with stage I and II non–small cell lung cancer (NSCLC), according to population-based data from a German cancer registry.

“From a public health perspective, SBRT is a good therapeutic option in terms of survival, especially for elderly and inoperable patients,” noted the study authors, led by Jörg Andreas Müller, MD, department of radiation oncology, University Hospital of Halle, Germany.

The analysis was published online in the journal Strahlentherapie Und Onkologie (2023 Mar 13. doi: 10.1007/s00066-023-02055-z).

Surgery remains the standard of care for early stage NSCLC. However, many patients are not eligible for surgery because of the tumor’s location, age, frailty, or comorbidities.

Before the introduction of SBRT, conventional
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LUNG CANCER

New insight into timing of combination therapy

BY RANDY DOTINGA
MDEdge News

Radiotherapy followed by immunotherapy within 1-12 months — but not sooner or later — may boost progression-free survival in patients with metastatic non–small cell lung cancer, according to a new study. However, patients still fared poorly on average since overall survival remained low and didn't change significantly.

While not conclusive, the new research — released at European Lung Cancer Congress 2023 — offers early insight into the best timing for the experimental combination treatment, study coauthor Yanyan Lou, MD, PhD, an oncologist at Mayo Clinic in Jacksonville, Fla., said in an interview.

The wide availability of radiation therapy could also allow the therapy to be administered even in regions with poor access to sophisticated medical care, she said. "Radiation is a very feasible approach that pretty much everybody in your community can get."

Radiotherapy is typically not added to immunotherapy in patients with non–small cell lung cancer. But "there has been recent interest in the combination: Would tumor necrosis from radiation enhance the immunogenicity of the tumor and thus combination" continued on following page

SBRT // continued from page 1

radiation therapy was the only reasonable option for inoperable patients, with study data showing only a small survival improvement in treated vs. untreated patients.

High-precision, image-guided SBRT offers better tumor control with limited toxicity. And while many radiation oncology centers in Germany adopted SBRT as an alternative treatment for surgery after 2000, few population-based studies evaluating SBRT's impact on overall survival exist.

Using the German clinical cancer registry of Berlin-Brandenburg, Dr. Müller and colleagues assessed SBRT as an alternative to surgery in 558 patients with stage I and II NSCLC, diagnosed between 2000 and 2015.

More patients received surgery than SBRT (74% vs. 26%). Those who received SBRT were younger than those in the surgery group and had better Karnofsky performance status.

Among patients in the SBRT group, median survival was 19 months overall and 27 months in patients over age 75. In the surgery group, median survival was 22 months overall and 24 months in those over 75.

In a univariate survival model of a propensity-matched sample of 292 patients — half of whom received SBRT — survival rates were similar among those who underwent SBRT versus surgery (hazard ratio [HR], 1.2; P = .7).

Survival was also similar in the two treatment groups in a T1 substudy (HR, 1.12; P = .7) as well as in patients over age 75 (HR, 0.86; P = .5).

Better performance status scores were associated with improved survival, and higher histological grades and TNM (tumor/nodes/metastases) stages were linked to higher mortality risk. The availability of histological data did not have a significant impact on survival outcomes.

Overall, the findings suggest that SBRT and surgery offer comparable survival outcomes in early-stage NSCLC and "the availability of histological data might not be decisive for treatment planning," Dr. Müller and colleagues said.

Drew Moghanaki, MD, chief of the thoracic oncology service at UCLA Health Jonsson Comprehensive Cancer Center, Los Angeles, highlighted the findings on Twitter.

A thoracic surgeon from Germany responded with several concerns about the study, including the use of statistics with univariate modeling and undiagnosed lymph node (N) status.

Dr. Moghanaki replied that these "concerns summarize how we used to think. It increasingly seems they aren't as important as our teachers once thought they were. As we move into the future we need to reassess the data that supported these recommendations as they seem more academic than patient centered."

The study authors reported no specific funding, and no relevant financial relationships.
PULMONARY FIBROSIS

Genetic analysis indicates a causal link between GERD and IPF

BY TERRY L. KAMPS, PHD

FROM CHEST   Relationships between 22 unique comorbidities and idiopathic pulmonary fibrosis (IPF) were assessed by a bidirectional Mendelian randomization (MR) approach in a retrospective study. Three of the comorbidities that were examined appeared causally associated with an increased risk of IPF.

Researchers used summary statistics of large-scale genomewide association studies (GWAS) obtained from the IPF Genetics Consortium. For replication, they used data from the Global Biobank Meta-Analysis Initiative (GBMI).

Pulmonary or extrapulmonary illnesses are regularly observed to be comorbidities associated with IPF. Although randomized controlled trials can provide strong deductive evidence of causal relationships between diseases, they are also often subject to inherent practical and ethical limitations. MR is an alternative approach that exploits genetic variants of genes with known function as a means to infer a causal effect of a modifiable exposure on disease and minimizes possible confounding issues from unrelated environmental factors and reverse causation. Bidirectional MR extends the exposure-outcome association analysis of MR to both directions, producing a higher level of evidence for causality, Jiahao Zhu, of the Department of Epidemiology and Health Statistics, Hangzhou, China, and colleagues wrote.

In a study published in the journal Chest (2023 Mar 2. doi: 10.1016/j.chest.2023.02.038), the researchers reported on direction and causal associations between IPF and comorbidities, as determined by bidirectional MR analysis of GWAS summary statistics from five studies included in the IPF Genetics Consortium (4,125 patients and 20,464 control participants). For replication, they extracted IPF GWAS summary statistics from the nine biobanks from the GBMI (6,257 patients and 947,616 control participants). All individuals were of European ancestry.

The 22 comorbidities examined for a relationship to IPF were identified through a combination of a PubMed search limited to English-language articles concerning IPF as either an exposure or an outcome and having an available full GWAS summary statistic. The number of patients in these studies ranged from 3,203 for osteoporosis to a maximum of 246,363 for major depressive disorder.

To estimate causal relationships, single-nucleotide polymorphism selection for IPF and each comorbidity genetic instrument were based on a genomewide significance value and were clumped by linkage disequilibrium. Evidence from analysis associating each comorbidity with IPF was categorized as either convincing, suggestive, or weak.

Follow-up studies examined the causal effects of measured lung and thyroid variables on IPF and IPF effects on blood pressure variables.

Convincing evidence

The bidirectional MR and follow-up analysis revealed “convincing evidence” of causal relationships between IPF and 2 of the evaluated 22 comorbidities. A higher risk of IPF was associated with gastroesophageal reflux disease (GERD).

Importantly, a multivariable MR analysis conditionning for smoking continued to show the causal linkage between GERD and a higher risk of IPF. In contrast, the genetic liability of COPD appeared to confer a protective role, as indicated by an associated decrease in risk for IPF. The researchers suggest that this negative relationship may be caused by their distinct genetic architecture.

Suggestive evidence

“Suggestive evidence” of underlying relationships between IPF and lung cancer or blood pressure phenotype comorbidities was also found with this study. The MR results give support to existing evidence that IPF has a causal effect for a higher lung cancer risk. In contrast, IPF appeared to have a protective effect on hypertension and BP phenotypes. This contrasted with venous thromboembolism (VTE). Bidirectional MR analysis suggested that VTE was more likely to be a cause rather than a consequence of IPF. Evidence suggests that genetic liability to hypothyroidism could lead to IPF was also found (International IPF Genetics Consortium analysis: P < 0.040; and GBMI analysis: P < 0.002).

The primary strength of the study was the ability of MR design to enhance causal inference, particularly when large cohorts for prospective investigations would be inherently difficult to obtain. Several noted limitations include the fact that causal estimates may not be well matched to observational or interventional studies and there was a low number of single-nucleotide polymorphisms available as genetic instruments for some diseases. In addition, it is unknown whether the results are applicable to ethnicities other than those of European ancestry.

The authors disclosed no relevant financial relationships.

COMBINATION continued from previous page

enhance the effect of immunotherapy?” oncologist Toby Campbell, MD, of University of Wisconsin–Madison, said in an interview.

Research has indeed suggested that the treatments may have a synergistic effect, he said, and it’s clear that “strategies to try and increase immunogenicity are an important area to investigate.”

But he cautioned that “we have a long way to go to understanding how immunogenicity works and how the gut microbiome, tumor, immunotherapy, and the immune system interact with one another.”

For the new study, researchers retrospectively analyzed case of 225 patients with metastatic non–small cell lung cancer (male = 56%, median age = 68, 79% adenocarcinoma) who were treated with immunotherapy at Mayo Clinic–Jacksonville from 2011 to 2022. The study excluded those who received targeted therapy or prior concurrent chemoradiotherapy and durvalumab.

The most common metastases were bone and central nervous system types (41% and 25%, respectively). Fifty-six percent of patients received radiotherapy before or during immunotherapy. Another 27% never received radiotherapy, and 17% received it after immunotherapy was discontinued.

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Common types of immunotherapy included pembrolizumab (78%), nivolumab (14%), and atezolizumab (12%).

Overall, the researchers found no statistically significant differences in various outcomes between patients who received radiotherapy before or during immunotherapy compared with those who didn’t get radiotherapy (progression-free survival: 5.9 vs. 5.5 months, P = .66; overall survival: 16.9 vs. 13.1 months, P = .84; immune-related adverse events: 26.2% vs. 34.4%, P = .24).

However, the researchers found that progression-free survival was significantly higher in one group: those who received radiotherapy 1-12 months before immunotherapy vs. those who received it less than 1 month before (12.6 vs. 4.2 months, hazard ratio [HR], 0.46; 95% confidence interval [CI] 0.26-0.83; P = .005) and those who never received radiotherapy (12.6 vs. 5.5 months, HR, 0.56; 95% CI, 0.36-0.89; P = .0197).

There wasn’t a statistically significant difference in overall survival.

The small number of subjects and the variation in treatment protocols may have prevented the study from revealing a survival benefit, Dr. Lou said.

As for adverse effects, she said a preliminary analysis didn’t turn up any.

It’s not clear why a 1- to 12-month gap between radiotherapy and immunotherapy may be most effective, she said. Moving forward, “we need validate this in a large cohort,” she noted.

In regard to cost, immunotherapy is notoriously expensive. Pembrolizumab, for example, has a list price of $10,897 per 200-mg dose given every 3 weeks, and patients may take the drug for a year or two.

Dr. Campbell, who didn’t take part in the new study, said it suggests that research into radiation-immunotherapy combination treatment may be worthwhile.

No funding was reported. The study authors and Dr. Campbell reported no disclosures.
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Should you recommend e-cigs to help patients quit?

BY KERRIE RUSHTON

In 2014, after smoking cigarettes for 40 years, Kati Markowitz decided to switch to vaping. She had heard the newer electronic cigarettes might be less harmful. And, at the time, she said, she wasn’t aware of other options to try to quit smoking.

For 7 years, she vaped every day. Then Ms. Markowitz received news she’d hoped never to hear: She had lung cancer. A nodule detected in a CT scan had grown. She was scheduled for treatment – the removal of an entire lobe from her right lung. But first, she said, her surgeon told her she had to quit vaping, which reduces the risk for postoperative complications and enables a healthy recovery.

Ms. Markowitz had thought switching to vaping would be less harmful than smoking cigarettes. Now, she no longer believes that’s true.

“Did I fool myself by hoping to get lucky and not have any bad repercussions? Yes, I did,” Ms. Markowitz said, adding that she wonders if vaping contributed to her lung cancer or if she’ll experience other negative health effects in the future.

Researchers are divided on if e-cigarettes are as effective in smoking cessation as other nicotine replacement therapies like gums and lozenges. They also say more research is needed on the long-term health impacts of vaping to ultimately determine if vapes are a safe replacement for cigarettes.

“There is scientific research to support vaping as a cessation tool, but we wouldn’t use it as a first line of defense because we still need longitudinal studies to understand the long-term risk of e-cigarettes,” said Monica Hanna, MPH, assistant director of the Nicotine and Tobacco Recovery Program at RWJ Barnabas Health’s Institute for Prevention and Recovery, Eatontown, N.J. “We also need research to understand exactly how we could use e-cigarettes as a cessation device.”

Vaping to quit

The first prototypes of e-cigarettes were developed in the 1930s, although what are now known as vapes weren’t sold by manufacturers until the 2000s in the United States, following an invention by a former health official in China. The vape was touted by both researchers and manufacturers over the years of development as a way to quit smoking cigarettes.

“The Consumer Advocates for Smoke-Free Alternatives Association, a nonprofit group that supports vaping and accepts donations from the e-cigarette industry, has compiled more than 13,000 testimonials from people who say vaping helped them give up smoking. Studies show mixed results that using vapes can help traditional smokers quit.”

A November 2022 Cochrane review showed a “high certainty of evidence that people are more likely to stop smoking traditional cigarettes for at least 6 months using e-cigarettes, or ‘vapes,’ than using nicotine replacement therapies, such as patches and gums.”

The meta-analysis examined 78 studies with more than 22,000 participants. And a 2019 study with 886 participants, published in the New England Journal of Medicine (2019 Feb 14. doi: 10.1056/NEJMoa1808779), found smokers who tried vaping to quit were twice as likely after a year to have stopped smoking cigarettes than those who used nicotine replacement therapy.

“In terms of the global research, it’s pretty clear that vaping can help smokers quit,” said Peter Shields, MD, a professor in the department of internal medicine at The Ohio State University College of Medicine, Columbus, who specializes in the treatment of lung cancer. But a 2013 study published in the Lancet (doi: 10.1016/S0140-6736(13)61842-5), and another from the Lancet in 2019 (doi: 10.1016/S2213-2600(19)30269-3), found only a modest improvement in cessation outcomes when participants used e-cigarettes paired with patches, compared with patches alone.

“For a disruptive technology that was supposed to end combustible tobacco use, there seems very little large-scale disruption,” said Thomas Eissenberg, PhD, co-director of Virginia Commonwealth University’s Center for the Study of Tobacco Products, Richmond.

Michael Joseph Blaha, MD, MPH, director of clinical research at the Johns Hopkins Ciccarone Center for the Prevention of Cardiovascular Disease, Baltimore, pointed to research that shows a portion of people who start vaping to quit smoking end up using both products – or become so-called “dual” users.

“I do think there is fairly high-quality evidence that vaping can lead to more cessation, but at the tradeoff of more long-term dual users and more overall nicotine addiction,” Dr. Blaha said. “Vaping remains a third-line clinical tool after nicotine replacement therapy and FDA-approved cessation medications.”

The U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) has not approved any e-cigarette or vaping device for smoking cessation, like it has for patches and gums, which means manufacturers cannot market their products as helping tobacco smokers quit.

“There is potential for vaping as a cessation device, but the evidence so far is too small to say for sure that vaping is a more effective tool than others for combustible tobacco cessation,” Ms. Hanna, the tobacco cessation specialist, said.

Reducing harm?

Vapes have been both praised as a boon to individual and public health since cigarette smoking is the leading cause of preventable disease and disability in the United States, responsible for more than 480,000 deaths per year in the U.S., according to the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC).

Quitting smoking lowers the risk of developing various cancers, heart disease, stroke, and other serious diseases. The aim of nicotine replacement therapy is to help smokers quit by gradually providing the body with smaller doses of nicotine over time, without exposing the body to toxic chemicals found in cigarettes.

“No one should say that e-cigarettes are safe, but compared to cigarettes, the data is consistent: They are not as harmful, and when a smoker switches, it’s better for them,” said Dr. Shields. “Like with other nicotine replacement therapies, if there is a risk that someone stops vaping and returns to smoking, I would rather have them as long-term vapers since it is generally considered to be less harmful than combustible tobacco.”

The FDA has allowed a handful of companies to market their electronic nicotine delivery systems as safer than traditional cigarettes by gaining approval through the Premarket Tobacco Product Applications (PMTA) process. In 2021, the agency announced its first PMTA authorization of an electronic cigarette to R.J. Reynolds for three of its tobacco-flavored vaping products. Regulators approved more products from three additional companies in 2022.

But the FDA has also denied others, including two products in 2023 from R.J. Reynolds, stating that, “the applications lacked sufficient evidence to demonstrate that permitting the marketing of the products would be appropriate for the protection of the public health.”

Questions remain among some researchers on the effects of vaping if used long term. Data on the health effects of vapes are just beginning to emerge and are mainly from studies of animals or cells. Measuring health effects among vape users will entail decades more of study, since
Americans only gained access to the products in the 2000s.

Dr. Eissenberg said vaping likely does not cause the same diseases as cigarette smoking, but that does not mean they are not harmful. Ingredients found in e-cigarettes, such as heated propylene glycol, vegetable glycerin, and flavors, have only been used as food ingredients. The potential diseases caused by vapes are still unknown, because inhaling these heated ingredients is new. He also said he had "no issue" with an adult smoker vaping to help them quit smoking – as long they do so for a short period.

"I am very concerned that long-term use in adults could lead to considerable disease and death," Dr. Eissenberg said. "Simply put, the human lung evolved for one purpose: gas exchange of oxygen in, carbon dioxide out. Anything else that enters the lung is a challenge to the organ."

But Kenneth Warner, PhD, dean emeritus at the University of Michigan School of Public Health, Ann Arbor, said breaking the addiction to traditional cigarettes could reduce high rates of lung cancer in lower-income communities where rates of smoking are comparatively high.

About three times as many Americans smoked (12.6%) than vaped (4.7%) in 2021, but those who live in households with lower incomes are more likely to smoke. According to the CDC, use of tobacco is higher among adults who were uninsured (27.3%) or who had Medicaid coverage (28.6%) than among those with private insurance (16.4%). People with annual family incomes of less than $12,500 also are more likely to be diagnosed with lung cancer than those with family incomes of $50,000 or more. Public health researchers have attributed those disparities in part to higher rates of smoking in lower-income households.

Dr. Warner said many lower-income and other Americans may never quit smoking cigarettes because they believe making the switch to e-cigarettes will not benefit their health. A 2022 study, published in the American Journal of Preventive Medicine (2022. doi: 10.1016/j.amepre.2022.03.019), found that the percent of Americans who thought vaping was more harmful than smoking quadrupled between 2018 and 2020, from 6.8% to 28.3%. A third of respondents thought vaping was as harmful as smoking.

"We've convinced a large percentage of the American public that vaping is as harmful as smoking when it could be helping people quit smoking," Dr. Warner said. "People are dying right now."

Ms. Markowitz did quit smoking by taking up vaping. But now she questions if her lung cancer prognosis would have been delayed, or even avoided, if she'd tried a traditional method like a lozenge or gum instead. She vaped once an hour for most of her 7 years of using the devices.

"For people who are trying to stop smoking, I would recommend something like the patch instead," Ms. Markowitz said.

The Consumer Advocates for Smoke-Free Alternatives receives funding from the vaping industry. Dr. Blaha, Dr. Eissenberg, Ms. Hanna, Dr. Shields, and Dr. Warner reported no funding from the tobacco or e-cigarette industry. Dr. Blaha and Dr. Warner receive tobacco-related funding from the FDA. Dr. Warner is a member of the FDA's Tobacco Products Scientific Advisory Committee.
An antiviral therapy in early development has the potential to prevent COVID-19 infections when given as a nasal spray as little as 4 hours before exposure. It also appears to work as a treatment if used within 4 hours after infection inside the nose, new research reveals.

Known as TriSb92 (brand name Covidin, from drugmaker Pandemblock Oy in Finland), the viral inhibitor also appears effective against all coronavirus variants of concern, neutralizing even the Omicron variants BA.5, XBB, and BQ.1.1 in laboratory and mice studies.

Unlike a COVID vaccine that boosts a person’s immune system as protection, the antiviral nasal spray works more directly by blocking the virus, acting as a “biological mask in the nasal cavity,” according to the biotechnology company set up to develop the treatment.

The product targets a stable site on the spike protein of the virus that is not known to mutate. This same site is shared among many variants of the COVID virus, so it could be effective against future variants as well, researchers noted.

“In animal models, by directly inactivating the virus, TriSb92 offers immediate and robust protection” against coronavirus infection and severe COVID, said Anna R. Mäkelä, PhD, lead author of the study and a senior scientist in the department of virology at the University of Helsinki.

The study was published online March 24 in Nature Communications (2023. doi: 10.1038/s41467-023-37290-6).

A potential first line of defense

Even in cases where the antiviral does not prevent coronavirus infection, the treatment could slow infection. This could happen by limiting how much virus could replicate early in the skin inside the nose and nasopharynx (the upper part of the throat), said Dr. Mäkelä, who is also CEO of Pandemblock Oy, the company set up to develop the product.

“TriSb92 could effectively tip the balance in favor of the [the person] and thereby help to reduce the risk of severe COVID-19 disease,” she said. The antiviral also could offer an alternative to people who cannot or do not respond to a vaccine.

“Many elderly people as well as individuals who are immunodeficient for various reasons do not respond to vaccines and are in the need of other protective measures,” said Kalle Saksela, MD, PhD, senior author of the study and a virologist at the University of Helsinki.

Multiple doses needed?

TriSb92 is “one of multiple nasal spray approaches but unlikely to be as durable as effective nasal vaccines,” said Eric Topol, MD, a professor of molecular medicine and executive vice president of Scripps Research in La Jolla, Calif. Dr. Topol is also editor-in-chief of Medscape, WebMD’s sister site for medical professionals.

“The sprays generally require multiple doses per day, whereas a single dose of a nasal vaccine may protect for months,” he said.

“Both have the allure of being variant-proof,” Dr. Topol added.

Thinking small

Many laboratories are shifting from treatments using monoclonal antibodies to treatments using smaller antibody fragments called “nanobodies” because they are more cost-effective and are able to last longer in storage, Dr. Mäkelä and colleagues noted.

Several of these nanobodies have shown promise against viruses in cell culture or animal models, including as an intranasal preventive treatment for SARS-CoV-2.

One of these smaller antibodies is being developed from llamas for example; another comes...
High-dose prophylactic anticoagulation benefits patients with COVID-19 pneumonia

BY HEIDI SPLETE
MDedge News

Patients with hypoxemic COVID-19 pneumonia are at increased risk of thrombosis and anticoagulation-related bleeding; therefore, data to identify the lowest effective anticoagulant dose are needed, wrote Vincent Labbé, MD, of Sorbonne University, Paris, and colleagues.

Previous studies of different anticoagulation strategies for noncritically ill and critically ill patients with COVID-19 pneumonia have shown contrasting results, but some institutions recommend a high-dose regimen in the wake of data showing macrovascular thrombosis in patients with COVID-19 who were treated with standard anticoagulation, the authors wrote. However, no previously published studies have compared the effectiveness of the three anticoagulation strategies: high-dose prophylactic anticoagulation (HD-PA), standard-dose prophylactic anticoagulation (SD-PA), and therapeutic anticoagulation (TA), they said.


The patients were randomly assigned to SD-PA (116 patients), HD-PA (111 patients), and TA (112 patients) using low-molecular-weight heparin for 14 days, or until either hospital discharge or weaning from supplemental oxygen for 48 consecutive hours, whichever outcome occurred first. The HD-PA patients received two times the SD-PA dose. The mean age of the patients was 58.3 years, and approximately two-thirds were men.

The primary outcomes were all-cause mortality and time to clinical improvement (defined as the time from randomization to a 2-point improvement on a 7-category respiratory function scale). The secondary outcome was a combination of safety and efficacy at day 28 that included a composite of thrombosis (ischemic stroke, noncerebrovascular arterial thrombosis, deep venous thrombosis, pulmonary artery thrombosis, and central venous catheter–related deep venous thrombosis), major bleeding, or all-cause death.

For the primary outcome, results were similar among the groups; HD-PA had no significant benefit over SD-PA or TA. All-cause death rates for SD-PA, HD-PA, and TA patients were 14%, 12%, and 13%, respectively. The time to clinical improvement for the three groups was approximately 8 days, 9 days, and 8 days, respectively. Results for the primary outcome were consistent across all prespecified subgroups.

However, HD-PA was associated with a significant fourfold reduced risk of de novo thrombosis compared with SD-PA (5.5% vs. 20.2%) with no observed increase in major bleeding. TA was not associated with any significant improvement in primary or secondary outcomes compared with HD-PA or SD-PA. The current study findings of no improvement in survival or disease resolution in patients with a higher anticoagulant dose reflects data from previous studies, the researchers wrote. “Our study results together with those of previous RCTs support the premise that the role of microvascular thrombosis in worsening organ dysfunction may be narrower than estimated,” they said.

The findings were limited by several factors including the open-label design and the relatively small sample size, the lack of data on microvascular (vs. macrovascular) thrombosis at baseline, and the predominance of the Delta variant of COVID-19 among the study participants, which may have contributed to a lower mortality rate. However, given the significant reduction in de novo thrombosis, the results support the routine use of HD-PA in patients with severe hypoxic COVID-19 pneumonia, they concluded.


“This is the first study that specifically compared a standard, prophylactic dose of low-molecular-weight heparin to a ‘high-dose’ prophylactic regimen and to a full therapeutic dose regimen,” Dr. Ortel said in an interview.

“Given the concerns about an increased thrombotic risk with prophylactic dose anticoagulation, and the potential bleeding risk associated with a full therapeutic dose of anticoagulation, this approach enabled the investigators to explore the efficacy and safety of an intermediate dose between these two extremes,” he said.

In the current study, “It was notable that the primary driver of the improved outcomes with the ‘high-dose’ prophylactic regimen reflected the fourfold reduction in macrovascular thrombosis, a finding that was not observed in other studies investigating anticoagulant therapy in hospitalized patients with severe COVID-19,” Dr. Ortel told this news organization. “Much initial concern about progression of disease in patients hospitalized with severe COVID-19 focused on the role of microvascular thrombosis, which appears to be less important in this process, or, alternatively, less responsive to anticoagulant therapy.”

The clinical takeaway from the study, Dr. Ortel said, is the decreased risk for venous thromboembolism with a high-dose prophylactic anticoagulation strategy compared with a standard-dose prophylactic regimen for patients hospitalized with hypoxic COVID-19 pneumonia, “leading to an improved net clinical outcome.”

“Additional research is needed to determine whether a higher dose of prophylactic anticoagulation would be beneficial for patients hospitalized with COVID-19 pneumonia who are not in an intensive care unit setting,” Dr. Ortel said. Studies are also needed to determine whether therapeutic interventions are equally beneficial in patients with variants other than Delta.

The study was supported by LEO Pharma. Dr. Labbé disclosed grants from LEO Pharma. Dr. Becker and Dr. Ortel reported no relevant disclosures.

NASAL continued from previous page

from experiments with yeast to develop synthetic nanobodies; and in a third case, researchers isolated nanobodies from llamas and from mice and showed they could neutralize the SARS-CoV-2 virus. These nanobodies and TriSb92 target a specific part of the coronavirus spike protein called the receptor-binding domain (RBD). The RBD is where the coronavirus attaches to cells in the body. These agents essentially trick the virus by changing the structure of the outside of cells, so they look like a virus has already fused to them. This way, the virus moves on.

Key findings

The researchers compared mice treated with TriSb92 before and after exposure to SARS-CoV-2. When given in advance, none of the treated mice had SARS-CoV-2 RNA in their lungs, while untreated mice in the comparison group had “abundant” levels.

Other evidence of viral infection showed similar differences between treated and untreated mice in the protective lining of cells called the epithelium inside the nose, nasal mucosa, and airways. Similarly, when given 2 or 4 hours after SARS-CoV-2 had already infected the epithelium, TriSb92 was linked to a complete lack of the virus’s RNA in the lungs. It was more effective against the virus, though, when given before infection rather than after, “perhaps due to the initial establishment of the infection,” the researchers noted.

The company led by Dr. Mäkelä is now working to secure funding for clinical trials of TriSb92 in humans.
Dupilumab moves forward as possible treatment

BY HEIDI SPLETE
MDedge News

Dupilumab, a fully human monoclonal antibody, significantly improved quality of life and respiratory symptoms compared with placebo in a phase 3 trial of more than 900 adults with uncontrolled chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD).

In the study, known as the BOREAS trial, dupilumab met its primary and secondary endpoints, with a significant reduction compared with placebo in exacerbations for adults with COPD that was uncontrolled despite use of the maximal standard-of-care inhaled therapy (triple therapy), according to a press release from manufacturers Regeneron and Sanofi.

Dupilumab, which inhibits the signaling of the interleukin-4 (IL-4) and interleukin-13 (IL-13) pathways, is currently approved in multiple countries as a treatment for certain patients with conditions including atopic dermatitis, asthma, chronic rhinosinusitis with nasal polyps, eosinophilic esophagitis, or prurigo nodularis in different age groups.

The drug is not an immunosuppressant, and would be the first biologic approved for COPD, according to the manufacturers.

In the BOREAS trial, 468 adults with COPD who were current or former smokers aged 40-80 years were randomized to dupilumab and 471 to placebo; both groups continued to receive maximal standard of care.

Over 52 weeks, patients in the dupilumab group experienced a 30% reduction in moderate to severe COPD exacerbations compared with placebo (P = .0005).

In addition, patients treated with dupilumab met the key secondary endpoints of significant improvement in lung function from baseline to 12 weeks compared with placebo (160 mL vs. 77 mL; P < .0001); this difference persisted at 52 weeks (P = .0003).

Dupilumab also met endpoints for improvement in patient-reported health-related quality of life based on the St. George’s Respiratory Questionnaire and a reduction in the severity of respiratory symptoms of COPD based on the Evaluation Respiratory Symptoms: COPD Scale, according to the company’s statement.

The results represent a previously unreported magnitude of improvement for COPD patients treated with a biologic, principal investigator George D. Yancopoulos, MD, said in the statement.

“These results also validate the role type 2 inflammation plays in driving COPD in these patients, advancing the scientific community’s understanding of the underlying biology of this disease,” Dr. Yancopoulos added.

The safety results in the BOREAS trial were generally consistent with the known safety profile of Dupixent in its approved indications. Overall adverse event rates were similar for dupilumab and placebo patients (77% and 76%, respectively) and the overall safety profiles were consistent with the currently approved dupilumab indications, according to the manufacturers.

The adverse events that were more common in dupilumab patients compared with placebo patients were headache (8.1% vs. 6.8%), diarrhea (5.3% vs. 3.6%), and back pain (5.1% vs. 3.4%).

Adverse events leading to deaths were similar between the groups (1.7% in placebo patients and 1.5% in dupilumab patients).

Complete safety and efficacy results from the BOREAS trial are scheduled to be presented in a future scientific forum, and a second phase 3 trial of dupilumab for COPD, known as NOTUS, is ongoing, with data expected in 2024, according to the manufacturers.

The BOREAS trial was sponsored by Sanofi and Regeneron Pharmaceuticals.

INTERSTITIAL LUNG DISEASE

Tofacitinib may have protective effect against ILD in RA

BY LUCY HICKS

Patients with rheumatoid arthritis treated with tofacitinib (Xeljanz) were 69% less likely to develop interstitial lung disease (ILD), compared with those treated with adalimumab (Humira), according to a new retrospective study.

About 10% of patients with RA develop ILD, but data on how different biologic and targeted synthetic disease-modifying antirheumatic drugs (b/tsDMARDs) may affect the risk of developing ILD are lacking, the authors wrote. Identifying treatments that may have protective effects could be useful when prescribing treatments for patients with RA who are at higher risk for ILD, first author Matthew C. Baker, MD, clinical chief in the division of immunology and rheumatology at Stanford (Calif.) University, said in an interview.

In the analysis, published in JAMA Network Open (2023 Mar 20. doi: 10.1001/jamanetworkopen.2023.3640), researchers used the Optum Clinformatics Data Mart to identify claims data for patients with RA who were taking b/tsDMARDs from December 2003 to December 2019. Patients were excluded if they had a preexisting diagnosis of ILD or if they had less than 1 year of continuous enrollment in the data set.

The researchers identified 28,559 patients with RA who were treated with adalimumab (13,326), abatacept (Orenica; 5,676), rituximab (Rituxan; 5,444), tocilizumab (Actemra; 2,548), and tofacitinib (1,565). More than three-fourths of patients were female (78%), and their average age was 55.6 years old. During the study period, 276 developed ILD. An adjusted model showed a 69% lower incidence of ILD in patients treated with tofacitinib, compared with those treated with adalimumab (adjusted hazard ratio [aHR], 0.31; 95% confidence interval [CI], 0.12-0.78; P = .009). An additional sensitivity analysis showed a similar reduction in ILD risk in those taking tofacitinib, compared with adalimumab (aHR, 0.32; 95% CI, 0.13-0.82; P < .001). There was no significant difference in risk of developing ILD in the abatacept, rituximab, or tocilizumab groups, compared with adalimumab.

“Patients who generally looked similar with RA, but were given different treatments, had different risks of developing ILD.”

“Even though this wasn’t a clinical trial, it suggested that one of the medications that we use to treat RA could potentially prevent the development of ILD,” Elizabeth Volkmann, MD, codirector of the Connective Tissue Disease-Related Interstitial Lung Disease Program at the University of California, Los Angeles, told this news organization. She was not involved with the study.

With retrospective studies, it is difficult to account for all confounding factors, even with adjusted models, she said. For example, the authors did not have data on patients’ history of smoking, a known risk factor for ILD that could have affected which treatment was selected, they acknowledged. The tofacitinib group was also smaller than other treatment groups, which “may have contributed to a small number of events,” the authors wrote. “However, the follow-up time was similar across all groups, and we used Cox proportional hazard models to investigate the association between time-to-event and use of treatment while controlling for the other baseline characteristics.”

Both Dr. Baker and Dr. Volkmann agreed that future research could also investigate whether tofacitinib prevents the progression of ILD in patients with RA who already have the lung condition. “That’s never been looked at before,” Dr. Volkmann said.

Dr. Baker and a coauthor received support for this work from grants from the National Institutes of Health. Dr. Baker and Dr. Volkmann report no relevant financial relationships.
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PREVENTING SEPSIS READMISSION; NEW LUNG DONOR SCORE; TELE-REHAB; AND MORE ...

CRITICAL CARE NETWORK
Sepsis/ Shock Section
We need more efforts to prevent sepsis readmissions

Sepsis remains the commonest diagnosis for hospital stays in the United States and the top hospital readmission diagnosis, with aggregate costs of $23.7 billion in 2013 (https://datatools.ahrq.gov/hcup-fast-stats; 2016. HCUP Statistical Brief #204).

Sepsis readmissions can be mitigated by predictive analytics, better access to health care, establishing post-discharge clinic follow-ups, transportation arrangements, and telemedicine. More research is needed to evaluate sepsis readmission prevention.

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DIFFUSE LUNG DISEASE AND LUNG TRANSPLANT NETWORK
Lung Transplant Section
In March 2023, the Composite Allocation Score (CAS) will replace the Lung Allocation Score (LAS) for matching donor lungs to transplant candidates in the United States. The system includes sepsis patients as a readmission measure, and in 2016, this measure included sepsis patients with pneumonia and aspiration pneumonia. For 2023, the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS) suppressed pneumonia as a readmission measure due to COVID-19’s significant impact (https://www.cms.gov/Medicare/Medicare-Fee-for-Service-Payment/AcuteInpatientPPS/Medicare/Medicare-Fee-for-Services-Payment/AcuteInpatientPPS/Medicare/Medicare-Fee-for-Services-Payment/AcuteInpatientPPS). Though sepsis is not a direct readmission measure, it could be one in the future. Studies found higher long-term mortality for patients with sepsis re-admitted for recurrent sepsis (Pandolfi F, et al. Crit Care. 2022;26(1):371; McNamara JF, et al. Int J Infect Dis. 2022;114:34).


McNamara and colleagues found that patients with gram-negative bloodstream infections had higher readmission rates for sepsis during a 4-year follow-up and had a lower 5-year survival rates (Int J Infect Dis. 2022;114:34). Hospitals can prevent readmissions by strengthening antimicrobial stewardship programs to ensure appropriate and adequate treatment of initial infections. Other predictive risk factors for readmission are lower socioeconomic status (Shankar-Hari M, et al. Intensive Care Med. 2020;46(4):619), lack of health insurance, and delays seeking medical care due to lack of transportation (Amrollahi F, et al. J Am Med Inform Assoc. 2022;29(7):1263).

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PREVIOUSLY, CANDIDATES WERE SUBMITTED TO STRICT GEOGRAPHICAL DISTRIBUTIONS WITHIN A 250-NAUTICAL-MILE RADII, WHICH FREQUENTLY RESULTED IN THOSE WITH LOWER LUNG DONOR SCORE OBTAINING A TRANSPLANT.

Previously, candidates were subjected to strict geographical distributions within a 250-nautical-mile radius, which frequently resulted in those with lower Lung Allocation Score (LAS) obtaining a transplant. LAS was implemented in 2005 to improve lung organ utilization. Its score was determined by two main factors: (1) risk of 1-year waitlist mortality and (2) likelihood of 1-year post-transplant survival, with the first factor having twice the weight. However, LAS did not account for candidate biology attributes, such as pediatric age, blood type, allosensitization, or height. Long-term survival outcomes under LAS may be reduced, given the greater emphasis on waitlist mortality. Candidates were also subjected to strict geographical distributions within a 250-nautical-mile radius, which frequently resulted in those with lower LAS obtaining a transplant. CAS differs from the LAS in that it assigns an allocation score in a continuous distribution based on the following factors: medical urgency, expected survival benefit following transplant, pediatric age, blood type, HLA antibody sensitization, candidate height, and geographical proximity to the donor organ. Each factor has a specific weight, and because donor factors contribute to CAS, a candidate's score changes with each donor-recipient match run. Continuous distribution removes hard geographical boundaries and aims for more equitable organ allocation. To understand how allocation might change with CAS, Valapour and colleagues created various CAS scenarios using data from individuals on the national transplant waiting list (Am J Transplant. 2022;22(12):2971).

They found that waitlist deaths decreased by 36%-47%. This effect was greatest in scenarios where there was less weight on placement efficiency (ie, geography) and more weight on post-transplant outcomes. Transplant system equity also improved in their simulation models. It will be exciting to see how candidate and recipient outcomes are affected once CAS is implemented.

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DIFFUSE LUNG DISEASE AND LUNG TRANSPLANT NETWORK
Pulmonary Physiology and Rehabilitation Section
Emerging role of tele-rehab: Efficacy and challenges


A recent study reported significant improvement in COPD Assessment Test (CAT) scores after PR in both in-person (n=383) and virtual programs (n=171). Similar improvements were found in health outcomes, attendance, and dropout rate (Huynh VC, et al. Chest. 2023;163(3):529).


This study established the accessibility, feasibility, and safety of a community-based tele-PR program and noted no differences between groups in 6-minute walk test or CAT score improvement. On follow-up, only tele-PR participants had persistent improvements of CAT scores beyond 1 month after completion.

Ongoing challenges with tele-PR include standardization of programs and of initial clinical evaluations that determine eligibility for them. Patients on home oxygen and those with exercise desaturation are often excluded, but they have the most potential for improvement. Studies are needed to determine the characteristics of patients who would benefit most from non-traditional models of PR.

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SLEEP MEDICINE NETWORK
Respiratory-related Sleep Disorders Section
Home sleep apnea test: Peripheral arterial tonometry


Utilization of HSAT devices has increased in recent years, partly due to the COVID-19 pandemic and limitations in insurance reimbursement for PSG as the initial diagnostic test. But while there are benefits to home testing with respect to convenience and increased access, we must take the clinical context into account.

Peripheral arterial tonometry (PAT) is a commonly used HSAT technology, which measures peripheral arterial vascular tone using plethysmography at the fingertip. It has a sensitivity of 80% and specificity of 83% for detecting OSA in patients without significant comorbidities. HSAT devices using PAT technology have been studied in patients with atrial fibrillation (Tauman R, et al. Nat Sci Sleep. 2020;12:1115), adolescents (Cho JH, et al. J Clin Sleep Med. 2018;14[10]:1741), and pregnant women (O’Brien LM, et al. J Clin Sleep Med. 2012;8[3]:287), and to assess OSA treatment adequacy with varying sensitivity and specificity. Study in special populations may allow for increased access to testing with the benefit of increased recognition of a generally underdiagnosed disorder. But it’s important to use HSAT alongside awareness of its limitations and it should not replace good clinical judgment when making treatment decisions.

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Using ABIM’s Longitudinal Knowledge Assessment (LKA®) for your advantage

BY LYNN T. TANOUÉ, MD, MBA
Chair, ABIM Pulmonary Disease Board

The American Board of Internal Medicine’s (ABIM) Longitudinal Knowledge Assessment (LKA®) has entered its second year of availability, and was launched in January 2023 for the disciplines of pulmonary disease and critical care medicine, as well as infectious disease. Tens of thousands of physicians nationwide are taking advantage of this option for a flexible assessment that also incorporates more learning opportunities. If you are due for an ABIM assessment in 2023 in pulmonary disease or critical care medicine, the deadline to enroll in LKA is June 30, 2023.

Many diplomates—including myself—are taking advantage of the flexibility offered by the LKA to maintain certification in one or more specialties. Others are using it to regain certifications that they allowed to lapse. Both scenarios offer a lower-stakes and less time-intensive route to maintaining or recertifying that also promotes relevant and timely learning in a given discipline. Remember that you can still choose to take the traditional 10-year Maintenance of Certification (MOC) exam in any discipline if you feel that works better for you than the LKA.

Detailed information about the LKA and how it works, as well as a walkthrough video and FAQs, are available on ABIM’s website. Following are some suggestions based on the experience of physicians who are currently enrolled in the LKA.

Take it one day at a time
With 30 questions released each quarter, the LKA is designed to be manageable and work with your schedule. You could take one question a day or every few days over the course of the quarter or you can choose to do all 30 in one sitting—whatever works for you. Each correct answer also earns you 0.2 MOC points, meaning that over time, you could potentially achieve all of your required MOC points through the LKA alone.

Don’t forget your time bank
Every question has a 4-minute time limit, but if you need more time to think through a question or look up a resource, you can draw from a 30-minute extra time bank that renews each year. On average, physicians answer most questions in less than 2 minutes.

Use resources
The LKA is essentially “open book,” meaning you can use any resource to help with a question except for another physician. Some physicians cite online sites or hard copy medical references as reliable resources, and CHEST offers additional resources that can be helpful, as well.

Set up your work area for success
Many physicians report using two screens or two devices while taking the LKA—one with the LKA platform open to answer questions and one for looking up resources. Questions involving viewing of media will prompt you when a larger screen may be helpful.

Consider the cost savings
The LKA is included in your annual MOC fee for each certificate you maintain at no additional cost. If you use the LKA to meet your MOC assessment requirement, you don’t need to take the traditional 10-year MOC exam or pay an additional exam fee.

Gauge areas of strength and weakness
Most questions on the LKA will give you rationale and feedback after you’ve answered, allowing you to brush up on knowledge gaps. In addition, you’ll receive interim quarterly score reports starting after your fifth quarter of participation showing your current score relative to the passing standard, including areas where you might need to focus more study.

Regain lapsed certification
The LKA is a simple and lower-stakes way to regain certification in a specialty that has lapsed, though it should be noted that you must complete your 5-year LKA cycle and achieve a passing score for the certificate to become active again. In the meantime, you can use the LKA to refresh your knowledge of current information in that specialty.

Ask about disability accommodations
ABIM offers some accommodations for the LKA in compliance with Title III of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) for individuals with documented disabilities who demonstrate a need for accommodation. Physicians requesting special testing accommodations under the ADA can submit a request on ABIM’s website.

If you’re due for an assessment in 2023, and you haven’t looked into the LKA yet, now is the time: the second quarter closes on June 30, 2023, and you will not be able to enroll after that date. Sign in to your ABIM Physician Portal to see if you are eligible and visit ABIM.org/LKA to learn more.

Review highlights from CHEST’s new clinical practice guideline


Endorsed by the American Association for Respiratory Care, the American Thoracic Society, the American Academy of Sleep Medicine, and the Canadian Thoracic Society, the guideline recommendations cover topics including mouthpiece ventilation, transition to home mechanical ventilation, salivary secretion management, and airway clearance therapies.

“Respiratory muscle weakness is a serious concern in patients with neuromuscular diseases. It can lead to inadequate ventilation, nighttime hypoventilation, and the inability to mobilize secretions, which is frequently the cause of death in this population,” said lead author on the guideline, Akram Khan, MD, FCCP, Associate Professor, Pulmonary, Allergy, and Critical Care Medicine, Oregon Health & Science University. “We anticipate this guideline will standardize and improve the care provided to patients with neuromuscular diseases and subsequent weakness.”

The guideline includes the following highlighted recommendations:

• For patients with neuromuscular diseases (NMD) and chronic respiratory failure, we recommend using noninvasive ventilation (NIV) for treatment. (Strong recommendation)

• For patients with NMD requiring NIV, we suggest individualizing NIV treatment to achieve ventilation goals. (Conditional recommendation)

HIGHLIGHTS continued on following page
Relearning old lessons from a new disease: Prolonged noninvasive respiratory support for hypoxemic respiratory failure can harm patients

BY BENJAMIN T. WILSON, MD, AND ABHIMANYU CHANDEL, MD

The threshold for abandoning supportive measures and initiating invasive mechanical ventilation (IMV) in patients with respiratory failure is unclear. Noninvasive respiratory support (RS) devices, such as high-flow nasal cannula (HFNC) and noninvasive positive-pressure ventilation (NIV), are tools used to support patients in distress prior to failure and the need for IMV. However, prolonged RS in patients who ultimately require IMV can be harmful.

As the COVID-19 pandemic evolved, ICUs around the world were overrun by patients with varying degrees of respiratory failure. With this novel pathogen came novel approaches to management. Here we will review data available prior to the pandemic and relate them to emerging evidence on prolonged RS in patients with COVID-19. We believe it is time to acknowledge that prolonged RS in patients who ultimately require IMV is likely deleterious. Increased awareness and care to avoid this situation (often meaning earlier intubation) should be implemented in clinical practice.

Excessive tidal volume delivered during IMV can lead to lung injury. Though this principle is widely accepted, the recognition that the same physiology holds in a spontaneously breathing patient receiving RS has been slow to take hold. In the presence of a high respiratory drive injury from overdistension and large transpulmonary pressure, swings can occur with or without IMV. An excellent review summarizing the existing evidence of this risk was published years before the COVID-19 pandemic (Brochard L, et al. AJRCCM. 2017;195[4]:438).

A number of pre-COVID-19 publications focused on examining this topic in clinical practice deserve specific mention. A study of respiratory mechanics in patients on NIV found it was nearly impossible to meet traditional targets for lung protective tidal volumes. Those patients who progressed to IMV had higher expired tidal volumes (Carteaux G, et al. Crit Care Med. 2016;44[2]:282). A large systematic review and metaanalysis including more than 11,000 immunocompromised patients found delayed intubation led to increased mortality (Dumas G, et al. AJRCCM. 2021;204[2]:187). This study did not specifically implicate RS days and patient self-induced lung injury as factors driving the excess mortality; another smaller propensity-matched retrospective analysis of patients in the ICU supported with HFNC noted a 65% reduction in mortality among patients intubated after less than vs greater than 48 hours on HFNC who ultimately required IMV (Kang B, et al. Intensive Care Med. 2015;41[4]:623).

Despite this and other existing evidence regarding the hazards of prolonged RS prior to IMV, COVID-19’s burden on the health care system dramatically changed the way hypoxemic respiratory failure is managed in the ICU. Anecdotally, during the height of the pandemic, it was commonplace to encounter patients with severe COVID-19 supported with very high RS settings for days or often weeks. Occasionally, RS may have stabilized breathing mechanics. However, it was often our experience that among those patients supported with RS for extended periods prior to IMV lung compliance was poor, lung recovery did not occur, and prognosis was dismal. Various factors, including early reports of high mortality among patients with COVID-19 supported with IMV, resulted in reliance on RS as a means for delaying or avoiding IMV. Interestingly, a propensity-matched study of more than 2,700 patients found that prolonged RS was associated with significantly higher in-hospital mortality but despite this finding, the practice increased over the course of the pandemic (Riera J, et al. Eur Respir J. 2023;61[3]:2201426). Further, a prospective study comparing outcomes between patients intubated within 48 hours for COVID-19-related respiratory failure to those intubated later found a greater risk of in-hospital mortality and worse long-term outpatient lung function testing (in survivors) in the latter group.

It has previously been postulated that longer duration of IMV prior to the initiation of extracorporeal membrane oxygenation (ECMO) support in patients with hypoxemic respiratory failure may contribute to worse overall ECMO-related outcomes. This supposition is based on the principle that ECMO protects the lung by reducing ventilatory drive, tidal volume, and transpulmonary pressure swings. Several studies have documented an increase in mortality in patients supported with ECMO for COVID-19-related respiratory failure over the course of the pandemic. These investigators have noted that time to cannulation, but not IMV days (possibly reflecting duration of RS), correlates with worse ECMO outcomes (Ahmad Q, et al. ASAIO J. 2022;68[2]:171; Barbaro R, et al. Lancet. 2021;398[10307]:1230). We wonder if this reflects greater attention to low tidal volume ventilation during IMV but lack of awareness of or the inability to prevent injurious ventilation during prolonged RS. We view this as an important area for future research that may aid in patient selection in the ongoing effort to improve COVID-19-related ECMO outcomes.

The COVID-19 pandemic remains a significant burden on the health care system. Changes in care necessitated by the crisis produced innovations with the potential to rapidly improve outcomes. Notably though, it also has resulted in negative changes in response to a new pathogen that are hard to reconcile with physiologic principles. Evidence before and since the emergence of COVID-19 suggests prolonged RS prior to IMV is potentially harmful. It is critical for clinicians to recognize this principle and take steps to mitigate this problem in patients where a positive response to RS is not demonstrated in a timely manner.
Future promise
Sleep medicine is uniquely positioned to develop robust AI algorithms because of its vast data trove. Using AI, scientists can efficiently analyze the raw data from polysomnography, consumer sleep technology (CST), and nightly remote monitoring (from PAP devices) to substantially improve comprehension and management of sleep disorders.

AI can redefine OSA through analysis of the big data available, rather than solely relying on the apnea-hypopnea index. In addition, novel variables such as facial structure; snoring index; temperature trends; and sleep environment, position, and timing using a camera-based contactless technology may be incorporated to enhance the diagnostic accuracy for OSA or better describe sleep quality. AI algorithms can also be embedded into the electronic health record (EHR) to facilitate screening for sleep disorders using patient characteristics, thus accelerating the recognition and evaluation of possible sleep disorders.

New ways of collecting data may deliver deeper insights into sleep health, as well. CST such as wearables, nearables, and phone applications are improving with each iteration, resulting in more data about sleep for millions of people over thousands of nights.

AI can help achieve precision medicine by integrating multimodal data to establish endotypes and phenotypes of various sleep disorders. Delineating endotypes and phenotypes allows for personalized treatment recommendations, which may improve patient adherence and health outcomes.

Treatment personalization can also be achieved through AI by predicting compliance to various therapies and responses, as well as by discovering alternative forms of delivery to accomplish desired health outcomes. For example, to predict PAP compliance, we can record a patient encounter and use natural language processing to analyze their opinion of their treatment, in a novel home-based alternative for treatment personalization.
2023 documentation guidelines updates

BY HUMAYUN ANJUM, MD, FCCP

This article’s goal is to draw attention to and give a general summary of the most significant modification to the documentation guidelines in 25 years, which went into effect on January 1, 2023. This is by no means an entire resource, so we urge our readers to study the official American Medical Association (AMA) materials and speak with a billing/coding professional at their clinic, facility, or hospital for additional information.

AMA, the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS), and CPT were all in agreement with the proposed modifications when the Proposed Rule for the 2023 CMS Guidelines for Fee Schedule modifications was first released in July 2022. The Proposed Rule was left unchanged when the Final Rule was released later that year. Given that these modifications have an effect on the distribution and assignment of E/M levels, it is prudent to understand and implement them. The goal of this thorough redesign is to record the excellent work that clinicians perform on a daily basis and to reduce the danger of medical litigation.

The fields most affected by these changes are critical care, hospital medicine, emergency medicine, surgery, obstetric hospital medicine, and pediatrics, whereas anesthesia, radiology, and neonatology have been less affected.

Medical Decision Making (MDM), which previously determined the level of E/M visits, has been altered as of 2023. It should be emphasized that the rules for critical care documentation have not changed. In addition, it is crucial to carefully record everything and support MDM with an "appropriate" history, review of systems, past medical/family/social history, and physical examination.

- So, the focus in 2023 should be on MDM. There are three components of MDM, and it is scored by the highest two of three components:
  1. **Number and complexity of problems addressed (previously, it was the number of diagnosis of management options)**
     - All acute, subacute, and chronic conditions affecting the patient’s care and management on that specific day should be listed in the chart for this, together with information about the severity and/or acuity of each diagnosis (for example: worsening, acute, stable, or improving). Additionally, any differential diagnoses and rule-out diagnoses pertaining to the patient should be mentioned. Finally, it's important to note whether systemic symptoms are present.
  2. **Amount and/or complexity of data to be reviewed**
     - As an MDM credit is provided for each distinct test, this should identify all the diagnostic tests that were ordered or evaluated. Additionally, an independent interpretation of the diagnostics should be reported if relevant and if conducted. This includes a review of all previous external notes (from a different facility, discharge summaries or other inpatient records, nursing home notes, a review of the pharmacy database, EMS notes, and specialist notes), information from independent historians, and consultation with other clinicians or qualified health professionals.

Challenges to an AI renaissance

Despite making strides in numerous specialties such as radiology, ophthalmology, pathology, oncology and dermatology, AI has not yet gained mainstream usage. Why isn’t AI as ubiquitous and omnipresent as radiology, ophthalmology, pathology, and other specialties such as environmental factors, sleep schedule, medical history, and other information extracted from the EHR. As another example, AI can determine the optimal time for cancer therapy by predicting a patient’s circadian timing (Hesse J, et al. Cancers (Basel). 2020;12[11]:3103). Circadian timing of drug delivery may be relevant in other specialties including cardiovascular disease, endocrine disorders, and psychiatric conditions due to its associations with sleep. Integration of the various “-omics” (eg, proteomics, genomics, and transcriptomics) with physiologic, behavioral, and environmental data can offer opportunities for drug discovery and possible prediction of sleep disorders and sleep-related morbidity. Although generative pretrained transformers are currently used to predict text (ie, ChatGPT), it is theoretically possible to also apply this technique to identify patients at risk for future sleep disorders from an earlier age.

A path forward

But these challenges, like any, can be overcome. Research in the area of differential privacy and the adoption of recent data-sharing standards (eg, HL7 FHIR) can facilitate access to training data (Saripalle R, et al. J Biomed Inform. 2019;84:103188). Regulators are also open to incorporating feedback from the AI research community and industry in favor of innovation in this frenetic domain. The FDA developed the AI/ML Software as a Medical Device Action Plan in response to stakeholder feedback for oversight (FDA, 2021). Specifically, the “Good Machine Learning Practice” will be developed to describe AI/ML best practices (eg, data management, training, interpretability, evaluation, and documentation) to guide product development and standardization.

Sleep medicine has significantly progressed over the last several decades. Rather than maintain the status quo, AI can help fill the existing knowledge gaps, augment clinical practice, and streamline operations by analyzing and processing data at a volume and efficiency beyond human capacity. Failibility is inevitable in machines and humans; however, like humans, machines can improve with continued training and exposure.

We asked ChatGPT about the future of AI in sleep medicine. It states that AI could have a “significant impact” on sleep disorders diagnosis, treatment, prevention, and sleep tracking and monitoring. Only time will tell if its claims are accurate.
GUIDELINES continued from previous page

providers (QHPs) about the management or test interpretations.

3. Risk of complications and/or morbidity or mortality

This category includes all diagnoses or treatments that are significantly impacted by social determinants of health; prescription drug management that was taken into account, started, or adjusted during that particular encounter; parenteral drug administration; discussions and decisions about the patient’s goals of care; and decisions regarding the need for hospitalization. (admit to inpatient or observation status, transfer to higher level of care, against medical advice, refusal of hospitalization, hospice discharge).

In summary, following are the top 10 MDM points that need to be considered by the clinician while documenting:

1. Capture the acuity, severity, and intensity of the services provided during the encounter.
2. Capture all the diagnoses addressed and patient-specific differential diagnoses/rule out diagnoses.
3. Capture any prior external notes reviewed.
4. Capture when and why there was a need to talk to an independent historian.
5. Independently interpret any diagnostics (EKG, radiograph, ultrasound, CT, MRI).
6. Capture all discussions with other clinicians or QHPs.
7. Capture hospitalization/admission/transfer to higher level of care.
8. Document the need for prescription drug management.
9. Document the social determinants of health impact that would limit the diagnosis/treatment plan.
10. Capture any procedures planned or done as well as any plans for surgery.

In the upcoming issues of this year, we will try to focus individually on some of these areas and provide general templates for our readers to ensure that each of us is able to implement these effectively into our daily practice. We hope that this review has helped to clarify the new documentation guidelines.

Reference

This month in the journal

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Editor’s picks

A Total Diet Replacement Weight Management Program for Difficult-to-Treat Asthma Associated With Obesity

By Varun Sharma, MBChB, et al.

Cardiovascular Complications Are the Primary Drivers of Mortality in Hospitalized Patients With SARS-CoV-2 Community-Acquired Pneumonia

By Ahmed Shebl Ali, MD, et al.

Real-World Evidence of Neutralizing Monoclonal Antibodies for Preventing Hospitalization and Mortality in COVID-19 Outpatients


Moral Distress in Canadian Intensivists

By Dominique Piquette, MD, PhD, et al.

Comparative Effectiveness of Amiodarone and Lidocaine for the Treatment of In-Hospital Cardiac Arrest

By Deborah Wagner, PharmD, et al.

Nebulized vs IV Tranexamic Acid for Hemoptysis

By Bharath Gopinath, MBBS, MD, et al.

Value-Based Care for Chest Physicians

By Momen M. Wahidi, MD, et al.

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Genetic factors also contribute to asthma risk, but highly variable heritability suggests that the nongenetic exposures play an important role. "However, whether healthy nongenetic exposure could decrease the risk of asthma and mitigate the adverse effect of genetic risk remains largely unknown," the authors state. They hypothesized that healthier sleep could decrease future asthma risk and mitigate the hazards of genetic effects.

Using data from the UK Biobank, they investigated the independent and combined effects of sleep pattern and PRSs on asthma incidence. In the UK Biobank cohort (455,405 adults aged 38-73 years, who were enrolled from 2006 to 2010), 17,836 were diagnosed with asthma over 10 years of follow-up. PRSs were constructed for each participant on the basis of their having any of 17 single-nucleotide polymorphisms that are significantly associated with asthma. Participants were stratified into three groups: those at high genetic risk, those at intermediate genetic risk, and those at low genetic risk. Around 1 in 3 participants were classified as being at high genetic risk (150,429), and another third (151,970) were classified as being at intermediate risk. The remainder were classified as being at low risk. Some 7,105 people at high genetic risk and 5,748 at intermediate genetic risk were diagnosed with asthma during the monitoring period.

Comprehensive sleep scores, which ranged from 0 to 5, were constructed on the basis of self-reported sleep traits. Higher scores represented healthier sleep patterns. A healthy sleep pattern was defined as early chronotype; getting from 7 to 9 hours of sleep every night; never or rarely snoring; and no frequent daytime sleepiness. On the basis of their responses, 73,223 people met the criteria for a healthy sleep pattern; and 97,915, a poor sleep pattern.

"Compared with non-cases, asthma cases were more likely to have lower education levels, unhealthy sleep traits and patterns, obesity, higher PRS, more smoking, more alcohol consumption, hypertension, diabetes, depression, gastroesophageal reflux, and more air pollution exposure," the authors report. All five healthy sleep traits were independently associated with lower risk for asthma. Never/rare insomnia and sleep duration of 7-9 hours a night were seemingly the most influential; they were associated with risk reductions of 25% and 20%, respectively.

Analysis showed that, compared with the low-risk group, the hazard ratios and 95% confidence intervals (CI) for the highest PRS group and the poor sleep pattern group were 1.47 (95% CI, 1.41-1.52) and 1.55 (95% CI, 1.45-1.65), respectively. Risk was two-fold higher in the presence of a combination of poor sleep and high genetic susceptibility (hazard ratio [HR], 2.22; 95% CI, 1.97-2.49; P < .001). Conversely, a healthy sleep pattern was associated with a lower risk of asthma in the low (HR, 0.56; 95% CI, 0.50-0.64), intermediate (HR, 0.59; 95% CI, 0.53-0.67), and high genetic susceptibility groups (HR, 0.63; 95% CI, 0.57-0.70). A population-attributable risk analysis indicated that improving these sleep traits would prevent 19% of asthma cases. Also, a subset analysis suggested that a healthy sleep pattern might reduce the risk of asthma among those at high genetic risk by 37%.

The study findings suggest that analysis of sleep patterns is warranted for all asthma patients, said coauthor Qing Wang, PhD, Chee-loo College of Medicine, Shandong University, Jinan, China, in an interview. "In our results, the effects of sleep and genetics were independent. Therefore, what we learned about the effects of sleep on asthma could be applied to all the patients, including those with a high or low genetic predisposition. In addition, we believe that intervening among those with high genetic predisposition could be more beneficial since they are more likely to have asthma. However, because this study is observational, a large clinical trial is absolutely needed to provide causal evidence, especially before guidelines modifications can be considered."

Complex and multifactorial
"Addressing relevant asthma comorbid conditions continues to be an integral part of asthma care," commented Diego J. Maselli, MD, FCCP, associate professor of medicine and interim chief, division of pulmonary diseases and critical care, UT Health, San Antonio, and an editorial advisory board member for CHEST Physician, in an interview. "There is mounting evidence that sleep patterns and obstructive sleep apnea may influence asthma control. This association is complex and multifactorial. It is important to remember that obstructive sleep apnea may coexist with other conditions, such as obesity and gastroesophageal reflux disease, that in turn can also worsen asthma control and influence clinical outcomes."

"Yet, even after controlling for these factors, sleep disturbances have been associated with poor asthma outcomes. It is reasonable, particularly in patients with uncontrolled and/or severe asthma, to screen for sleep disturbances. There are multiple questionnaires and clinical tools that can be employed to screen for coexisting sleep apnea and other conditions. Although genetic testing has shown some promise in identifying individuals at risk, these assays are not widely available and are not ready yet for routine clinical practice. Therefore, sleep studies should be reserved for patients who have symptoms and test positive for screening questionnaires and other tools."

"The study by Xiang and colleagues adds to the field of study, but further evidence is required to change practice guidelines at this time. Fortunately, sleep studies are readily available now with more widespread use of home testing, so patients can be easily tested. The majority third-party payers have identified that diagnosing these disorders is cost-effective and are able to reimburse sleep studies," Dr. Maselli concluded.

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