Clinical features and outcomes of patients with refractory out-of-hospital cardiac arrest and an initial shockable rhythm

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Background: Clinical features of patients presenting with refractory out-of-hospital cardiac arrest (OHCA) and initial shockable rhythms of ventricular fibrillation/pulseless ventricular tachycardia (VF/pVT) remain poorly described.

Purpose: This study evaluated clinical characteristics, angiographic findings, and short-term outcomes among patients with refractory OHCA (defined as incessant VF/pVT after ≥3 direct-current shocks) compared to those without refractory OHCA.

Methods: Of 761 consecutive patients hospitalized for OHCA between 2014–2018 at two large tertiary health services in Victoria, Australia, 204 (27%) had an initial shockable rhythm and were stratified by the presence (n=74, 36%) or absence (n=130, 64%) of refractory OHCA. Primary outcome was in-hospital mortality. Multivariable logistic regression was performed to evaluate independent predictors of in-hospital mortality.

Results: The majority of patients were male (77%) and the median age was 62 years [IQR 52–72]. Refractory OHCA patients had longer cardiopulmonary resuscitation (23 vs 15 minutes), more frequently required ≥450 mg of amiodarone (34% vs 3.8%), had cardiogenic shock (80% vs 55%) necessitating higher adrenaline dose (4.0 vs 1.0 mg) and higher rates of mechanical ventilation (92% vs 74%) (all p<0.01). A total of 167 patients (82%) underwent coronary angiography, and refractory OHCA patients were less likely to be selected (74% vs 86%, p=0.035).

Conclusions: Refractory VF/pVT OHCA was associated with more intensive resuscitation, higher rates of acute coronary occlusion and poorer in-hospital outcomes, underscoring the need for future studies in this extreme-risk subgroup.

Figure 1: Independent predictors of in-hospital mortality for overall cohort

Caption: CI indicates confidence interval; OHCA, out-of-hospital cardiac arrest; OR, odds ratio; pVT, pulseless ventricular tachycardia; VF, ventricular fibrillation.
Figure 2: Independent predictors of in-hospital mortality for refractory OHCA group

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>$p$-value</th>
<th>95% CI</th>
<th>OR</th>
<th>Variable</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>0.007</td>
<td>1.16–2.53</td>
<td>1.71</td>
<td>Age per 10-year increase</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>0.043</td>
<td>1.01–1.89</td>
<td>1.38</td>
<td>Total pre-hospital adrenaline dose per 1 mg increase</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>0.042</td>
<td>1.00–1.57</td>
<td>1.13</td>
<td>Number of DCR attempts per 1 additional shock</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>0.039</td>
<td>0.09–0.94</td>
<td>0.28</td>
<td>Coronary revascularisation</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Caption: CI indicates confidence interval; DCR, direct current cardioversion; OR, odds ratio.

Figure 2