T1 Mapping by Cardiac Magnetic Resonance and Multidimensional Speckle-Tracking Strain by Echocardiography for the Detection of Acute Cellular Rejection in Cardiac Allograft Recipients

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ABSTRACT

OBJECTIVES The aim of this study was to test the hypothesis that echocardiographic strain imaging, by tracking subtle alterations in myocardial function, and cardiac magnetic resonance T1 mapping, by quantifying tissue properties, are useful and complement each other to detect acute cellular rejection in heart transplant recipients.

BACKGROUND Noninvasive alternatives to endomyocardial biopsy are highly desirable to monitor acute cellular rejection.

METHODS Surveillance endomyocardial biopsies, catheterizations, and echocardiograms performed serially according to institutional protocol since transplantation were retrospectively reviewed. Sixteen-segment global longitudinal strain (GLS) and circumferential strain were measured before, during, and after the first rejection and at 2 time points for patients without rejection using Velocity Vector Imaging for the first part of the study. The second part, with cardiac magnetic resonance added to the protocol, served to validate previously derived strain cutoffs, examine the progression of strain over time, and to determine the accuracy of strain and T1 measurements to define acute cellular rejection. All tests were performed within 48 h.

RESULTS Median time to first rejection (16 grade 1 rejection, 15 grade ≥2 rejection) was 3 months (interquartile range: 3 to 36 months) in 49 patients. GLS and global circumferential strain worsened significantly during grade 1 rejection and ≥2 rejection and were independent predictors of any rejection. In the second part of the study, T1 time ≥1,090 ms, extracellular volume ≥32%, GLS > −14%, and global circumferential strain ≥ −24% had 100% sensitivity and 100% negative predictive value to define grade ≥2 rejection with 70%, 63%, 55%, and 35% positive predictive values, respectively. The combination of GLS > −16% and T1 time ≥1,060 ms defined grade 1 rejection with 91% sensitivity and 92% negative predictive value. After successful treatment, T1 times decreased significantly.

CONCLUSIONS T1 mapping and echocardiographic GLS can serve to guide endomyocardial biopsy selectively. (J Am Coll Cardiol Img 2019;12:1601–14) © 2019 by the American College of Cardiology Foundation.
Acute allograft rejection remains a major issue for heart transplantation (HTx) patients (1). Timely treatment is indispensable to avoid allograft loss. Endomyocardial biopsy (EMB) remains the gold standard for diagnosing rejection, despite considerable limitations. In addition, acute rejections are now more silent and difficult to detect thanks to improvements in immunosuppressive treatments. As the risk for acute rejection has decreased over the years (2), the number of unnecessary biopsies has increased. Noninvasive alternatives are highly desirable to monitor allograft rejection. Although echocardiography is the primary imaging modality for follow-up, conventional functional and morphological parameters are known to be insensitive markers of cardiac allograft rejection. Because of patchy distribution of acute cellular rejection (ACR), the combination of structural and functional imaging with full coverage of left ventricle may help overcome the limited information of conventional parameters (3-5). Therefore, we hypothesized that characterization and quantification of myocardial tissue properties by cardiac magnetic resonance (CMR) T1 mapping and mechanical alterations by echocardiographic speckle-tracking strain are complementary to each other and can provide valuable noninvasive indexes to detect ACR in HTx patients.

METHODS

In the first part of the study, we retrospectively reviewed surveillance EMBs, catheterization findings, and echocardiograms of HTx patients obtained serially according to our institutional protocol since transplantation (from January 2009 to January 2016). After January 2016, we decided to add CMR to the surveillance protocol and conducted the second, cross-sectional part of the study, including CMR irrespective of patient symptoms. All tests were done within 48 h of each other on consecutive patients. In the first part, 49 of 64 adult HTx patients were included consecutively. Excluded patients underwent HTx <1 month previously (n = 3) and had
intercurrent systemic infections (n = 4), malignancies (n = 2), severe cardiac allograft vasculopathy (CAV) (n = 3), humoral rejection (n = 2), or poor images for strain analysis (n = 1). The first rejection episode was counted as the index event. Strain was measured at 3 time points in patients with rejection (before, during, and resolution of rejection) and at 2 time points for patients without rejection (most recent and preceding) (Figure 1). In the first part, we assessed the potential of strain quantification for detecting ACR. The second cross-sectional part of the study, with CMR, served to validate previously derived strain cutoffs, examine the progression of strain over time, and test the accuracy of T1 mapping, with a head-to-head comparison with strain, to detect ACR. All patients had glomerular filtration rates >35 ml/min/1.73 m².

The study protocol was approved by the Institutional Review Board and Institutional Ethical Committee for Human Research of Baskent University and complied with the Declaration of Helsinki. All patients gave informed consent.

Pressure measurements were performed during EMB procedures invasively. Coronary angiography early after transplantation to detect donor-related coronary artery disease and yearly thereafter to detect CAV was also part of our follow-up protocol. EMB. EMB is performed at 1, 2, 4, 6, and 10 weeks, 6 and 12 months, and yearly thereafter at our institution. Additional biopsies are performed whenever rejection is suspected or to confirm treatment success. ACR is determined on the basis of the severity of inflammatory infiltrates and myocyte damage.
TABLE 1 Baseline Clinical Characteristics

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Rejection (n = 31)</th>
<th>No Rejection (n = 18)</th>
<th>p Value</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Donor age, yrs</td>
<td>28 (22–42)</td>
<td>30 (25–35)</td>
<td>0.60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Recipient age, yrs</td>
<td>46 (32–52)</td>
<td>34 (20–39)</td>
<td>0.005</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Women</td>
<td>10 (32)</td>
<td>6 (33)</td>
<td>0.90</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Time from transplantation, months</td>
<td>3 (3–36)</td>
<td>12 (36–84)</td>
<td>0.0001</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hypertension</td>
<td>9 (29)</td>
<td>6 (33)</td>
<td>0.75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fasting glucose, mg/dl</td>
<td>98 (93–107)</td>
<td>94 (88–98)</td>
<td>0.06</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Creatinine, mg/dl</td>
<td>0.88 (0.81–1.09)</td>
<td>0.85 (0.74–1.03)</td>
<td>0.65</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Systolic blood pressure, mm Hg</td>
<td>120 (110–130)</td>
<td>118 (105–130)</td>
<td>0.19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Diastolic blood pressure, mm Hg</td>
<td>80 (70–80)</td>
<td>80 (70–80)</td>
<td>0.68</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Body mass index, kg/m²</td>
<td>1.83 (1.73–1.94)</td>
<td>1.75 (1.63–1.87)</td>
<td>0.13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cardiopulmonary index, l/m²</td>
<td>2.8 (2.7 to 2.9)</td>
<td>2.7 (2.3 to 2.9)</td>
<td>0.05</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cardiac index, l/m²</td>
<td>10.5 (10.0 to 10.0)</td>
<td>11.5 (9.7 to 13.3)</td>
<td>0.12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cardiac index, l/m²</td>
<td>2.8 (2.7 to 2.9)</td>
<td>2.7 (2.3 to 3.0)</td>
<td>0.12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PCWP, mm Hg</td>
<td>12 (9 to 14)</td>
<td>13 (10 to 15)</td>
<td>0.05</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RAP, mm Hg</td>
<td>5 (4 to 8)</td>
<td>4 (3 to 6)</td>
<td>0.05</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Values are median (interquartile range) or n (%).

according to the standardized International Society for Heart and Lung Transplantation nomenclature (6).

Echocardiography. Standard 2-dimensional echocardiography was performed by using the SC 2000 cardiac ultrasound machine (Siemens Medical Solutions USA, Mountain View, California) according to our protocol (7). This protocol also includes yearly performed dobutamine stress echocardiography for assessing CAV (7). We reviewed echocardiograms obtained concomitantly with EMBs. Speckle-tracking strain analyses were performed from 3 cine loops, digitally stored at a frame rate of 40 to 90 frames/s, using a dedicated software (Velocity Vector Imaging, Siemens Healthcare, Erlangen, Germany). Curved regions of interest were manually traced on the endocardial border in apical 4-chamber, 2-chamber, long-axis, and basal, mid, and apical short-axis views. Regional strain was calculated by automated tracking of the location shifts of the acoustic markers in the endocardium. All image planes were divided into 6 segments and only the apical short-axis image into 4 segments, automatically. Global longitudinal strain (GLS) was obtained from 3 apical views and global circumferential strain (GCS) from 3 short-axis planes, as the average of the means of each plane (Figures 2A to 2D).

CMR. CMR was performed using a 1.5-T scanner (Ingenia CX, Philips Healthcare, Best, the Netherlands). Cine images were obtained using a short-axis cine steady-state free precession sequence. T1 measurements were performed using modified Look-Locker inversion recovery pulse sequence images that were acquired in short-axis slices covering the whole ventricle, during a breath hold, before and 15 min after the administration of 0.2 mmol/kg gadoterate meglumine (Dotarem, Guerbet, Villepinte, France). This acquisition sampled the inversion recovery using a 5s(3s)3s scheme for native T1 and a 4s(3s)3s(1s)2s scheme following contrast. Parameters were field of view 300 × 300 mm, matrix size 152 × 150, resolution 1.97 × 2 mm, slice thickness 10 mm, repetition time 2 ms, echo time 0.91 ms, flip angle 35°, acquisition window 188 ms, parallel imaging factor 2, partial echo factor 0.85, and minimum inversion time for pre-contrast scan 120 ms and for post-contrast scan 140 ms. Normal native T1 values of the scanner were between 967 and 1,029 ms. Late gadolinium hyperenhancement images were obtained using a

TABLE 2 Echocardiographic and Hemodynamic Findings Before and During Rejection and in Patients With No Rejection

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Grade 1 Rejection (n = 16)</th>
<th>Grade 2 Rejection (n = 15)</th>
<th>No Rejection (n = 18)</th>
<th>p Value</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>GLS, %</td>
<td>−18.3 (−20.7 to −17.2)</td>
<td>−16.7 (−18.4 to −14.9)</td>
<td>−18.4 (−21.0 to −17.3)</td>
<td>0.05</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GCS, %</td>
<td>−28.9 (−34.0 to −23.4)</td>
<td>−24.0 (−26.2 to −21.0)</td>
<td>−27.2 (−34.3 to −26.0)</td>
<td>0.001</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EF, %</td>
<td>58 (56 to 61)</td>
<td>58 (52 to 60)</td>
<td>58 (54 to 62)</td>
<td>0.65</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EDV, ml</td>
<td>74 (70 to 85)</td>
<td>81 (75 to 89)</td>
<td>75 (70 to 104)</td>
<td>0.001</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ESV, ml</td>
<td>34 (30 to 35)</td>
<td>33 (30 to 42)</td>
<td>36 (29 to 46)</td>
<td>0.001</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TAPSE, mm</td>
<td>14 (12 to 17)</td>
<td>15 (13 to 18)</td>
<td>14 (12 to 16)</td>
<td>0.001</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>S, cm/s</td>
<td>8.5 (8.0 to 9.1)</td>
<td>8.0 (7.3 to 9.1)</td>
<td>8.7 (8.3 to 9.7)</td>
<td>0.01</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E, cm/s</td>
<td>10.5 (10.0 to 12.0)</td>
<td>11.5 (9.7 to 13.3)</td>
<td>11.6 (10.6 to 12.7)</td>
<td>0.001</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cardiac index, l/m²</td>
<td>2.8 (2.7 to 2.9)</td>
<td>2.7 (2.3 to 3.0)</td>
<td>2.6 (2.5 to 2.9)</td>
<td>0.001</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>sPAP, mm Hg</td>
<td>26 (21 to 32)</td>
<td>26 (24 to 29)</td>
<td>28 (24 to 34)</td>
<td>0.001</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PCWP, mm Hg</td>
<td>12 (9 to 14)</td>
<td>13 (10 to 15)</td>
<td>13 (10 to 17)</td>
<td>0.001</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RAP, mm Hg</td>
<td>5 (4 to 8)</td>
<td>4 (3 to 6)</td>
<td>6 (3 to 7)</td>
<td>0.001</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Values are median (interquartile range). *p < 0.05 versus before. †p < 0.01 versus before. ‡p < 0.001 versus R2 rejection. §p < 0.05 versus R2 rejection. ¶p < 0.01 versus R1 rejection. ††p < 0.001 versus R1 rejection.
phase-sensitive inversion recovery segmented gradient echo sequence 10 min after gadolinium administration in 2 long- and short-axis planes. T1 analyses were performed using dedicated Cardiac Quant software (Philips Healthcare). After controlling for motion artifacts, regions of interest were manually traced at the basal and midventricular short-axis slices, and measurements were averaged, excluding areas enhanced on late gadolinium hyperenhancement images to avoid partial volume effects, on the left ventricular wall and center of the left ventricular cavity (Figures 2E and 2F). Extracellular volume (ECV) was calculated as: myocardial ECV = (1 – hematocrit) × (ΔR1 myocardium/ΔR blood), where R1 = 1/T1 (8).

STATISTICAL ANALYSIS. SPSS version 18 (SPSS, Chicago, Illinois) was used. Data are expressed as numbers and percentages or as medians and interquartile ranges. Mann-Whitney U, Wilcoxon signed rank, and Friedman tests for related groups and the Kruskal-Wallis H test for independent groups were used to determine differences. Chi-square or Fisher exact tests were used for categorical variables. Univariate logistic regression analysis was performed for potential determinants of rejection. Parameters with p values <0.10 in the univariate analysis were entered into a multivariate logistic regression model with forward selection. Cutoffs were defined from receiver-operating characteristic curves by using the maximum Youden index. All analyses investigating the predictive efficiency of specific thresholds of T1 and GLS included only 1 rejection episode of the patient to avoid the confounding that may be introduced by correlated longitudinal observations. Intraobserver and interobserver reliabilities of GLS, GCS, and T1 time were described using intraclass correlation coefficients (2-way mixed effects, absolute agreement, single measure). Two-tailed p values <0.05 were considered to indicate statistical significance.

RESULTS

PART 1. Of 49 patients, the first rejection episode was grade 1 rejection (grade 1R) in 16, grade 2 rejection (grade 2R) in 14, and grade 3 rejection in 1 patient. Eighteen patients had no rejection (Table 1). Table 2 presents the echocardiographic findings in patients with (before and during) and without rejection. Only GLS and GCS reduced significantly during grade 1R. During grade ≥2R, GLS, GCS, tricuspid annular peak systolic excursion and cardiac index reduced and right atrial pressure increased significantly.

Measurements before rejection were not different from measurements in the no-rejection group. GLS and GCS improved significantly only after treatment of grade ≥2R (GLS from −14.0% [16.6% to −12.4%] to −17.9% [−19.8% to −16.7%], p = 0.04; GCS from −20.4% [−28.0% to −15.6%] to −25.5% [−30.9% to −21.7%], p = 0.02). Overall, despite successful treatment, strain values did not reach exactly the pre-rejection levels and remained significantly worse than the values in the no-rejection group (GLS −17.0%...
\[ -18.3\% \text{ to } -14.7\% \] vs. \[ -18.9\% \text{ to } -16.8\% \], \( p = 0.006 \); GCS \[ -25.5\% \text{ to } -22\% \] vs. \[ -29.0\% \text{ to } -24.0\% \], \( p = 0.01 \) \((\text{Figure 3})\). Importantly, GLS decreased in every patient (100%) during grade 2R and in 11 of 16 patients (69%) during grade 1R \((\text{Figure 4})\).

GLS and GCS determined grade \( \geq 2R \) and also grade 1R. Their best fit cutoff values are presented in \( \text{Figure 5} \). In the multivariate logistic regression analysis including the most pertinent variables (tricuspid annular plane systolic excursion, cardiac index, right atrial pressure, and recipient age) according to univariate analyses, GLS and GCS emerged as independent determinants of any rejection \(( p = 0.015 \text{ and } p = 0.004, \text{respectively})\). Time delay from transplantation was significantly shorter in patients with rejection, as expected \((9)\), and therefore was not included in the multiple regression model.

\textbf{PART 2.} Part 2 was conducted 15.5 months (interquartile range: 12 to 24 months) later with 38 consecutive patients after exclusion of those with intracardiac defibrillator \((n = 1)\), renal transplantation \((n = 1)\), and re-HTx \((n = 1)\) and those who died \((n = 8, 4 \text{ from systemic infections, } 2 \text{ from malignancies, } 2 \text{ from rejection})\).

There were 10 episodes of grade 1R and 6 episodes of grade 2R. The cutoff values derived from the first part had higher sensitivity but lower specificity (GLS \(-17\%\): sensitivity 82%, specificity 50%; GCS \(-26\%\): sensitivity 77%, specificity 53%) to detect any rejection, because at that time, the best cutoffs were less negative than those defined in the first part (GLS \(-16\%\) and \(-14\%\) and GCS \(-25\%\) and \(-24\%\) for grades 1R and 2R, respectively). An explanation was the decremental course of strain over time in patients who survived previous rejections, despite resolution, in contrast to almost stable strain in patients who survived no rejection \((\text{Figure 6})\).

CMR data are presented in \( \text{Table 3 and Figure 7} \). T1 time and ECV were significantly reduced during grade 1R and 2R. Furthermore, T1 time was the only independent determinant of grade 1R, while GLS and T1 time were independent determinants of grade 2R \((\text{Table 4})\). Cutoffs, sensitivities, specificities, negative predictive value (NPV), and positive predictive value for T1 time and strain are presented in \( \text{Table 5 and Figure 8} \). T1 time \( \geq 1,060 \text{ ms} \) had 82% sensitivity and 86% NPV to define grade 1R. Its sensitivity increased to 91% and its NPV to 92% when combined with GLS \( > -16\% \).

\( \text{Figure 4} \) \textbf{Changes in Global Longitudinal Strain With Rejection}

\begin{center}
\begin{tabular}{ccc}
Grade 1R & Grade \( \geq 2R \) \\
\begin{tabular}{c}
\begin{tabular}{c}
Before Grade 1R \\
Before Grade \( \geq 2R \)
\end{tabular}
\end{tabular} & \begin{tabular}{c}
\begin{tabular}{c}
Grade 1R \\
Grade \( \geq 2R \)
\end{tabular}
\end{tabular}
\end{tabular}
\end{center}

\textit{Grade 1R (A) and grade \( \geq 2R \) (B). Global longitudinal strain worsened in every patient with grade \( \geq 2R \).}
determine grade 2R, T1 time (cutoff ≥1,090 ms), ECV (cutoff ≥32%), GLS (cutoff ≥-14%), and GCS (cutoff ≥-24%) had 100% sensitivity and 100% NPV. Patients with rejection underwent repeat CMR 3 months later if resolution of rejection was confirmed by EMB. T1 time decreased from 1,105 ms (1,054 to 1,141 ms) to 1,085 ms (1,051 to 1,096 ms) (p = 0.02), but the decrease in ECV did not reach statistical significance. Importantly, T1 time after resolution tended to be higher than in the no-rejection and never-rejected groups (Figure 7).

Intraobserver and interobserver intraclass correlation coefficients, calculated in 10 patients, were 0.985 (95% confidence interval [CI]: 0.942 to 0.996) and 0.947 (95% CI: 0.769 to 0.987) for T1 time, 0.975 (95% CI: 0.836 to 0.994) and 0.978 (95% CI: 0.919 to 0.994) for GCS, 0.975 (95% CI: 0.670 to 0.994), and 0.964 (95% CI: 0.868 to 0.991) for GLS, respectively.
**DISCUSSION**

Our main findings are as follows: 1) CMR T1 mapping and echocardiographic GLS are reliable to define grade ≥2R ACR and complementary to each other to define grade 1R in HTx patients; 2) a decrease in GLS is a unanimous finding during grade ≥2R despite preserved ejection fraction (EF); 3) there is no complete return to baseline values after resolution of grade ≥2R, and a smoldering deterioration of the graft over the years, that can be quantified by strain; and 4) strain cutoffs to determine ACR are time dependent.

Several single-center studies compared CMR findings with EMB for allograft rejection, T2 imaging being the most widely used technique. Significant increase in absolute T2 values or relative T2 signal intensity were reported in relation to ACR (10,11). Lately, the prolongation of T2 relaxation time, as a quantitative means of assessing myocardial edema (12), has provided more reproducible results and determined grade ≥2R better (3,4,13). In contrast, late gadolinium hyperenhancement as a means of quantifying myocardial fibrosis was not found to correlate with ACR, likely because of the small size of areas with myocyte necrosis related to rejection (3,11,14) and its inability to differentiate old from new fibrosis, even if ACR-related fibrosis is different from infarct typical hyperenhancement (14). Combining structural and functional information to better define myocardial damage related to rejection has also been previously suggested (3,4). Markl et al. (4) assessed the relationship between myocardial velocity and T2 relaxation times, and Butler et al. (3) combined T2 relaxation times and right ventricular function by CMR to detect grade ≥2 rejection in HTx patients.

Data on T1 imaging for monitoring ACR in HTx patients are scarce (15). T1 signal intensity had limited reproducibility and yielded inconsistent results. However, preliminary quantitative T1 data were promising (16,17). Although T2 times are more reflective of water content, native T1 times and ECV have the advantage of reflecting extracellular expansion including not only fibrosis but also edema and inflammation (18), which are typical features of ACR depending on its severity. Obviously, fibrosis may result from CAV, but we used not only angiography but also dobutamine stress echocardiography to exclude CAV (7). Therefore, T1 time prolongation and ECV augmentation in our population are a reflection of ACR rather than CAV-related fibrosis. We also found that prolonged T1 times resolved after intensification of immunosuppressive treatment, further supporting our hypothesis.

GLS has gained considerable importance as a reproducible and sensitive quantification tool for myocardial function lately, in a variety of diseases and also in patients who undergo HTx (19). Speckle-tracking strain and CMR enable the assessment of the entire myocardium and therefore could be more sensitive than biopsy to detect ACR. We used a 16-segment model with strain and the entire

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**FIGURE 6** Global Longitudinal Strain and Global Circumferential Strain Over Time in Patients With and Without Rejection

![Graph showing changes in GLS and GCS over time](image)

Note the significant decreases in global longitudinal strain (GLS) and global circumferential strain (GCS) in patients who survived rejection (A) and almost stable GLS and GCS in patients who survived no rejection (B). FU = follow-up; NS = nonsignificant.
circumference of the left ventricle by T1 quantification. Biopsy-negative rejection is well recognized (20,21). Therefore, ACR cannot be excluded in all patients with abnormal imaging findings and no evidence of rejection on biopsy, because random and limited biopsy sampling can miss patchy foci of rejection. This partly explains the relatively low positive predictive value of imaging in comparison with EMB as a reference. Also, in the study of Marie et al. (10), patients with CMR results defined as false positive were significantly more likely to develop rejection in the subsequent 3 months than those with normal results on CMR and EMB.

We observed that GLS tracked functional deterioration during ACR more accurately than GCS. Clemmensen et al. (19) also showed that GLS, but not GCS, correlated with ACR. However, they assessed circumferential strain at the mid left ventricular level only, while we assessed in all 3 short-axis planes to better represent the entire left ventricle. Indeed, our study is the first to assess the entire left ventricle with multidimensional strain in comparison with concomitant EMB and CMR in HTx patients. Importantly, we also observed a wide range of “normal” strain values in our HTx patients in the absence of rejection, which is in accordance

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**TABLE 3 Cardiac Magnetic Resonance Findings in Patients With and Those Without Rejection**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>No Rejection* (n = 11)</th>
<th>R1 Rejection (n = 10)</th>
<th>R2 Rejection (n = 6)</th>
<th>Never Rejected† (n = 11)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>T1 time, ms</td>
<td>1,075 (1,049–1,094)</td>
<td>1,096 (1,060–1,143)</td>
<td>1,132 (1,111–1,134)</td>
<td>1,035 (1,007–1,052)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ECV, %</td>
<td>30.0 (28.0–33.4)</td>
<td>34.8 (31.0–36.6)†‡</td>
<td>35.0 (33.0–38.9)†‡</td>
<td>27.7 (25.7–29.0)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EF, %</td>
<td>68.1 (64.0–73.1)</td>
<td>65.6 (63.0–72.8)</td>
<td>55.4 (52.0–62.0)</td>
<td>67.2 (64.0–73.0)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EDVI, ml/m²</td>
<td>77.2 (67.0–80.2)</td>
<td>73.5 (65.0–88.7)</td>
<td>72.7 (69.0–80.0)</td>
<td>71.0 (62.5–81.0)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ESVI, ml/m²</td>
<td>24.5 (21.6–26.4)</td>
<td>27.1 (23.0–37.0)‡</td>
<td>28.4 (22.0–39.0)</td>
<td>25.0 (24.0–31.5)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SVI, ml/m²</td>
<td>27.7 (26.8–30.9)</td>
<td>29.5 (25.0–34.0)</td>
<td>23.6 (21.6–26.4)</td>
<td>26.6 (21.3–31.5)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LVMI, g/m²</td>
<td>62 (50–73)</td>
<td>68 (53–76)</td>
<td>65 (58–81)</td>
<td>59 (49–70)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LGE**</td>
<td>3 (2–3)</td>
<td>2 (1–3)</td>
<td>3 (2–4)</td>
<td>2 (1–3)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Values are median (interquartile range). *Patients without rejection at the time of surveillance. †Patients without rejection at the time of surveillance and without rejection in the past since transplantation. ‡p < 0.01 versus never rejected. §p < 0.05 versus no rejection. ¶p < 0.05 versus never rejected. k p < 0.05 versus no rejection. **Number of segments with LGE.

ECV = extracellular volume; EDVI = end-diastolic volume index; EF = ejection fraction; ESVI = end-systolic volume index; LGE = late gadolinium hyperenhancement; LVMI = left ventricular mass index; SVI = stroke volume index.

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**FIGURE 7 T1 Relaxation Time and Extracellular Volume According to Rejection Status**

A

T1 Relaxation Time (ms)

B

Extracellular Volume (%)

1300

1200

1100

1000

900

No Rejection Grade 1R Grade 2R After Treatment Never Rejected

† p < 0.001 versus never rejected, †p < 0.05 versus no rejection, †p < 0.05 versus no rejection.
TABLE 5  Accuracy of Strain and T1 Time Alone or in Combination to Determine Rejection

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Grade 1 Rejection</th>
<th>Grade 2 Rejection</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>NPV</strong></td>
<td><strong>PPV</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Sensitivity</strong></td>
<td><strong>Specificity</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>T1 time</td>
<td>82%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ECV</td>
<td>55%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GLS</td>
<td>91%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

NPV = negative predictive value; PPV = positive predictive value; other abbreviations as in Tables 2 and 3.
frequency to track subtle myocardial functional alterations needs to be explored in order to balance cost and potential harm as a screening test to replace echocardiographic strain quantification.

**CLINICAL IMPLICATIONS.** Our results extend previous findings by incorporating imaging for myocardial function and tissue characteristics to detect cardiac allograft rejection noninvasively. GLS and T1 time alone had very high NPV to rule out grade ≥2R and very high sensitivity to screen patients for grade ≥2R. Furthermore, the combination of GLS and T1 time provided reasonable accuracy to track mild ACR (grade 1R), which can help fine-tune immunosuppressive therapy before waiting for manifest rejection episodes. We suggest a strategy of noninvasive monitoring for ACR, as illustrated in Figure 9, to risk-stratify patients and possibly defer unnecessary biopsies. In particular, up to 2 years after transplantation, to rule out rejection confidently, we underline the importance of serial GLS comparisons. Any decrease in GLS, particularly during this period, should be regarded as possible rejection, because in patients without CAV or rejection, the graft deterioration is insidious, and overall GLS is expected to remain stable as long as the patient stays “healthy” (29). Because CMR data were

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**FIGURE 8** Receiver-Operating Characteristic Curves for Accuracy to Define Rejection by T1 Time and Extracellular Volume

- **A**: Grade 1R (A), grade 2R (B), and any rejection (C). Abbreviations as in previous figures. AUC = area under the curve; CI = confidence interval; ECV = extracellular volume.

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Grade 1R (A), grade 2R (B), and any rejection (C). Abbreviations as in previous figures. AUC = area under the curve; CI = confidence interval; ECV = extracellular volume.
obtained later than the first year after transplantation in the present study, whether the T1 time cutoffs can be extended to the first year after transplantation needs to be further tested.

**STUDY LIMITATIONS.** Despite a relatively small patient population, our results represent an unselected cohort with routine follow-up tests, unlike most published studies that investigated the role of noninvasive ACR surveillance techniques in selected patients with suspected ACR and usually outside the time period when the early detection of ACR is likely to be most useful. The second part of our study, including CMR, was conducted later in time. This is also probably not a severe limitation because quantitative “normal” T1 and T2 measurements were found to be higher after transplantation compared with healthy volunteers and improved over time (16), suggesting that CMR parameters become more useful and stable for detecting ACR as time from transplantation increases. We excluded patients immediately after the operation (first month) because myocardium is affected by operation-related conditions in this time period, diminishing the accuracy of imaging for rejection (18). Our results cannot be extrapolated to patients with humoral rejection. To avoid the confounding that may be introduced by the correlated observations potentiating the effect of the predictive value of T1 mapping and strain cutoffs, we included only 1 rejection per patient in each part of the study. Yet from the clinical perspective, there is no reason to think that the highly discriminatory capacity of these tests will vanish for repeated evaluations of rejections. Minor deviations in hematocrit levels cannot be excluded as a potential source of
error for the calculation of ECV, as blood samples were not obtained at the time of CMR but early the same morning. The lack of T2 mapping results may be a limitation of this work.

CONCLUSIONS

Our findings favor the use of CMR T1 mapping and echocardiographic GLS in HTx patients to guide more selective EMBs, diminish biopsy-related complications, and fine-tune immunosuppressive treatment. Whether CMR T1 mapping and speckle-tracking strain are helpful in determining ACR in biopsy-negative cases with high suspicion needs further investigation.

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**KEY WORDS** cardiac magnetic resonance, echocardiography, heart transplant, strain, T1 mapping