Original article

Multimarker Strategy for Heart Failure Prognostication. Value of Neurohormonal Biomarkers: Neprilysin vs NT-proBNP

Antoni Bayes-Genis, a,b,* Jaume Barallat, b,c Amparo Galán, b,c Marta de Antonio, a,b Mar Domingo a Elisabet Zamora, a,b Paloma Gastellurtia, d Joan Vila, e,f Judith Peñafiel, e,f Carolina Gálvez-Montón, d and Josep Lupón a,b

Unidad de Insuficiencia Cardíaca, Servicio de Cardiología, Hospital Universitari Germans Trias i Pujol, Badalona, Barcelona, Spain
Departamento de Medicina, Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona, Barcelona, Spain
Servicio de Bioquímica, Hospital Universitari Germans Trias i Pujol, Badalona, Barcelona, Spain
Fundació Institut Investigació en Ciències de la Salut Germans Trias i Pujol, Badalona, Barcelona, Spain
IMIM (Institut de Recerca Hospital del Mar), Barcelona, Spain
CIBER Epidemiología y Salud Pública, Barcelona, Spain

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ABSTRACT

Introduction and objectives: Neprilysin breaks down numerous vasoactive peptides. The soluble form of neprilysin, which was recently identified in heart failure, is associated with cardiovascular outcomes. Within a multimarker strategy, we directly compared soluble neprilysin and N-terminal pro-B-type natriuretic peptide as risk stratifiers in a real-life cohort of heart failure patients.

Methods: Soluble neprilysin, N-terminal pro-B-type natriuretic peptide, ST2, and high-sensitivity troponin T levels were measured in 797 consecutive ambulatory heart failure patients followed up for 4.7 years. Comprehensive multivariable analyses and soluble neprilysin vs N-terminal pro-B-type natriuretic peptide head-to-head assessments of performance were performed. A primary composite endpoint included cardiovascular death or heart failure hospitalization. A secondary endpoint explored cardiovascular death alone.

Results: Median soluble neprilysin and N-terminal pro-B-type natriuretic peptide concentrations were 0.64 ng/mL and 1187 ng/L, respectively. Both biomarkers significantly correlated with age (P < .001) and ST2 (P < .001), but only N-terminal pro-B-type natriuretic peptide significantly correlated with estimated glomerular filtration rate (P < .001), body mass index (P < .001), left ventricular ejection fraction (P = .02) and high-sensitivity troponin T (P < .001). In multivariable Cox regression analyses, soluble neprilysin remained independently associated with the composite endpoint (hazard ratio = 1.14; 95% confidence interval, 1.02-1.27; P = .03) and cardiovascular death (hazard ratio = 1.15; 95% confidence interval, 1.01-1.31; P = .04), but N-terminal pro-B-type natriuretic peptide did not. The head-to-head soluble neprilysin vs N-terminal pro-B-type natriuretic peptide comparison showed good calibration and similar discrimination and reclassification for both neurohormonal biomarkers, but only soluble neprilysin improved overall goodness-of-fit.

Conclusions: When added to a multimarker strategy, soluble neprilysin remained an independent prognosticator, while N-terminal pro-B-type natriuretic peptide lost significance as a risk stratifier in ambulatory patients with heart failure. Both biomarkers performed similarly in head-to-head analyses.

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E-mail address: abayesgenis@gmail.com (A. Bayes-Genis).

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INTRODUCTION

Heart failure (HF) is a growing public epidemic, with an increasing incidence and prevalence. Despite substantial progress in recent decades, mortality remains high for patients with HF. Prognostication may be refined by the use of biomarkers for distinct pathophysiological processes not reflected by established mortality risk factors. In 2008, Braunwald classified circulating biomarkers into 7 categories based on their pathophysiological effects in HF and hypothesized that multiple biomarkers in combination would provide a valuable means for risk stratification. These pathways include myocardial stretch, myocyte injury, extracellular matrix, inflammation, renal dysfunction, neurohormonal activation, and oxidative stress.

At present, all multimarker approaches include natriuretic peptides as surrogates of the neurohormonal activation pathway. However, soluble neprilysin (sNEP) has recently emerged as a potential alternative. Neprilysin (NEP) is a membrane-bound enzyme that cleaves numerous vasoactive peptides, including natriuretic peptides, adrenomedullin, angiotensin-I and -II, bradykinin, and substance P. This enzyme is fairly ubiquitous and expressed mainly within cell membranes, but a circulating soluble form of NEP was recently reported in HF. In an ambulatory cohort of patients with HF, sNEP was found to be an independent predictor of cardiovascular (CV) death and HF hospitalizations. By virtue of its central role in neurohormonal regulation, sNEP provides prognostic value on the status of several pathophysiological pathways involved in HF. Therefore, we directly compared sNEP, which is indicative of comprehensive neurohormonal activation, and N-terminal pro-B-type natriuretic peptide (NT-proBNP), a surrogate of natriuretic peptide release and current standard-of-care, in combination with high-sensitivity troponin T (hsTnT) (myocyte injury), ST2 (myocardial fibrosis and

Abbreviations

CV: cardiovascular
HF: heart failure
hsTnT: high-sensitivity troponin T
NT-proBNP: N-terminal pro-B-type natriuretic peptide
sNEP: soluble neprilysin

RESUMEN

Introducción y objetivos: La neprilisina degrada numerosos péptidos vasoactivos. La forma soluble de neprilisina, que se ha identificado recientemente en la insuficiencia cardíaca, se asocia con eventos cardiovasculares. Se compararon de manera directa la neprilisina soluble y la fracción aminoterminal del propéptido natriurético cerebral como estratificadores de riesgo, dentro de una estrategia multimarcadores, en una cohorte de pacientes con insuficiencia cardíaca de la práctica clínica real.

Métodos: Se determinaron las concentraciones de neprilisina soluble, la fracción aminoterminal del propéptido natriurético cerebral, ST2 y troponina T de alta sensibilidad en 797 pacientes ambulatorios consecutivos con insuficiencia cardíaca seguidos durante 4,7 años. Se llevaron a cabo análisis multivarsables exhaustivos y se realizaron comparaciones directas de neprilisina soluble frente a la fracción aminoterminal del propéptido natriurético cerebral mediante estadísticas de rendimiento. El objetivo final principal fue el compuesto por muerte cardiovascular u hospitalización por insuficiencia cardíaca. Un objetivo secundario exploró la muerte cardiovascular sola.

Resultados: Las medianas de concentración de neprilisina soluble y la fracción aminoterminal del propéptido natriurético cerebral fueron de 0,64 ng/mL y 1.187 ng/l respectivamente. Ambos biomarcadores presentaron una correlación significativa con la edad (p < 0,001) y las cifras de ST2 (p < 0,001), pero solo la fracción aminoterminal del propéptido natriurético cerebral mostró una correlación significativa con el filtrado glomerular estimado (p < 0,001), el índice de masa corporal (p < 0,001), la fracción de eyección del ventrículo izquierdo (p = 0,02) y la troponina T de alta sensibilidad (p < 0,001). En los análisis de regresión de Cox multivarsables, la neprilisina soluble continuó mostrando una asociación independiente con el objetivo compuesto (hazard ratio = 1,14; intervalo de confianza del 95%, 1,02-1,27; p = 0,03) y la muerte cardiovascular (hazard ratio = 1,15; intervalo de confianza del 95%, 1,01-1,31; p = 0,04), pero no así la fracción aminoterminal del propéptido natriurético cerebral. La comparación directa de la fracción aminoterminal del propéptido natriurético cerebral puso de manifiesto buena calibación y discriminación y reclasificación similares con ambos biomarcadores neurohormonales, pero solo la neprilisina soluble mejoró la bondad de ajuste global.

Conclusiones: La neprilisina soluble mantuvo el valor pronóstico independiente al incluirlo en una estrategia multimarcadores, mientras que la fracción aminoterminal del propéptido natriurético cerebral perdió la significación en la estratificación del riesgo en los pacientes ambulatorios con insuficiencia cardíaca. Ambos biomarcadores obtuvieron medidas de rendimiento similares en los análisis de comparación directa.

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inflammation), and estimated glomerular filtration rate (eGFR) (renal dysfunction) for HF prognostication.

METHODS

Study Population

The present is a multimer marker subanalysis of the previously reported total cohort studied. The subanalysis was performed in those patients with availability of all the examined biomarkers (sNEP, NT-proBNP, hsTnT and ST2). From May 2006 to May 2013, ambulatory patients treated at a multidisciplinary HF clinic were consecutively included in the study. Referral inclusion criteria and blood sample collection have been described elsewhere. All biomarkers were analyzed in the same blood sample stored at –80 °C without previous freeze-thaw cycles. All samples were obtained between 09:00 am and 12:00 pm.

All participants provided written informed consent, and the study was approved by the local ethics committee. All study procedures were conducted in accordance with the ethical standards outlined in the 1975 Declaration of Helsinki, as revised in 1983.

Follow-up and Outcomes

All patients were followed-up at regular predefined intervals, with additional visits as required in the case of decompensation. The regular visits schedule included a minimum of quarterly visits with nurses, biannual visits with physicians, and elective visits with geriatricians, psychiatrists, and rehabilitation physicians. Patients who did not attend the regular visits were contacted by telephone.

The primary outcome was a composite of CV death or HF hospitalization. Cardiovascular and all-cause deaths were also explored as secondary outcomes. A death was considered CV in origin if it was caused by HF (decompensated HF or treatment-resistant HF in the absence of another cause), sudden death (unexpected death, witnessed or not, of a previously stable patient with no evidence of worsening HF or any other cause of death), acute myocardial infarction (directly related in time to acute myocardial infarction due to mechanical, hemodynamic, or arrhythmic complications), stroke (associated with recently appearing acute neurologic deficit), procedural (post-diagnostic or post-therapeutic procedure death), and other CV causes (e.g., rupture of an aneurysm, peripheral ischemia, or aortic dissection). Hospitalizations were identified from the clinical records of patients with HF, hospital wards, and the Catalan electronic medical record. Fatal events were identified from the clinical records of patients with HF, hospital wards, the emergency room, general practitioners, and by contacting the patient’s relatives. Data were verified by the databases of the Catalan and Spanish health systems. Events were adjudicated by 2 of the authors (M. Domingo and J. Lupón). Follow-up was closed at March 31, 2014.

N-terminal Pro-B-type Natriuretic Peptide Assay

The NT-proBNP levels were determined using an immuno-electrochemiluminescence method (Elecsys®, Roche Diagnostics; Basel, Switzerland). This assay has < 0.001% cross-reactivity with bioactive B-type natriuretic peptide (BNP), and in the constituent studies in this report, the assay had inter-run coefficients of variation ranging from 0.9% to 5.5%.

High-sensitivity Cardiac Troponin T Assay

Troponin levels were measured by electrochemiluminescence immunoassay using an hsTnT assay on the Modular Analytics E 170 (Roche Diagnostics). The hsTnT assay has an analytic range from 3 ng/L to 10 000 ng/L. At the 99th percentile value of 13 ng/L, the coefficient of variation was 9%. The assays were run with reagents from lot 157123 and were not affected by the analytical issues that have emerged with Roche hsTnT assays.

ST2 Assay

ST2 was measured from plasma samples using a high-sensitivity sandwich monoclonal immunoassay (Presage® ST2 assay, Critical Diagnostics; San Diego, California, United States). The ST2 assay had a within-run coefficient of < 2.5% and total coefficient of variation of 4%.

Statistical Analysis

Categorical variables are expressed as percentages. Continuous variables are expressed as means ± standard deviation or medians [interquartile range] according to normal or nonnormal distributions. Normal distribution was assessed with normal Q-Q plots. The correlation between sNEP and NT-proBNP concentrations with age, left ventricular ejection fraction, LVEF, eGFR, assessed by the CKD-EPI (Chronic Kidney Disease Epidemiology Collaboration) equation, blood urea and body mass index (BMI) were analyzed using the rho Spearman coefficient due to skewed distribution. Statistical differences (P-value for trend) in NT-proBNP and sNEP concentrations among eGFR subgroups (≥ 60, 30 to < 60, and < 30 mL/min/1.73 m²) and BMI subgroups (< 20.5, 20.5 to < 25.5, 25.5 to < 30, and ≥ 30 kg/m²) were determined using the Spearman test.

Multivariable Cox regression analyses were performed using the backward step method. To fulfill the assumption of linearity of the covariates sNEP, NT-proBNP, hsTnT, and ST2, the logarithmic functions of sNEP, NT-proBNP and hsTnT, and the quadratic term of log (hsTnT) and of ST2 were used in the Cox models. For hazard ratio (HR) calculation in the 3 logarithm-transformed variables, a standard deviation increase was used, and ST2 analyses were performed per every 10 ng/mL change. In patients with sNEP levels below the lower range of detection (0.250 ng/mL), a concentration of 0.249 ng/mL was introduced as a continuous variable. The following variables were incorporated into the model: age, sex,
null
remained independently associated with both HF-related death (HR = 1.31; 95%CI, 1.11-1.55.; P=.001) and with the composite endpoint of HF-related death or HF hospitalization (HR = 1.20; 95%CI, 1.06-1.35; P = .005), whereas NT-proBNP did not (HR = 1.18; 95%CI, 0.97-1.43; P = .1 and HR = 1.07; 95%CI, 0.89-1.29; P = .48, respectively).

Direct comparison of sNEP vs NT-proBNP in a predictive model containing 11 clinical variables plus hsTnT and ST2 showed no differences in discrimination (all differences in area under the curve, P > .05) (Figure 2) and reclassification (all integrated discrimination improvement and net reclassification improvement, P > .05) for both endpoints added to the reference model (Table 4). The calibration was good, with a nonsignificant Hosmer-Lemeshow test in all models (all P > .05), although the models containing sNEP showed slightly lower Aikake information criterion and Bayesian information criterion values (better calibration) (data not shown). The addition of sNEP improved overall goodness-of-fit assessed by the likelihood ratio test for both the composite primary endpoint (P = .02) and CV death (P = .03), but NT-proBNP did not (P = .22 and P = .11 respectively). A significant P value in this test means that adding a new variable to the model significantly improves the accuracy of the model of reference.

Figure 3 shows the Cox regression event-free survival curve for the primary composite endpoint of CV death or HF hospitalization (Figure 3A) and survival curve for CV death (Figure 3B) according to the serum concentrations below or above the median of sNEP, hsTnT, and ST2.

**DISCUSSION**

Natriuretic peptides have become standard-of-care biomarkers in HF and are currently the only biomarkers that have crossed the research boundary to become routinely used in every day practice. Used as surrogates of myocardial stretch, natriuretic peptides are just one of the multiple counter-regulatory mechanisms activated in HF. In contrast, NEP is an essential enzyme that cleaves a majority of HF-activated neurohormones, including, but not
## Table 2
Multivariable Cox Regression Analysis for Risk of the Composite Primary Endpoint (Cardiovascular Death or Heart Failure Hospitalization)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Model with sNEP</th>
<th>Model with NT-proBNP</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>HR (95% CI)</strong></td>
<td><strong>P</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
<td>1.03 (1.01-1.04)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>0.86 (0.66-1.13)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ischemic etiology of HF</td>
<td>1.01 (0.78-1.30)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LVEF</td>
<td>1.01 (1.00-1.02)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NYHA functional class</td>
<td>1.48 (1.18-1.85)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>eGFR, ml/min/1.73 m²</td>
<td>1.00 (0.99-1.00)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Heart rate</td>
<td>1.00 (0.99-1.01)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Systolic blood pressure</td>
<td>1.00 (1.00-1.01)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Diabetes mellitus</td>
<td>1.34 (1.06-1.69)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ACE inhibitors or ARB therapy</td>
<td>0.68 (0.47-1.00)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Beta-blocker therapy</td>
<td>0.63 (0.45-0.88)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sodium</td>
<td>0.96 (0.94-1.01)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hemoglobin</td>
<td>0.90 (0.84-0.96)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>hsTnT&lt;sup&gt;a&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>1.69 (1.43-2.01)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ST&lt;sup&gt;a,b&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>1.12 (1.02-1.22)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NT-proBNP&lt;sup&gt;g&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>—</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>sNEP&lt;sup&gt;d&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>1.14 (1.02-1.27)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

95% CI, 95% confidence interval; ACE, angiotensin-converting enzyme; ARB, angiotensin receptor blockers; eGFR, estimated glomerular filtration rate; HF, heart failure; HR, hazard ratio; hsTnT, high-sensitivity cardiac troponin T; LVEF, left ventricular ejection fraction; NEP, neprilysin; NT-proBNP, N-terminal pro-B-type natriuretic peptide; NYHA, New York Heart Association; sNEP, soluble neprilysin.

<sup>a</sup> High-sensitivity cardiac troponin T as log (hsTnT); N-terminal pro-B-type natriuretic peptide as log (NT-proBNP); neprilysin as log (NEP). For hazard ratio calculation in the 3 logarithm-transformed variables, a 1 standard deviation increase was used.

<sup>b</sup> For log (hsTnT<sup>2</sup>): P = .001 in the model containing neprilysin and P = .001 in the model containing N-terminal pro-B-type natriuretic peptide.

<sup>c</sup> For ST<sup>2</sup> as ST<sup>2</sup>/10 ng/mL.

<sup>d</sup> For ST<sup>2</sup>, P = .05 in the model containing NEP and P = .04 in the model containing NT-proBNP.

## Table 3
Multivariable Cox Regression Analysis for Risk of Cardiovascular Death

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Model with sNEP</th>
<th>Model with NT-proBNP</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>HR (95% CI)</strong></td>
<td><strong>P</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
<td>1.03 (1.02-1.05)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>0.78 (0.56-1.08)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ischemic etiology of HF</td>
<td>0.97 (0.72-1.31)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LVEF</td>
<td>1.01 (1.00-1.02)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NYHA functional class</td>
<td>1.56 (1.21-2.05)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>eGFR, ml/min/1.73 m²</td>
<td>1.00 (0.99-1.00)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Heart rate</td>
<td>1.00 (0.99-1.01)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Systolic blood pressure</td>
<td>1.00 (0.99-1.01)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Diabetes mellitus</td>
<td>1.31 (1.00-1.72)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ACE inhibitors or ARB therapy</td>
<td>0.63 (0.41-0.98)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Beta-blocker therapy</td>
<td>0.54 (0.37-0.79)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sodium</td>
<td>0.96 (0.92-1.00)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Haemoglobin</td>
<td>0.96 (0.88-1.04)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>hsTnT&lt;sup&gt;a&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>1.78 (1.45-2.18)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ST&lt;sup&gt;a,b&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>1.13 (1.00-1.26)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NT-proBNP&lt;sup&gt;g&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>—</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>sNEP&lt;sup&gt;d&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>1.15 (1.01-1.31)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

95% CI, 95% confidence interval; ACE, angiotensin-converting enzyme; ARB, angiotensin receptor blockers; eGFR, estimated glomerular filtration rate; HF, heart failure; HR, hazard ratio; hsTnT, high-sensitivity cardiac troponin T; LVEF, left ventricular ejection fraction; NEP, neprilysin; NT-proBNP, N-terminal pro-B-type natriuretic peptide; NYHA, New York Heart Association; sNEP, soluble neprilysin.

<sup>a</sup> High-sensitivity cardiac troponin T as log (hsTnT); N-terminal pro-B-type natriuretic peptide as log (NT-proBNP); neprilysin as log (NEP). For hazard ratio calculation in the 3 logarithm-transformed variables, a 1 standard deviation increase was used.

<sup>b</sup> For log (hsTnT<sup>2</sup>): P = .007 in the model containing neprilysin and P = .01 in the model containing N-terminal pro-B-type natriuretic peptide.

<sup>c</sup> For ST<sup>2</sup> as ST<sup>2</sup>/10 ng/mL.

<sup>d</sup> For ST<sup>2</sup>, P = .09 in the model containing neprilysin and P = .05 in the model containing N-terminal pro-B-type natriuretic peptide.
Reclassification in limited IDI, hemoglobin, heart ST2, depicted containing beta-blocker therapy, and angiotensin-converting enzyme inhibitor or angiotensin receptor blockers therapy. The model also containing soluble nephrin is depicted as a green line and the model also N-terminal pro-B-type natriuretic peptide is depicted as a blue line. A: composite endpoint of cardiovascular death and heart failure hospitalization ($P = .83$) for the comparison between the core model and the model also containing N-terminal pro-B-type natriuretic peptide; $P = .24$ for the comparison between the core model and the model also containing soluble nephrin, and $P = .22$ for the direct comparison between the 2 models containing neurohormonal biomarkers). B: cardiovascular death ($P = .87$, $P = .26$, and $P = .40$ respectively for the same comparisons). AUC, area under the curve sNEP, soluble nephrin; NT-proBNP, N-terminal pro-B-type natriuretic peptide.

Table 4
Reclassification for the Composite Endpoint of Cardiovascular Death and Heart Failure Hospitalization and for Cardiovascular Death According to the Addition of Soluble Nephrin or N-terminal Pro-B-type Natriuretic Peptide-the Core Model

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Composite primary endpoint</th>
<th>Cardiovascular death</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Core model + NT-proBNP</td>
<td>Core model + sNEP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IDI</td>
<td>0.0 (–0.3 to 0.3); $P = .94^a$</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NRI</td>
<td>0.3 (–3.1 to 3.6); $P = .86^a$</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IDI Reference</td>
<td>0.5 (–0.1 to 1.1); $P = .08^b$</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NRI Reference</td>
<td>Reference</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

IDI, integrated discrimination improvement; NRI, net reclassification improvement; sNEP, soluble nephrin; NT-proBNP, N-terminal pro-B-type natriuretic peptide.
Core model: age, sex, New York Heart Association functional class, left ventricular ejection fraction, ischemic etiology, diabetes, estimated glomerular filtration rate, hemoglobin, sodium, beta-blocker therapy, angiotensin-converting enzyme inhibitor or angiotensin receptor blockers treatment, ST2, and hsTnT.

Natriuretic peptides were recognized as class Ia biomarkers of prognosis in the 2013 American College of Cardiology/American Heart Association HF guidelines. A multitude of prospective and retrospective studies have consistently confirmed the usefulness of both BNP and NT-proBNP in predicting risk in HF. Nevertheless, in the post-PARADIGM era, NT-proBNP may emerge as a stand-alone natriuretic peptide biomarker. Indeed, with the advent of angiotensin receptor and nephrin inhibitors, particularly after the ground-breaking results of the PARADIGM-HF with LCZ696, circulating levels of BNP will almost certainly not be suitable for prognosis, monitoring, and therapeutic guidance. Packer et al elegantly demonstrated that treatment with LCZ696 exerts its beneficial effects by inhibiting NEP, which subsequently inhibits BNP degradation, persistently maintaining high BNP levels limited to, natriuretic peptides. Therefore, the recent identification of a soluble form of NEP with strong independent prognostic value has raised the potential of sNEP as a truly comprehensive neurohormonal biomarker in HF. Here, we performed a head-to-head comparison of both biomarkers within a multimarker strategy that also included ST2 and hsTnT for HF prognostication.

Three conclusions emerged from this study. First, both sNEP and NT-proBNP performed similarly in risk stratification in a large cohort with long-term follow-up of real-life patients with HF. Second, sNEP was unaffected by renal dysfunction and BMI. Third, in the context of multimarker analyses, particularly with the incorporation of ST2 and hsTnT, both of which have been shown consistently to be strong prognosticators in chronic HF, only sNEP retained its prognostic value.

Figure 2. Area under the curve for the predictive models. Core model (red line): age, sex, ischemic etiology of heart failure, left ventricular ejection fraction, New York Heart Association functional class, presence of diabetes mellitus, hemoglobin, serum sodium, estimated glomerular filtration rate, high-sensitivity troponin T, ST2, beta-blocker therapy, and angiotensin-converting enzyme inhibitor or angiotensin receptor blockers therapy. The model also containing soluble nephrin is depicted as a green line and the model also N-terminal pro-B-type natriuretic peptide is depicted as a blue line. A: composite endpoint of cardiovascular death and heart failure hospitalization ($P = .83$) for the comparison between the core model and the model also containing N-terminal pro-B-type natriuretic peptide; $P = .24$ for the comparison between the core model and the model also containing soluble nephrin, and $P = .22$ for the direct comparison between the 2 models containing neurohormonal biomarkers). B: cardiovascular death ($P = .87$, $P = .26$, and $P = .40$ respectively for the same comparisons). AUC, area under the curve sNEP, soluble nephrin; NT-proBNP, N-terminal pro-B-type natriuretic peptide.
among treated patients. LCZ696 dissociates the molecular balance between BNP and NT-proBNP such that circulating BNP may no longer reflect the true myocardial stretch, but rather sustained NEP inhibition.\textsuperscript{15} In contrast, NT-proBNP, not an NEP substrate, exhibited a progressive decline in LCZ696-treated patients as HF improved.

In a recent study,\textsuperscript{7} our group demonstrated for the first time that high levels of sNEP are found in the circulation of patients with HF and that sNEP concentrations are indicators of adverse outcomes for both CV mortality and morbidity. These data were important for better understanding of sNEP pathobiology in HF and for putting the results obtained in the PARADIGM-HF Trial into context. Nevertheless, the results reported here show that sNEP also provides independent information to other biomarkers commonly used for HF risk stratification and may be an alternative to natriuretic peptides. A current limitation is that the assay used for sNEP determination is not approved for clinical use and requires \textit{ad hoc} fine-tuning, but it has good intra- and inter-assay coefficients of variation. This assay displays 0\% cross-reactivity with the 2 metallopeptidases most similar to this sequence, namely endothelin-converting enzymes 1 and 2, and does not display cross-reactivity with erythrocyte cell-surface antigen (Kell), another protein with strong homology with NEP.\textsuperscript{16}

Renal dysfunction and high BMI are becoming epidemic in HF patients. A recent report from the European Society of Cardiology HF long-term registry indicates that 26.4\% of patients hospitalized with HF and 18.2\% of chronic HF patients have renal dysfunction and have a median body mass index of 28 kg/m\textsuperscript{2}.\textsuperscript{17} Moreover, data from our group showed that, depending on the equation used to calculate estimated glomerular filtration rate, the prevalence of renal failure (defined as eGFR < 60 mL/min/1.73 m\textsuperscript{2}) may be as high as 64\% in ambulatory patients with chronic HF.\textsuperscript{18} The use of a biomarker significantly affected by these comorbidities may hamper widespread clinical use for prognostication. Given that plasma NT-proBNP is excreted by the kidney, we found, as expected, that decreased renal function is independently associated with higher plasma NT-proBNP concentrations. Previous studies have suggested that plasma NT-proBNP concentrations increase in patients with kidney dysfunction due to impaired clearance;\textsuperscript{19} however, other studies have suggested that this finding may be explained by increased cardiac secretion due to coexistent CV disease.\textsuperscript{20} In this study, sNEP was unaffected by renal function, but many unsettled issues remain and the exact excretion mechanism of sNEP is currently uncertain. In regards to BMI, an important clinical factor influencing outcomes in HF patients,\textsuperscript{21,22} sNEP concentration remained unaffected across BMI strata, whereas NT-proBNP showed a well-recognized reduction at higher BMI.\textsuperscript{23} Taken together, our data indicate that sNEP is a novel independent prognostic biomarker that does not require adjustments for most common HF comorbidities.

Interest is increasing in multimarker strategies to examine panels of biomarkers that assess different pathophysiological pathways.\textsuperscript{24} Several recently reported scores for risk prediction assessment have shown that multiple biomarker scoring is superior to a conventional risk score including clinical parameters and NT-proBNP.\textsuperscript{25,26} Additional predictive information from different biological pathways reflects the multisystemic character of HF. In this study, we examined the value of ST2, which is indicative of fibrosis,\textsuperscript{26} and hsTnT, which is reflective of myocyte injury\textsuperscript{27} in combination with sNEP or NT-proBNP, which are both indicative of neurohormonal activation, using a comprehensive clinical model including 11 prognostically meaningful variables (age, sex,

![Figure 3](image-url)
ischemic etiology of HF, LVEF, New York Heart Association, NYHA functional class, diabetes mellitus, hemoglobin, sodium, eGFR, beta blockers, and angiotensin-converting enzyme inhibitors/angiotensin receptor blockers therapy). Remarkably, sNEP retained its predictive value in combination with ST2 + hsTnT for CV- and HF-related outcomes, whereas NT-proBNP was no longer relevant. A number of biomarker panels may perform equivalently; choosing which one to employ in clinical practice will depend on factors such as cost, ease of assay, and potential therapeutic implications. Our present multimarker study, beyond the description of sNEP as a valuable biomarker in HF recently described,7 suggests that the triad ST2, hsTnT, and sNEP may eventually become a panel of choice once the sNEP assay is refined.

Neither sNEP nor NT-proBNP were independently associated with all-cause death in the multivariate analysis. It should be taken into account that non-CV death was not negligible (37.4% of patients) and this might have influenced the results. We chose the same endpoints as the PARADIGM-HF Trial, which are the most accepted in recent HF trials. Remarkably, sNEP also remained independently associated with HF-related death and HF hospitalization whereas NT-proBNP did not.

**Limitations**

The experimental assay for sNEP measurement described here has long incubation times, making it ill-suited for daily clinical use. We have no data on the stability of sNEP while frozen so we cannot rule out the possibility that the sNEP concentrations found would have been different in fresh samples. Samples were obtained during routine visits and no data on the clinical stability of patients (ie, possible decomposition during the 3 previous months) were collected. However, the sample is representative of ambulatory chronic HF patients in real life. Although the study population was a real-life HF population with different HF etiologies, it was treated at a specific multidisciplinary HF unit in a tertiary care hospital; most patients were referred from the cardiology department and, thus, were relatively young men with HF of ischemic etiology and reduced LVEF. As such, these results cannot necessarily be extrapolated to a more global HF population. In the near future, with the likely widespread use of NEP inhibitors in patients with HF and reduced LVEF, the prognostic value and use of sNEP and other circulating biomarkers may change.

Prospective studies are needed to assess tailored strategies for pharmacological NEP inhibition based on measurements of sNEP levels in patients with HF. The appropriate use of biomarkers supporting management of patients with HF should help to reduce the costs of a very costly disease in developed countries.28

**CONCLUSIONS**

When added to a multimarker strategy that also incorporates ST2 and hsTnT, sNEP remained an independent prognosticator while NT-proBNP lost significance as risk stratifier in ambulatory patients with HF. In head-to-head analyses, sNEP performed similarly to NT-proBNP, but it was less influenced by comorbidities (renal function and BMI).

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**CONFLICTS OF INTEREST**

A. Bayes-Genís and J. Lupón have received lecture honoraria from Roche Diagnostics and A. Bayes-Genís from Critical Diagnostics. A. Bayes-Genís and J. Lupón report a relationship with Critical Diagnostics.

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