Comments on Exercise Echocardiography and Multidetector Computed Tomography for the Evaluation of Acute Chest Pain

Comentarios a la evaluación del dolor torácico agudo mediante ecocardiografía de ejercicio y tomografía computarizada multidetector

To the Editor,

I have read the article published by the group at the Hospital Clínic de Barcelona with great interest, and would like to congratulate the authors publically on their outstanding research endeavor.

Nonetheless, although the authors recommend “a balanced strategy” combining both techniques, in my reading of the article I detect an underlying conflict between them, and would like to make some comments related to this. These comments are intended in no way to diminish the authors’ extraordinary work, but rather to present “the current value” of computed tomography (CT).

1. A limitation not mentioned by the authors is the long time elapsed between the conduct of the study and its publication. It may be that the intervening 6 years have brought no changes in exercise echocardiography and that older results thus remain applicable in 2014; however, developments in multidetector computed tomography (MDCT) during this period have been truly spectacular and exponential. Besides improved spatial and...
temporal resolution and reduced radiation doses, these developments include the introduction of complementary explorations for the detection of ischemia (perfusion, noninvasive determination of functional repercussion of stenosis, etc.). These advances have made MDCT one of the most sensitive and specific methods for ruling out significant coronary artery disease, second only to invasive coronary angiography. The noninvasive nature of MDCT moreover brings added benefits, including the detection of subclinical coronary artery disease, the potential to characterize high-risk plaques, and prognostic value.

2. Technical considerations. The diagnostic performance of MDCT could have been improved with an optimized spatial resolution of the reconstructions, achievable by modifying the slice thickness, the between-slice increase and filters as described by other authors working with exactly the same type of scanner. Additionally, given the mean body surface area observed in the study population (although the benchmark parameter in cardiac CT is body-mass index), a tube potential of 100 kV would have improved luminal contrast in the coronary arteries, thereby facilitating image interpretation and exponentially reduces the radiation dose. Such dose reductions are line with Society of Cardiovascular Computed Tomography guidelines, which recommend the establishment of quality assurance procedures to meet the following objectives: sufficient diagnostic quality in ≥ 95% of scans, a demonstrable diagnostic accuracy at least 75% that of invasive coronary angiography, and a mean radiation dose at the reference level (12 mSv according to the most recent guidelines). Today, with a careful acquisition protocol and the latest scanners, doses are normally in the region of 1-2 mSv or even lower, well below the 7-10 mSv in invasive coronary angiography and the 8-10 mSv in isotope studies with gamma radiation, demonstrated to be more harmful than X rays.

3. Methodological considerations. An Agatston score > 400 is not equivalent to the detection of significant coronary artery disease by MDCT because this threshold drags down the specificity of the method, with 20% of patients with this score having no disease. The authors’ statement in the Discussion that “MDCT has low diagnostic specificity” seems to me to be inappropriate. What limits specificity is setting the significance threshold at ≥ 50% when the “reference pattern” is ≥ 70% for invasive coronary angiography (luminogram) and MDCT is based on this same “luminogram”, with the advantage of assessing the coronary wall. The ≥ 50% significance threshold was established in the cited study by Hoffmann, in which final cost-effectiveness did not reach statistical significance. In contrast, the Goldstein study, using a significance threshold of ≥ 70%, showed a significantly positive cost-effectiveness for MDCT ($2137 for MDCT compared with $3458 for standard; P < .0001).

The major scientific societies now accept the diagnostic value of both techniques and their complementary nature, especially in non-diagnostic MDCT studies and studies that indirectly evaluate the functional repercussion of intermediate or limiting stenosis, an evaluation achieved directly with pressure guides in invasive coronary angiography.

Paz Catalán-Sanz

Certificación en la Subespecialidad de Tomografía Computarizada Cardiovascular (CB CCT); Cardiovascular Healthcare Innovation, Madrid, Spain

E-mail address: pazcatalan@secardiologia.es

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Comments on Exercise Echocardiography and Multidetector Computed Tomography for the Evaluation of Acute Chest Pain. Response

Comentarios a la evaluación del dolor torácico agudo mediante ecocardiografía de ejercicio y tomografía computarizada multidetectores. Respuesta

To the Editor,

We would like to thank Dr Catalán for her comments and to clarify certain points.

Although major technological progress has been made in cardiac multidetector computed tomography (MDCT) since 2008 when the above-mentioned study was started, it is important to recognize that both the myocardial perfusion study and the recent evaluation of functional repercussion using MDCT discussed by Dr Catalán are emerging techniques that are not included in clinical practice guidelines. Noninvasive estimation of the coronary reserve flow using MDCT, whose analysis is still not widely available, could be promising in the future, but its diagnostic value in addition to MDCT angiography is still to be determined for acute chest pain.

Dr Catalán states that the results could have been improved by a different image reconstruction according to the study by Rixe et al. The device used in our study provides a rotation time of 370 ms, inferior to the 330 ms used by Rixe et al. To compensate for the loss of sharpness of the coronary lumen, we used 0.7 mm slices and 0.4 mm increments instead of the 0.6 × 0.3 mm suggested by Rixe et al, resulting from the tests performed and consensus among 3 observers. For the same reasons, a tube current of 120 kV was maintained, similar to that used by Rixe et al, instead of the suggested 100 kV.

Our article acknowledges the specificity of MDCT was affected by the 50% stenosis cut-off value, which is why we conducted another analysis at 70%, producing a considerable improvement in...