Pre-hospital risk stratification in suspected Non ST-elevation acute coronary syndrome

Citation for published version (APA):

Document status and date:
Published: 01/01/2020

DOI:
10.26481/dis.20200903dd

Document Version:
Publisher's PDF, also known as Version of record

Please check the document version of this publication:

• A submitted manuscript is the version of the article upon submission and before peer-review. There can be important differences between the submitted version and the official published version of record. People interested in the research are advised to contact the author for the final version of the publication, or visit the DOI to the publisher's website.
• The final author version and the galley proof are versions of the publication after peer review.
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Download date: 19 Sep. 2020
SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

Until now, complete risk stratification in patients with suspected NSTE-ACS is performed in the hospital. However, since point-of-care troponin assessment has been developed, risk stratification is nowadays also performable outside the hospital. This thesis addresses the feasibility of pre-hospital risk stratification in suspected NSTE-ACS. The goals of this thesis were to investigate how low-risk patients can be accurately identified by paramedics, to assess the healthcare utilization in those patients and to evaluate whether patients at high-risk for revascularization can be identified.

In chapter 1, a brief introduction about the subject and the background of the thesis is given. Suspected NSTE-ACS is a common reason for emergency department presentation and requires fast risk stratification. Further research is needed to assess whether risk stratification with subsequent treatment decisions is feasible in the pre-hospital setting.

The first phase of the Famous Triage research project is reported in chapter 2. This was the first study in which paramedics assessed a pre-hospital HEART score. In 600 patients with suspected NSTE-ACS the HEAR components of the HEART score were prospectively assessed by paramedics. Blood samples were collected at time of inclusion and troponin assessment was performed in the hospital. A total of 140 patients (23%) were classified as low, 341 (57%) as intermediate and 119 (20%) as high-risk patients. Occurrence of MACE within 30 days was 3%, 19% and 45%, respectively (p <0.001). There were no deaths in the low-risk group. AUC of the pre-hospital HEART score for predicting MACE was 0.77 (95% CI 0.73 – 0.81). The importance of this study lies primarily in proving the feasibility of pre-hospital HEART(T) scoring by paramedics.

For the second phase of the Famous Triage research project, a pre-hospital point-of-care troponin was introduced in the ambulance. Chapter 3 describes the main outcomes of this study. In 700 patients with suspected NSTE-ACS risk stratification was performed by paramedics. A total of 172 patients (25%) were stratified as low risk and 528 patients (75%) as intermediate to high-risk. MACE occurred in 5 patients in the low-risk group (3%) and in 111 (21%) patients at intermediate or high risk (p <0.001). There were no deaths in the low-risk group and the occurrence of acute myocardial infarction in this group was 1%. In the high-risk group 6 patients died (1%) and 76 patients had myocardial infarction (14.4%). Conclusion was that pre-hospital risk stratification by paramedics is accurate, but to decrease MACE in the low-risk group further training of paramedics and a second troponin assessment when measurement was shortly after complaint onset are needed.
In chapter 4 we assessed the added value of the troponin component to the HEART score. Mean HEAR score was 4.5 ± 1.6, mean HEART score was 4.7 ± 1.7. Using the HEAR score, a total of 183 patients (26%) were stratified as low risk, whereas using the HEART score, 172 patients (25%) were stratified as low risk (p = 0.001). In both low-risk groups, there were no deaths within 45 days. Using HEAR, MACE occurred in 13 patients (7%) in the low-risk group, whereas using HEART, MACE occurred in 5 patients in the low-risk group (3%, p < 0.001). The use of HEART (AUC 0.74) obtained a higher predictive value compared to HEAR (AUC 0.65, p < 0.001) for MACE. Conclusion was that in patients with suspected NSTE-ACS, the pre-hospital troponin component of the HEART score has important added predictive value.

Whether a pre-hospital HEART score is equally accurate with using point-of-care or high sensitive troponin is investigated in chapter 5. In 689 consecutive patients with suspected NSTE-ACS, point-of-care troponin and laboratory high-sensitive troponin were measured in pre-hospital derived blood. For every patient the HEART score with both point-of-care troponin (HEART-POC) and high sensitive troponin (HEART-hsTnT) was determined. 163 (24%) Patients were considered low-risk by using HEART-hsTnT and 170 (25%) by using HEART-POC. Although high sensitive versus POC troponin scoring was different in 130 (19%) of patients, in 678 (98%) patients risk classification in low versus intermediate-high risk was similar. The predictive values of HEART-POC versus HEART-HsTnT was also similar (AUC 0.75 versus 0.76, p = 0.241). Conclusion was that POC troponin measurement suffices for pre-hospital risk stratification in suspected NSTE-ACS.

Because the HEART score was originally validated in the hospital setting we compared the pre-hospital HEART score with the in-hospital HEART score in chapter 6. In 699 patients with suspected NSTE-ACS, the HEART score was independently prospectively assessed in the pre-hospital setting by ambulance paramedics and in the hospital by physicians. In 516 (74%) patients pre-hospital and hospital risk classification was similar, in 50 (7%) pre-hospital risk classification was false negative (45 days mortality 0%) and in 133 (19%) false positive (45 days mortality 1.5%). Occurrence of MACE was comparable in pre-hospital and hospital low-risk patients (2.9% versus 2.7%, p = 0.9). Predictive values of both pre-hospital and hospital acquired HEART scores were high, although the AUC of hospital acquired HEART score was higher (0.84 vs 0.74, p < 0.001). Disagreement was primarily caused by different scoring of history and risk factors and therefore additional training may improve pre-hospital scoring.

If low-risk patients do not need to be transferred to the hospital anymore in the future, there might be a reduction in healthcare utilization (and costs). In chapter 7 we assessed the diagnostics in pre-hospital low-risk patients and the contribution of those
diagnostic results in the healthcare process. 84% of patients was discharged within 12 hours. Repeated electrocardiography and routine laboratory measurements, including cardiac markers were performed in all patients. Chest X-ray was performed in 61%, echocardiography in 11% of patients. After additional diagnostics, 2 patients (1%) were diagnosed as non-STEMI, 2 patients (1%) as unstable angina. Other diagnoses were atrial fibrillation (n=1) and acute pancreatitis/cholecystitis (n=2), all other patients had non-specific/non-acute discharge diagnoses. Mean in-hospital costs per patient were €1,580. The estimated yearly acute healthcare costs in low-risk chest pain patients in the Netherlands are €30,438,700.

Beside early identification of low-risk patients, pre-hospital risk assessment could also facilitate faster identification of high-risk patients. In chapter 8 we investigated whether patients at high risk for early revascularization can be identified in a pre-hospital setting. This was a prospective cohort study including 1289 consecutive patients with suspected NSTE-ACS in which the HEART score including point-of-care troponin was performed by paramedics. Endpoint was revascularization (PCI or CABG) within 30 days of inclusion. A total of 164 patients (13%) received revascularization within 30 days. Of 99 patients (8% of total group) with elevated point-of-care troponin, 49 (49%) received revascularization. Of 180 patients (14%) with high-risk HEART score, 52 (29%) received revascularization. Both elevated troponin (OR 8.7) and high-risk HEART score (OR 3.6) were significantly associated with revascularization after univariate analysis. After multivariate regression analysis elevated point-of-care troponin remained the strongest predictor for revascularization. Possibly, patients with elevated point-of-care troponin benefit from direct transfer to a PCI center.

Until now, all research has been observational. Pre-hospital risk assessment and troponin results have not been implemented in pre-hospital treatment decisions. Because the previous mentioned studies showed feasibility of pre-hospital risk assessment, phase 3 of the Famous Triage study was initiated. In chapter 9 the rationale and design of this phase are reported. The aim is to further assess whether pre-hospital HEART score management including point-of-care troponin measurement and subsequently not transferring low-risk patients to the hospital is feasible and non-inferior to routine management.