Macular Impairment in Fabry Disease: A Morpho-functional Assessment by Swept-Source OCT Angiography and Focal Electroretinography

Angelo Maria Minnella,1,2 Lucilla Barbano,3 Elena Verrecchia,4 Francesco Martelli,5 Valeria Pagliei,1 Gloria Gambini,1 Giorgio Placidi,1 Benedetto Falsini,1,2 Aldo Caporossi,1,2 and Raffaele Manna4

1Institute of Ophthalmology, Università Cattolica del S. Cuore, Rome, Italy
2Fondazione Policlinico Universitario A. Gemelli IRCCS, Rome, Italy
3IRCCS- Fondazione Bietti, Rome, Italy
4Periodic Fever and Rare Diseases Research Centre, Università Cattolica del S. Cuore, Fondazione Policlinico Universitario A. Gemelli IRCCS, Rome, Italy
5Department of Cardiovascular, Dysmetabolic and Aging-associated Diseases, National Institute of Health, Rome, Italy

Correspondence: Lucilla Barbano, IRCCS- Fondazione Bietti, Via Livenza 3, Rome 00198, Italy; lucillabarbano@gmail.com.

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PURPOSE. Fabry disease (FD) is a multiorgan X-linked condition characterized by a deficiency of the lysosomal enzyme alpha-galactosidase A, resulting in a progressive intralysosomal deposit of globotriaosylceramide. The aim of this study was to evaluate the macular ultrastructure of the vascular network using optical coherence tomography angiography (OCTA) and to evaluate macular function using focal electroretinography (fERG) in Fabry patients (FPs).

METHODS. A total of 20 FPs (38 eyes, mean age 57 ± 2.12 SD, range of 27–80 years) and 17 healthy controls (27 eyes, mean age 45 years ± 20.50 SD, range of 24–65 years) were enrolled in the study. Color fundus photography, swept-source optical coherence tomography (SS-OCT), OCTA and fERG were performed in all subjects. The OCTA foveal avascular zone (FAZ), vasculature structure, superficial and deep retinal plexus densities (images of 4.5 × 4.5 mm) and fERG amplitudes were measured. Group differences were statistically assessed by Student’s t-test and ANOVA.

RESULTS. In the FP group, the FAZ areas of the superficial and deep plexuses were enlarged (P = 0.036, t = 2.138; P < 0.001, t = −3.889, respectively), the vessel density was increased in the superficial plexus, and the fERG amplitude was reduced (P < 0.001, t = −10.647) compared with those in healthy controls. No significant correlations were found between the structural and functional data.

CONCLUSIONS. OCTA vascular abnormalities and reduced fERG amplitudes indicate subclinical signs of microangiopathy with early retinal dysfunction in FPs. This study highlights the relevance of OCTA imaging analysis in the identification of abnormal macular vasculature as an ocular hallmark of FD.

Keywords: Fabry disease, retina, OCT angiography, focal electroretinogram, innovative biotechnology

Fabry disease (FD) (OMIM 301500) is a lysosomal storage disorder resulting from a deficient or absent activity of the lysosomal enzyme alpha-galactosidase A, which is encoded by the GLA gene on chromosome X (Xq22). This enzyme is involved in the degradation of glycosphingolipids, catalyzing the galactose terminal hydrolysis of globotriaosylceramide (GB3) by transforming it into lactosylceramide.1–3 In the presence of GLA gene variants, the enzyme activity may be reduced or absent, thus leading to the progressive deposition of glycosphingolipids, including GB3, in various tissues, such as the vascular endothelium, kidneys, smooth muscle cells, and neuronal ganglions, resulting in subsequent cellular damage. The clinical presentation and disease severity may vary; although the onset of FD is often observed during childhood, it worsens during adulthood. Acroparesthesia, skin angiokeratomas, abdominal pain, fever, and anhidrosis or hypohidrosis are the most common symptoms in children. In adults, cardiac involvement with arrhythmias and left ventricular hypertrophy, cerebrovascular and renal dysfunction with proteinuria, and progressive kidney failure predominate the symptoms. An early diagnosis would lead to enzyme replacement therapy before any irreversible damage, thus reducing the risk of disease progression to organ failure.4,5 The time of therapy as well as the individual response are important prognostic factors.

The ocular involvement in FD usually consists of corneal abnormalities, which present as cornea verticillata, lens opacity, and/or vascular abnormalities.6,7 Deposits of GB3 in the cornea take on a vortex pattern and are located in the corneal epithelium, basal and Bowman’s membranes, and the anterior stroma, whereas they have not...
been demonstrated in the endothelium.8,9 Anterior capsular and radial posterior subcapsular cataracts, increased tortuosity, or telangiectasia or small angiomata of conjunctival and retinal vessels are frequently observed.10,11 Indeed, pathological deposits of GB3 in the vascular endothelium11,12 may induce decreased vessel wall resistance to hydrostatic pressure, resulting in vascular tortuosity12 and impaired tissue peripheral perfusion.13

These vascular abnormalities have been studied to date with color fundus photography and fluorescein angiography.10 The recent introduction of optical coherence tomography angiography (OCTA) enables the assessment of retinal and choroidal vascular flow features in several ocular vasculopathies without the injection of dye.15 With the exception of a few reports (Hufendiek K, et al. IOVS 2018;59:ARVO E-Abstract 5460; Baur J, et al. IOVS 2018;59:ARVO E-Abstract 4249), little information regarding the use of OCTA in Fabry patients (FPs) is available in the literature. To our knowledge, the relationship between morphological retinal vascular changes in FD, which are described using OCTA, and their functional implication, as detected using focal electoretinography (fERG), has not yet been underlined. The aim of this study was to evaluate the superficial and deep capillary plexuses, the choriocapillaris and the foveal avascular zone (FAZ) using OCTA and to investigate macular function using fERG.

METHODS

The study was conducted at the Institute of Ophthalmology, Università Cattolica del S. Cuore, Fondazione Policlinico Universitario A. Gemelli IRCCS, in Rome (Italy) in accordance with the principles of the Declaration of Helsinki.

The sample size of the study was preliminarily estimated by considering the results of a pilot series of measurements (n = 10) obtained in FPs, as well as in controls. Assuming a standard deviation of 20% for both the morphological and electrophysiological measurements, a total sample size of 36 subjects (20 FPs and 16 healthy controls) provided a power of 0.8, at a P value of less than 0.05, to detect a between-group difference of 25%.

A total of 20 patients (38 eyes) with a diagnosis of FD were enrolled between March 2017 and June 2017 (12 males and 8 females; mean age 57 ± 2.12 SD; age range of 27–80 years).

All patients were selected from a larger cohort (n = 57) that was followed by the Department of Periodic Fever and Rare Disease Research Centre of the same university. Recruitment was performed according to a collaboration between the two departments and following an internal procedure of ocular evaluation of FPs.

An age-matched group (mean age 45 ± 20.50 SD, ranging from 24 to 65 years) of 17 healthy subjects (10 males and 7 females), providing 27 eyes with no signs of any ocular disease, served as controls.

The essential requirement to be included in the study was an established diagnosis of FD demonstrated by performing an enzymatic assay, which was confirmed by genetic testing. FPs, aged 18 years or older, who were affected by different forms of the disease (classic, mild, and late onset), which were defined based on organ involvement and clinical features, were included in this study. Patients were evaluated globally, and disease severity was estimated using a severity score (Mainz severity score index) based on general, cardiological, nephrological and neurologic involvement, which contributed to emphasizing the heterogeneity of the sample.5 All data are summarized in Table 1.

The comorbidity of diabetes, atherosclerotic vasculopathy, glaucoma, or any other macular or retinal disorders was regarded as exclusion criteria. Similarly, patients with optical media opacity (lens opacity corresponding to a grading of > N1, C2, P1 in accordance with the lens opacities classification system5)16 and/or those who had an inability to maintain or difficulty maintaining visual fixation, which would have limited visualization of the retinal structure and execution of the functional examinations, were excluded from the study. Two eyes in the FPs were excluded due to severe optic media opacity (dense cataract C4) and retinal disorder (macular pucker) in accordance with the exclusion criteria of the study; among the controls, seven eyes were excluded because they presented with myopia or hyperopia >2 diopters (D). The remaining study eyes were emmetropic or slightly myopic (<1

### Table 1. Genotype and Phenotype of the 20 FPs Included in the Study and the Corresponding Clinical Ocular Signs

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Patient</th>
<th>Genotype</th>
<th>Phenotype</th>
<th>Ocular Signs</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>c.548G&gt;C</td>
<td>Classical</td>
<td>Cornea verticillata, cataract, conjunctival and retinal vessel tortuosity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>c.758T&gt;C</td>
<td>Mild</td>
<td>Normal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>c.907A&gt;T</td>
<td>Mild</td>
<td>Conjunctival, eyelid rim, and retinal vessel tortuosity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>c.644A&gt;G</td>
<td>Late onset</td>
<td>Conjunctival, eyelid rim, and retinal vessel tortuosity, cataract</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>c.747C&gt;A</td>
<td>Mild</td>
<td>Normal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>c.758T&gt;C</td>
<td>Classical</td>
<td>Conjunctival and retinal vessel tortuosity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>IVS5+1G&gt;C</td>
<td>Classical</td>
<td>Cataract, conjunctival and retinal vessel tortuosity</td>
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<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>IVS5+1G&gt;T</td>
<td>Classical</td>
<td>Cataract, conjunctival and retinal vessel tortuosity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>IVS3+1G&gt;A</td>
<td>Classical</td>
<td>Cornea verticillata, cataract, conjunctival and retinal vessel tortuosity</td>
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<tr>
<td>10</td>
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<td>Conjunctival vessel tortuosity</td>
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<td>11</td>
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<td>12</td>
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<td>Cataract, conjunctival and retinal vessel tortuosity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15</td>
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<td>Late onset</td>
<td>Cataract</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16</td>
<td>c.730G&gt;A</td>
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<td>Cornea verticillata, conjunctival vessel tortuosity</td>
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<td>17</td>
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<td>Cornea “verticillata,” conjunctival and retinal vessel tortuosity, cataract</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18</td>
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<td>Mild</td>
<td>Conjunctival vessel tortuosity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19</td>
<td>c.548G&gt;C</td>
<td>Mild</td>
<td>Normal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20</td>
<td>c.647 A&gt;G</td>
<td>Classical</td>
<td>Cornea “verticillata,” conjunctival and retinal vessel tortuosity, cataract</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The phenotypes include classical (multiple, complete organ involvement), mild (incomplete organ involvement), and late onset (occurring in adult age or involving a single organ or system).
Sph D). Given such small refractive errors, axial length was not predicted to influence FAZ or vessel density measurements.

All patients underwent a full ophthalmological examination, including best corrected visual acuity (BCVA) and IOP measurements, as well as anterior segment slit lamp biomicroscopy and fundus ophthalmoscopy after pupil dilation with tropicamide 1% eye drops.

Color fundus images, structural OCT three-dimensional (3D) scans and OCTA 4.5 × 4.5-mm images were obtained using a DRI Triton Swept-Source OCTA device (Topcon, Tokyo, Japan). The quality of the B-scans was evaluated using the TopQ index provided by the device software. As far as OCTA, the quality was assessed on the basis of the mean value of the TopQ index.

All B-scans were reviewed by two expert graders (AMM, LB) to exclude cases of failed segmentation. In cases of incorrect automatic segmentation, segmentation boundaries were manually adjusted. OCTA measurements of the FAZ area were performed by two investigators (AMM, LB) who were blinded to the clinical diagnosis, as well as to each other’s findings. Spearman’s rank-order correlation analysis was carried out. The agreement between the results of the investigators’ analyses was satisfactory (correlation coefficient > 0.8). The FAZ area was manually calculated on the en face scans of the superficial and deep capillary plexuses.

The superficial and deep capillary plexus images were analyzed after applying the device proprietary projection artifact removal algorithm. OCTA scans (320 × 320 pixels, 24-bit RGB) of the superficial (layer 1) and deep capillary plexuses (layer 2) and of the outer retinal (layer 3) and choriocapillaris (layer 4) layers were checked for projection artifacts, computing 2D correlation coefficients between layers for each eye.17,18 Scans with correlation coefficients greater than 0.25 (six FP eyes and one control eye) were discarded. Projection-free OCTA images of the 16 FPs (30 eyes, 120 images) and of the 10 age-matched healthy controls (19 eyes, 76 images) were selected for further analysis. The images were processed with a specifically developed algorithm, analogous to that reported by Kim et al.,19 implemented in MATLAB (MathWorks, Inc., Natick, MA, USA) to compute a vascular density score for each image.

In detail, the following steps were performed:

1. The RGB images were converted to grayscale, eliminating the hue and saturation information while retaining the luminance, following International Telecommunication Union Recommendation BT.601.7,20 Annex 2.
2. A modified version21 of Niblack’s algorithm22 was used to remove uneven background luminance artifacts.
3. The image contrast was enhanced using histogram equalization.
4. Image binarization was performed following the method of Ridler and Calvard.23
5. Binary image morphological operations 24 (spur, majority, fill) were performed.

The density score was calculated as a ratio (expressed as a percentage) of the number of pixels of the corresponding vascular tissue to the total number of pixels in the image.24

Eight randomly chosen layer 1 angiographic images (four FPs, four controls; two right eyes and two left eyes for FPs and controls) were manually segmented by skilled operators (AMM, LB) to obtain a ground truth segmentation for comparison with the segmentation obtained using the algorithm.

A representative image of the eye of an FP that was analyzed with this system is shown in Figure 1.

fERG was performed as described in previously published works.25 We assessed a monocular recording with an Ag-AgCl electrode taped on the skin over the lower eyelid after pupil dilation with tropicamide 1% eye drops. A similar electrode was placed over the eyelid of the contralateral patched eye and was used as a reference. Stimuli consisted of flickering uniform fields that were generated by an array of eight red light-emitting diodes (LEDs) covering an 18° diameter with a mean luminance.
A diffusing filter was placed well established that a 41-Hz flicker reflects the activity of both harmonic component, as originally reported by Seiple et al.27 mental conditions, was optimal for the amplitude of the first frequency of only 41 Hz. This frequency, under our experi-
immediately illuminated at the same mean luminance as the stimulus.
primarily Ganzfeld bowl (Primus; LACE Elettronica, Pisa, Italy) that was
generated and presented on the rear of a modified stimulus was sinusoidally produced by a custom-made digital
wavelength of the stimulus was 630 nm. The flickering stimulus was 20%).
the recorded fERG data were above the noise level (noise amplitude <0.08 mV in all cases) and were sufficiently reliable (the variation coefficient in amplitude was 20%).

An independent samples t-test was conducted to compare the vascular density score in the images of both eyes of the FPs and controls.

A 2-way ANOVA with a post hoc Tukey test was conducted to compare the main effects of subject type (patient, control) and retinal layers (1, 2, 3, 4 as described above) on the density score. A P < 0.01 was chosen as the level of significance for this correlation.

In comparing FPs and controls, the potential for age bias was evaluated by testing the effect of age by linear regression analysis on morphometric and electrophysiological measurements. No significant effect of age was detected in the 40 to 60 age range; therefore, no correction for age was applied to the data.

## Results

The mean BCVA among the 20 patients (38 eyes) who were diagnosed with FD and included in our study was 83 letters Early Treatment Diabetic Retinopathy Study (ETDRS) (corre-
sponding to 0.04 logMAR) in the right eye and 84 (0.02 logMAR) in the left eye. The mean BCVA in the group of the healthy controls was 90 letters ETDRS in the right eye (~0.10 logMAR) and 92 in the left eye (~0.14 logMAR). For BCVA, no significant difference was found between the FPs and controls.

Among the prototypical findings of FD, cornea verticillata (Fig. 2A), increased tortuosity of the conjunctival vessels (Fig. 2B), increased tortuosity of vessels on the eyelid rim, anterior and posterior cortical opacity, and increased tortuosity of the retinal vessels (Fig. 2C) were observed in 7, 14, 3, 10, and 11 patients affected by the disease, respectively.

All patients in both groups had a normal IOP, a mean value of 13.5 mm Hg in FP and a mean of 13 mm Hg in controls. No alterations in macular thickness, morphology, and/or reflectivity were observed on OCT 3D scans in either FPs or controls.

In detail, a qualitative analysis of the OCTA scans showed a rarefaction of the superficial and deep retinal capillary plexuses, with the latter being more compromised, as a reduction in the blood flow in the perifoveal area (see also Fig. 6) was also noticed in the eyes of FPs compared to those of controls.

### Table 1: Ophthalmological characteristics of the study population.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Clinical Findings</th>
<th>n° patients</th>
<th>Eye</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Cornea verticillata (A)</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>OU</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Increased tortuosity of conjunctival vessels (B)</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>OU</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Increased tortuosity of eyelid rim</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>OU</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anterior or Posterior cataract</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>RE</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Increased tortuosity of retinal vessels (C)</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>OU</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 2. Ophthalmological features of FD: (A, top left) cornea verticillata; (B, top middle) increased tortuosity of conjunctival vessels with angiomatosis and telangiectasia; (C, top right) increased tortuosity of retinal vessels. The table indicates the distribution of the listed ophthalmological signs in study patients. OU, both eyes; RE, right eye.
As a further confirmation of these findings, manual measurement of the FAZ on the OCTA scans was carried out. The mean values of the FAZ areas on the superficial and deep capillary plexuses were 274.01 ± 137.62 SD and 428.69 ± 164.47 SD in FPs and 209.62 ± 98.16 SD and 288.04 ± 105.96 SD in controls. Further analysis of these data revealed a statistically significant enlargement of the FAZ; mean values for both the deep (P < 0.001, t = −3.889) and the superficial (P < 0.05, t = 2.13) vascular plexuses in the FP group compared to those in the control group (Figs. 3A, 3B).

fERG amplitude values (µV) obtained in FPs and in controls were 0.87 ± 0.41 SD and 2.22 ± 0.24 SD, respectively. A significantly lower fERG mean amplitude was found in FPs than in controls (P < 0.001, t = −10.647) (Fig. 3C), whereas the fERG phase did not show any significant differences between the groups (t-test not significant) (Fig. 4).

Although a trend toward an association between FAZ enlargement and reduction in fERG amplitude was noticed in the eyes of the FP group, no significant correlations between FAZ enlargement values and fERG amplitude or phase measurements were observed in the eyes of FPs (Fig. 5).

A vascular density score was computed for the superficial (layer 1) and deep capillary plexuses (layer 2), the outer retina (layer 3) layers, and the choriocapillaris (layer 4). The mean vascular density values in the FP group were 14.57 ± 8.36 (layer 1), 5.27 ± 3.20 (layer 2), 8.46 ± 6.69 (layer 3), and 6.60 ± 4.02 (layer 4) layers, and the choriocapillaris (layer 4). The mean (mean FD density increase = 0.93; t[55] = −0.99) were found in the FP group.

The descriptive statistics of the computed density scores are reported in Table 2.

There was a statistically significant effect of the group on the vascular density score (P < 0.001; F15.96] = 17.29) as a result of a significant mean difference between the FPs (mean 9.04 ± 3.61 SD) and controls (mean = 8.36 ± 3.20 SD) (Table 3).

The main effect for the retinal layer yielded an F ratio of F15.96] = 542.51 (P < 0.001), indicating a significant effect of the retinal layer, as reported in Table 2. The interaction between groups (patients, controls) and retinal layer was not significant (F15.96] = 2.19, P = 0.094). Tukey’s pairwise comparison test revealed a significant (P < 0.01) increase in the density score between the patients and controls in layer 1 (mean FD density increase =1.24) but not in layers 2, 3, or 4 (Table 4).

Segmentation algorithm performance was evaluated by comparing manually segmented images with those obtained with the binarization algorithm. The estimated algorithm sensibility and specificity were 0.68 (0.32 error margin) and 0.94 (0.17 error margin), respectively.

Assessment with the Spearman rank-order analysis showed no correlation between our results and the systemic severity of the disease quantified by calculating the Mainz severity score index.

**DISCUSSION**

FD is characterized by the progressive accumulation of GB3 in any cell of the body, which leads to metabolic alterations and thus to cellular dysfunction. Several studies that have been performed in murine models have demonstrated that lysosomal deposits of GB3 may inhibit the receptors that are involved in the activation of the endothelial nitric oxide synthase enzyme, thus altering the vasoconstriction/vasodilation ratio of peripheral circulation with a consequent abnormal expression of endothelial K(Ca)3 channels.12,13 These alterations are thought to be responsible for the development of vascular abnormalities, such as increased tortuosity, telangiectasis, and microaneurysms. These vascular features may involve several organs, such as the kidney, heart, and brain, leading to the development of renal failure, coronary dysfunction, and stroke, and they are thus responsible for the reduced life expectancy in FPs.30–32

Vascular alterations also may affect the eye and the retinal vasculature and may be related to retinal ischemia and its complications.33–35 In our study, OCTA was used to investigate the vasculature features of FPs. A qualitative observation of a rarefaction of the retinal capillary plexuses, especially the deep capillary plexuses, suggests the presence of subclinical retinal ischemia, as previously found in several other retinal vasculopathies.46 (Fig. 6). Similarly, a significant enlargement in the FAZ implies a structural impairment of the macular area vasculature in this rare disease. These findings, however, were inconsistent with preserved visual acuity.

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**Table 2.** Descriptive Statistics for Computed Vascular Density Scores in Control Eyes and FP Eyes Showing the Mean and SD Values

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Layer</th>
<th>Controls (10), Mean ± SD</th>
<th>Patients (16), Mean ± SD</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Layer 1</td>
<td>13.33 ± 0.59</td>
<td>14.57 ± 1.10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Layer 2</td>
<td>8.46 ± 1.00</td>
<td>9.37 ± 1.02</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Layer 3</td>
<td>5.27 ± 0.38</td>
<td>5.54 ± 0.51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Layer 4</td>
<td>6.40 ± 0.66</td>
<td>6.69 ± 0.71</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>All layers</td>
<td>8.36 ± 3.20</td>
<td>9.04 ± 3.61</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Layers: superficial (layer 1), deep capillary plexuses (layer 2), outer retina (layer 3), and choriocapillaris (layer 4).
Figure 4. Representative examples of fERG recordings obtained from a typical FP and a control subject. On top, fERG tracings (eight blocks of responses) and their grand average (red trace) are shown. On the bottom, polar diagrams showing the response vector amplitude (in microvolts) and phase angle (in degrees) of the response fundamental harmonic (isolated by Fourier analysis) are reported. Note that the cluster of response vectors recorded from the FP eye show reduced amplitude (reduced vector length) compared with that from the control. Response phases (vector orientations) are similar between the representative patient and control.

Figure 5. Scatterplot of fERG amplitude values as a function of the deep plexus FAZ: enlargement of the FAZ did not show a significant direct correlation with a reduction in the fERG amplitude (left) or phase (right). The data from both eyes are included in the figure.
Consequently, the fERG method was used to further investigate the macular function to objectively assess the outer and middle retinal functional statuses. The deep capillaryplexus is placed between the INL and the outer plexiformlayer, where the bipolar cells are located and connected withphotoreceptors. Evidence of a decreased fERG amplitude withpreserved phase values in FPs suggests a subclinical dysfunc-
tion of the outer retinal layers.

All of these findings suggest that compromised vascularblood supply can harm photoreceptors and bipolar cells. However, no significant correlations were found between FAZ enlargement and fERG values, implying that, in addition to tissue perfusion deficits, other factors might be responsible for the observed abnormalities in outer retinal function.

For instance, the importance of the choriocapillaris layer inproviding blood supply to the retinal pigment epithelium(RPE) and the photoreceptor layers should be considered, witha possible compensatory function of the more external ocularvasculature on the retina. Another possible reason for fERGabnormalities may be the accumulation of GB3 at the level ofthe RPE and photoreceptor cell membrane, similar to whatoccurs in the vascular endothelium, which may alter synapticsignaling between bipolar cells and photoreceptor cells. Infact, it is already known that lysosomal storage disorders mayimpair membrane trafficking.37,38

All of these hypotheses need to be verified by furtherhistological or ultrastructural studies of the eyes from patientswith this rare disorder.

fERG may show high test-retest variability39 but also can becorrelated with OCT parameters when a concomitant reduc-
tion in outer nuclear layer thickness occurs. This phenomenonis not the case for FD.

Automated measurements of vascular density scores of boththesuperficial and the deep capillary plexuses were obtainedfrom an artifact-free subset of OCTA scans. FPs showed anincreased vascular density in the superficial plexus incomparison with controls; this finding may be suggestive ofvascular tortuosity, which represents a typical feature observedin FD.

The observation of FAZ enlargement associated withrarefaction of retinal capillary plexuses together with anincreased vascular density may appear contradictory. However,because an increased vascular tortuosity may affect OCT signalreflectance, this outcome, in turn, may yield an increase in thedensity score (defined as the ratio between the area detected inthe vessel and the total image area), even in cases with anenlarged FAZ area. In this view, an increase in the density scorecould be observed in subjects in whom expanded FAZ areasuggests a general blood supply impairment.

An investigation of the vascular involvement in patientswho are affected by FD was provided by the OCTA findingsand represents a major strength of this study. Moreover, thecombined use of OCTA to conduct a vascular structuralanalysis and fERG to assess retinal function provides an evendeeper and more complete assessment. In this study, fERGcan be regarded as a helpful tool in the identification of subclinicalphases of FD, as supported by the fact that even in patientswith a preclinical stage of FD, a reduction in fERG values wasobserved. In fact, two female FPs, whose medical conditionsdid not require any therapy, showed no signs other than a reduction in fERG amplitude. In our results, the decreasedfERG amplitude is a statistically significant value that is worthconsidering.

The relatively small sample size is a major limitation of thisstudy. A potential limitation to the study is the measurement ofthe eye’s refraction and not the axial length; it is plausible thatcataracts could change the lenticular contribution of refractiveerror to offset any axial length issues (i.e., a short eye withamyopic shift from the lens may be close to plano). Furtherclinical studies will validate OCTA and fERG as essential toolsfor the routine ophthalmological evaluation of patients whoare affected by FD.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Source of Variation</th>
<th>df</th>
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<td>354.05</td>
<td>542.51</td>
<td>0.09447</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interaction</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4.28</td>
<td>1.43</td>
<td>2.19</td>
<td>0.09447</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Model</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>1168.92</td>
<td>166.99</td>
<td>253.88</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Error</td>
<td>96</td>
<td>62.65</td>
<td>0.65</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Corrected total</td>
<td>103</td>
<td>1231.57</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Macular Involvement in Fabry Disease

Table 4. Tukey’s Honestly Significant Difference Test Results of the Mean Vascular Density Score Differences (Patient Score – Control Score)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Retinal Layer</th>
<th>P – C Score</th>
<th>SEM</th>
<th>q Value</th>
<th>Prob</th>
<th>LCL</th>
<th>UCL</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Layer 1</td>
<td>1.24</td>
<td>0.33</td>
<td>5.38</td>
<td>0.01</td>
<td>0.05</td>
<td>2.42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Layer 2</td>
<td>0.92</td>
<td>0.33</td>
<td>3.98</td>
<td>0.10</td>
<td>0.27</td>
<td>2.10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Layer 3</td>
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<td>0.33</td>
<td>1.16</td>
<td>0.99</td>
<td>-0.92</td>
<td>1.45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Layer 4</td>
<td>0.28</td>
<td>0.33</td>
<td>1.24</td>
<td>0.99</td>
<td>-0.90</td>
<td>1.47</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Significant effects are in bold; Alpha level = 0.01. P – C score, patient vascular density score – control vascular density score; Prob, probability; LCL, lower confidence limit; UCL, upper confidence limit.

Acknowledgments

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References


