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Research Letter

Nonsustained Ventricular Tachycardia at the Time of Implantation Predicts Appropriate Therapies on Rapid Ventricular Arrhythmia in Primary Prevention Patients With Nonischemic Cardiomyopathy

Results From the Very-High-Rate Registry

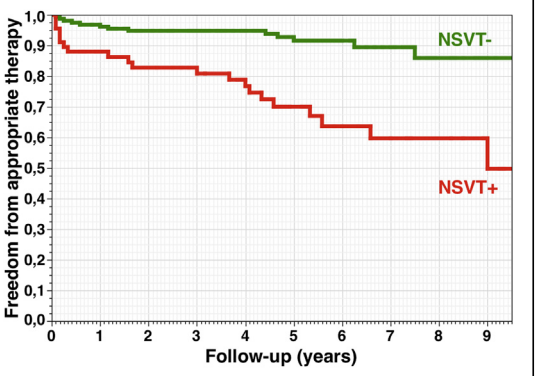
Recent results from the Danish trial call into question the benefits of implantable cardioverter-defibrillator (ICD) in primary prevention for patients with nonischemic cardiomyopathy (NICM) and a reduced left ventricular ejection fraction (LVEF), considering that a majority of these well-treated patients also received cardiac resynchronization therapy (CRT) (1). We sought to evaluate the factors associated with appropriate therapies for ventricular arrhythmias over 220 beats/min in NICM patients included in the VH-RATE (Very High Rate study) study (2,3).

Consecutive NICM patients with a reduced LVEF despite optimal medical therapy, who underwent the implantation of an ICD in primary prevention of sudden cardiac death, were included. Devices were programmed with identical tachycardia settings: a monitoring zone starting at a rate of 170 beats/min or above, and a ventricular fibrillation zone at 220 beats/min or above, with nominal settings for the number of detection intervals, according to the manufacturer (average 18 ± 4 detection intervals). Shock therapies were programmed at maximum output and antitachycardia pacing (ATP) before or during charging, when available. A 24-h electrocardiographic Holter monitoring was performed in all patients just before implantation to detect the presence of nonsustained ventricular tachycardia (NSVT) episodes (≥3 consecutive complexes and <30 s). Time to first appropriate therapy (ATP or shock) was recorded. Follow-up ended with death, heart transplantation, or ICD removal.

A total of 223 patients were included (60 ± 11 years of age, LVEF 24 ± 7%, 26% single chamber, 22% dual chamber, and 52% CRT devices). Patients were well treated, with 97% having a beta-blocker, although information on renin-angiotensin-aldosterone system inhibitors was not available. During a mean follow-up of 4.7 ± 2.5 years (median 4.7 years [interquartile range: 3.2 years]) (i.e., 1,051 patient-years), 35 (16%) patients experienced at least 1 appropriate therapy, including 24 (11%) patients with shocks (11 for ventricular fibrillation [VF], 10 for fast monomorphic ventricular tachycardia [VT], and 3 for both VT and VF), and 11 (5%) patients with ATP-only therapies.

After adjustment for age; sex; LVEF; New York Heart Association functional class; single-chamber, dual-chamber, and biventricular devices; history of atrial fibrillation; NSVT at the time of implantation; complete atrioventricular block; and treatment with a beta-blocker and amiodarone, patients with NSVT (n = 67, 30%) was the only independent factor associated with a higher risk of appropriate therapy over 220 beats/min (adjusted hazard ratio: 4.81; 95% confidence

FIGURE 1 Freedom From Appropriate Therapy in Patients With or Without NSVT on 24-h Holter Monitoring at the Time of Implantable Cardioverter-Defibrillator Implantation



Freedom from appropriate therapy over 220 beats/min in patients with nonischemic cardiomyopathy according to the presence (NSVT+) or absence (NSVT−) of NSVT (≥3 consecutive complexes) at the time of implantable cardioverter-defibrillator implantation. NSVT = nonsustained ventricular tachycardia.

interval: 2.33 to 10.30; $p < 0.0001$) (**Figure 1**). NSVT on 24-h Holter monitoring at the time of implantation was the only independent factor associated with a higher risk of appropriate shock on VF or polymorphic VT (adjusted hazard ratio: 5.21; 95% confidence interval: 1.63 to 18.80; $p = 0.005$). Patients with NSVT were also more likely to have NSVT episodes detected in the monitoring zone (170 to 220 beats/min) during follow-up (14.9% vs. 6.4%; $p = 0.04$).

Presence of NSVT alone indentifies a subgroup (30%) of NICM patients (37% implanted with a CRT device) at very-high risk of rapid and potentially life-threatening ventricular arrhythmia (5.0 events per 100 patient-years vs. 1.7 events per 100 patient-years; $p < 0.0001$) (4). Even if ICD treated fast ventricular arrhythmia is not an equivalent endpoint as all-cause mortality, our findings suggest that NSVT may predict a higher risk population of NICM patients who will actually benefit from implantation of a defibrillator in primary prevention of sudden cardiac death. A new randomized study in that population may be needed (5).

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