Impact of chronic obstructive pulmonary disease on the natural history of atrial fibrillation: a report from the GLORIA-AF registry phase II & III

G.F. Romiti1, M. Prioletti2, B. Corica1, D.A. Mei1, F. Frost1, A. Bisson1, G. Boriani3, B. Olshansky4, T.F. Chao5, M.V. Huisman6, G.Y.H. Lip1

1University of Liverpool, Liverpool Centre for Cardiovascular Science, Liverpool, United Kingdom of Great Britain & Northern Ireland
2University of Milan, Department of Clinical Sciences and Community Health, Milan, Italy
3University of Modena and Reggio Emilia, Department of Biomedical, Metabolic and Neural Sciences, Modena, Italy
4University of Iowa, Iowa, United States of America
5Taipei Veterans General Hospital, Taipei, Taiwan
6Leiden University Medical Center, Leiden, Netherlands (The)

On behalf of GLORIA-AF Investigators

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Background: The relationship between chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD) and atrial fibrillation (AF) remains unclear. COPD may influence the management and prognosis of AF and may affect treatments, including beta-blockers prescription.

Purpose: To investigate the association between COPD and AF, and assess the impact of COPD on treatment patterns and major adverse outcomes in a large contemporary global cohort of AF patients.

Methods: The GLORIA-AF Registry enrolled newly diagnosed AF patients with at least 1 stroke risk factor. Diagnosis of COPD and treatments (including oral anticoagulant [OAC]) prescribed were recorded by investigators at baseline. We evaluated clinical characteristics associated with the diagnosis of COPD at baseline, OAC and other treatment prescription, and risk of OAC discontinuation. Adjusted Cox-regression models were utilized to analyse the relationship of COPD with major outcomes including a primary composite outcome of all-cause death and major adverse cardiovascular events (MACE).

Results: 36,263 patients (mean age 70.1 ± 10.5 years, 45.3% females) were included in this analysis. Patients with COPD (n=2,261; 6.2%) were older, and had higher thromboembolic risk. Increasing age, smoking status, BMI and cardiovascular comorbidities were associated with higher odds of COPD diagnosis at baseline. COPD was associated with higher odds of receiving OACs (Odds Ratio [OR] and 95% Confidence Interval [CI]: 1.31, 1.15-1.49), and with a higher risk of discontinuing OACs during follow-up (hazard ratio (HR): 1.14, 95%CI: 1.03-1.27). COPD patients were more likely prescribed with digoxin and verapamil or diltiazem, with lower prescription of beta-blockers (OR [95%CI]: 0.79, 0.72-0.87; Figure 1) and amiodarone (OR [95%CI]: 0.83, 0.73-0.96). Patients with COPD were at higher risk of the primary outcome of all-cause death and MACE (Hazard Ratio [95%CI]: 1.78, 1.58-2.01; Figure 2), and were also found at higher risk of all-cause mortality, cardiovascular death, MACE and major bleeding, while no statistically significant differences were observed for thromboembolism. There was no statistically significant interaction between beta-blocker use and risk of the primary composite outcome in COPD patients.

Conclusions: COPD is associated with different treatment patterns in AF patients, higher risk of OAC discontinuation, and ultimately a poorer clinical prognosis, with an increased risk of all-cause death, MACE and major bleeding. Beta-blocker use appeared safe in COPD patients.
Figure 1
Figure 2

Survival probability over time (months) for participants with and without COPD, showing a statistically significant difference (p < 0.0001). The number of participants at risk decreases over time, with a higher number of participants in the COPD group compared to the no COPD group.