

Gdański Uniwersytet Medyczny Wydział Lekarski

Rozprawa doktorska

Zmiany w budowie i funkcji mięśnia sercowego oceniane w badaniu MRI serca u pacjentów po przebytej chorobie COVID -19

Changes in myocardial structure and function assessed by cardiac MRI in post-COVID patients -19

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myocardial injury; cardiac magnetic resonance imaging; coronavirus disease; late gadolinium enhancement; myocarditis; myocardial longitudinal strain,

WYKAZ STOSOWANYCH SKRÓTÓW (en. list of abbrevations)

AHA	American Heart Association
BMI	body mass index
CMR	cardiac magnetic resonance
CVI	cardiovascular imaging
DENSE	displacement encoding
ECV	extracellular volume fraction
FT	feature tracking
GLPS	longitudinal peak systolic strain
GLS	global longitudinal strain
LGE	late gadolinium enhancement
LLC	Lake Louise criteria
LV	left ventricle

LVEF	left ventricular ejection fraction
MACE	major adverse cardiovascular events
MT	myocardial tagging
ROC	receiver operating characteristic
RT-PCR	reverse transcription-polymerase chain reaction
RV	right ventricle
SD	standard deviation
SENC	strain encoding
TTE	transthoracic echocardiography

STRESZCZENIE W JĘZYKU POLSKI

WPROWADZENIE

Uszkodzenie mięśnia sercowego związane z COVID-19 może być bezpośrednim wynikiem infekcji wirusowej lub odpowiedzi immunologicznej w organizmie [1]. Zapalenie mięśnia sercowego w przebiegu choroby Covid-19 przebiega z różnorodnymi i niespecyficznymi objawami, co utrudnia jego diagnostykę i leczenie. Najnowsze badania wykazują, że nawet pacjenci ambulatoryjni mogą mieć zmiany w mięśniu sercowym po przebyciu COVID-19 [2,3]. Wcześniejsze badania sugerowały, że zajęcie mięśnia sercowego przez wirusa wiązało się z niekorzystnym rokowaniem, jednak obecnie uważa się, że istotne klinicznie uszkodzenie mięśnia sercowego występuje głównie u pacjentów z ciężkim przebiegiem infekcji i wymagających hospitalizacji [4, 5]. Rezonans magnetyczny układu sercowo-naczyniowego (CMR) jest obecnie uznawany za najlepsze narzędzie diagnostyczne w przypadku podejrzenia zapalenia mięśnia sercowego [6]. CMR pozwala na wykrycie charakterystycznych cech zapalenia, takich jak dysfunkcja mięśnia sercowego, jego obrzęk lub nieodwracalne uszkodzenie czy zwłóknienie miokardium. Standardowe kryteria diagnostyczne Lake Louise oparte na charakterystyce tkankowej w badaniu CMR nie zawsze jednoznacznie pozwalają postawić diagnozę zapalenia mięśnia sercowego [7]. Pomocne są nowe techniki, takie jak mapowanie T1 i T2 oraz analiza odkształcenia miokardium, które umożliwiają poprawę dokładności diagnozowania zapalenia mięśnia sercowego [8]. Badania wykazały, że parametry odkształcenia mięśnia sercowego są bardziej czułymi wskaźnikami dysfunkcji skurczowej niż tradycyjne wskaźniki [9, 10]. Techniki mapowania pozwalają na ilościową ocenę zmian w mięśniu sercowym [11, 12]. W ostatnich badaniach proponuje się wieloparametryczne podejście do obrazowania zapalenia mięśnia sercowego, które łączy różne nowe parametry ilościowe w jednym protokole obrazowania, celem poprawy czułości i specyficzności diagnozy [13, 14].

CELE PRACY

Publikacja 1

Cardiac abnormalities detected by echocardiography and cardiac magnetic resonance in healthcare professionals recovered from non-severe COVID-19

Celem badania było oszacowanie częstości występowania nieprawidłowości w badaniu rezonansu magnetycznego serca oraz oszacowanie stopnia uszkodzenia mięśnia sercowego w tym zapalenia mięśnia sercowego w grupie pracowników ochrony zdrowia po przebytej infekcji Covid -19 o łagodnym przebiegu, niewymagającej hospitalizacji.

Publikacja 2

Cardiac Magnetic Resonance Relaxometry Parameters, Late gadolinium Enhancement, and Feature- Tracking Myocardial Longitudinal Strain in Patients Recovered from COVID-19 Celem badania była analiza globalnego odkształcenia podłużnego mięśnia lewej komory (GLS) za pomocą rezonansu magnetycznego oraz wpływu czasów relaksacji T1, T2 oraz ECV i LGE na parametry GLS w wieloparametrycznym protokole obrazowania u pacjentów, którzy wyzdrowieli z COVID-19.

Materiały i metody

Do pierwszego badania zostało zakwalifikowanych 95 pacjentów natomiast do badania drugiego włączono 86. W obu badaniach byli to pracownicy służby zdrowia, którzy zachorowali na Covid -19, potwierdzony za pomocą wymazu z reakcją łańcuchową odwrotnej transkrypcji-polimerazy (RT-PCR). Wszyscy pacjenci wyzdrowieli z COVID-19, a przebieg infekcji był łagodny lub umiarkowany, dlatego też żaden z pacjentów nie był hospitalizowany z powodu COVID-19.

U wszystkich pacjentów wykonano przezklatkowe badanie echokardiograficzne oraz CMR do 4 miesięcy od rozpoznania infekcji.

Przezklatkowe badanie echokardiograficzne wykonano zgodnie z wytycznymi Asocjacji Echokardiografii Polskiego Towarzystwa Kardiologicznego przy użyciu aparatu VIVID E95 (GE Ultrasound, Horten, Norwegia). Wykonano tradycyjne pomiary echokardiograficzne, a dodatkowo określono globalne szczytowe skurczowe odkształcenie podłużne lewej komory serca (GLPS).

Badanie CMR wykonane w obu badaniach zostało zaprojektowane i przeprowadzone zgodnie z Deklaracją Helsińską, a jego protokół został zatwierdzony przez Niezależną Komisję Bioetyczną ds. Badań Naukowych przy Gdańskim Uniwersytecie Medycznym (zgoda nr NKBBN/475/2021). Od wszystkich uczestników badania uzyskano pisemną świadomą zgodę. U wszystkich uczestników wykonano badanie CMR na skanerze 1,5-T (Magnetom Aera lub Magnetom Sola, Siemens Healthineers, Erlangen, Niemcy) z 18-kanałową cewką kardiologiczną, przy użyciu standardowych protokołów obrazowania. Obejmowały one serie kinetyczne w długiej i krótkiej osi do oceny anatomicznej i czynnościowej, sekwencje mapowania parametrycznego serca do pomiarów czasu relaksacji podłużnej (T1) i poprzecznej (T2) (sekwencja MOLLI (Modified Look-Locker) do pomiaru T1 oraz sekwencję bSSFP do pomiaru T2; MyoMaps, Siemens Healthineers, Erlangen, Niemcy), a także rutynową ocenę LGE w standardowych długich i krótkich osiach przy użyciu zarówno szybkich sekwencji z impulsem inwersyjnym (single-shot bSSFP), jak i segmentowanych sekwencji z impulsem inwersyjnym wrażliwych na fazę (PSIR, phase-sensitive inversion recovery), wykonywanych w ciągu 7-15 minut po wstrzyknięciu 0,1 mmol/kg gadobutrolu (Gadovist, Bayer AG, Leverkusen, Niemcy). Lewą komorę podzielono na 16 segmentów zgodnie z wytycznymi American Heart Association (AHA) GLS lewej komory mierzono za pomocą metody feature tracking, która obejmuje wykrywanie "wzorców cech" lub "nieregularności" na granicy wsierdzia, które są śledzone w kolejnych klatkach rutynowego CMR cine. Dane ilościowe dotyczące deformacji orientacji podłużnej mięśnia sercowego lewej komory zostały następnie przeanalizowane przy użyciu oprogramowania Circle CVI ver. 4.2 (Circle Cardiovascular Imaging, Calgary, AB, Kanada). Obecność zwłóknienia za pomocą LGE oceniano wizualnie i dalej kategoryzowano wg lokalizacji jako podnasierdziowe, podwsierdziowe, śródścienne, pełnościenne lub rozproszone.

Rozproszone zwłóknienie oceniano na podstawie frakcji objętości pozakomórkowej (ECV). Obrzęk określono na podstawie stosunku intensywności sygnału (SI) mięśnia sercowego do

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intensywności sygnału (SI) mięśni szkieletowych na obrazach T2 zależnych. Wszystkie analizy zostały wykonane przez tych samych dwóch lekarzy, kardiologa i radiologa, odpowiednio z 5 i 11-letnim doświadczeniem w analizie badań CMR przy użyciu komercyjnego oprogramowania (SyngoVia VB40, Siemens Healthineers, Erlangen, Niemcy).

Analiza statystyczna

Publikacja 1:

Zmienne ciągłe przedstawiono jako wartość średnią i odchylenie standardowe (SD) dla zmiennych o rozkładzie normalnym, zmienne kategoryczne wyrażono w procentach. W celu oceny normalności rozkładu danych przeprowadzono test Shapiro-Wilka. Obliczenia przeprowadzono przy użyciu programu Statistica w wersji 13.3. *Wartość P* <0,05 uznano za istotną statystycznie.

Publikacja 2:

Zmienne ciągłe przedstawiono jako wartość średnią i odchylenie standardowe (SD).

Zmienne kategoryczne przedstawiono jako procent całości. W celu sprawdzenia normalności rozkładu użyto testu Kołmogorowa-Smirnowa. Dane ciągłe z dwóch grup porównano za pomocą testu t-Studenta lub testu U Manna-Whitneya, w zależności od typu rozkładu. Kategoryczne dane porównano za pomocą testu chi-kwadrat i dokładnego testu Fishera. Korelacje oceniano za pomocą testu korelacji Pearsona lub Spearmana, w zależności od rozkładu zmiennych. Szukaliśmy niezależnych czynników ryzyka dla diagnozy globalnego obciążenia mniejszego niż -15% przy użyciu jednoczynnikowej regresji logistycznej, a następnie analizowaliśmy zmienne z p < 0,10 przy użyciu wieloczynnikowej regresji logistycznej ROC wykorzystano do oceny wartości predykcyjnej globalnego T1 dla globalnego odkształcenia mniejszego niż -15% oraz do określenia najlepszego punktu odcięcia dla globalnego T1 przy użyciu metody wskaźnika Youdena (J). Wartość p mniejszą niż 0,05 uznano za istotną statystycznie. Dane analizowano przy użyciu oprogramowania SPSS v. 21 (IBM, Armonk, NY, USA).

Wyniki

Publikacja 1

W badaniach TTE i CMR w analizowanej grupie badanych wykazaliśmy, że uszkodzenie mięśnia sercowego, definiowane jako obniżenie frakcji wyrzutowej wystąpiło u 29% pacjentów a

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upośledzenie funkcji podłużnej mięśnia sercowego lewej komory u 39% badanych. W badaniu CMR u 32% pacjentów wykazaliśmy podwyższony natywny czas T1 (niespecyficzne stwierdzenie obserwowane zarówno przy ostrym uszkodzeniu/obrzęku mięśnia sercowego, jak i zwłóknieniu lub nacieku), u 39% pacjentów -podwyższony T2 (marker ostrego uszkodzenia/obrzęku mięśnia sercowego) i u 57% pacjentów - obszary LGE (wskazujące na obecność martwicy, zwłóknienia lub blizny).

Czas relaksacji podłużnej T1 był wydłużony przynajmniej w jednym segmencie u 29 (32%) pacjentów, najczęściej dotyczył segmentów przegrody oraz ściany dolno-bocznej. W sumie czas relaksacji podłużnej T1 był podwyższony w 185 ze 1068 segmentów (17%). U ośmiu pacjentów (9%) stwierdzono podwyższoną średnią wartość T1 obliczoną dla wszystkich 12 segmentów LV objętych pomiarem.

Czas relaksacji poprzecznej T2 był wydłużony przynajmniej w jednym segmencie u 35 pacjentów, co stanowiło 39% badanych i podobnie jak w przypadku T1, zmiany te najczęściej dotyczyły segmentów podstawnych i środkowych przegrody oraz ściany dolno-bocznej. W sumie 228 segmentów (21%) miało podwyższone T2. U siedemnastu pacjentów (19%) stwierdzono podwyższone średnie T2 obliczone dla wszystkich 12 segmentów LV objętych pomiarem.

Publikacja 2

U pacjentów z GLS powyżej -15% stwierdzono istotnie niższą LVEF (53,6% ±8,9 vs. 61,6% ± 4,8; <0,001) oraz istotnie częściej wydłużony T1 (28,6% vs. 7,5%; p = 0,019). GLS lewej komory istotnie korelował z wartościami T1 (r = 0,303; p = 0,006) i LVEF (r = -0,732; p < 0,001). GLS lewej komory powyżej -15% był 7,5 razy bardziej prawdopodobny u pacjentów z wydłużonym T1 (HR 7,62; 95% CI 1,25-46,64). Zmniejszone podłużne odkształcenie segmentu podstawnego dolno-bocznego miało znaczący wpływ na globalne podłużne odkształcenie lewej komory. Wyniki ROC sugerowały, że GLS wynoszący -14,5% przewidywał wydłużenie czasu relaksacji T1 z najlepszą czułością i swoistością.

Podsumowanie

CMR jest metodą obrazowania, która pozwala diagnozować zmiany zachodzące w ostrym procesie zapalnym mięśnia sercowego przy użyciu kombinacji sekwencji skanowania, które wykrywają obrzęk, przekrwienie i zwłóknienie. Ta kombinacja sekwencji stanowi podstawę klasycznych kryteriów Lake Louise (LLC) w podstawowej diagnostyce zapalenia mięśnia sercowego z 2009 roku [4]. Jednak nowsze, ilościowe metody obrazowania, takie jak mapy parametryczne czasów relaksacji podłużnej (T1) i poprzecznej (T2) miokardium, zwane niekiedy relaksometrią T1 i T2, mogą poprawić dokładność diagnostyczną CMR i są obecnie zalecane do stosowania klinicznego przez panel ekspertów [5]. Dodatkowo wprowadzenie techniki śledzenia cech (FT) umożliwiającej analizę odkształcenia mięśnia sercowego może dodatkowo poprawić wstępną ocenę pacjentów z ostrym zapaleniem mięśnia sercowego. Nasze wyniki sugerują, że regionalne procesy zapalne mogą prowadzić do lokalnej dysfunkcji mięśnia sercowego, dlatego segmentalna ocena odkształcenia mięśnia sercowego może być uważana za nieinwazyjny parametr uszkodzenia miokardium w przebiegu procesu zapalnego mięśnia sercowego.

Zmiany zarówno w zakresie globalnego jak i mierzonego w poszczególnych segmentach podłużnego odkształcenia lewej komory CMR są związane z wydłużonym czasem relaksacji T1 i mogą służyć jako łatwo dostępny nowy parametr do wykrywania globalnego i regionalnego uszkodzenia i dysfunkcji mięśnia sercowego u pacjentów z podejrzeniem zajęcia mięśnia sercowego w przebiegu infekcji COVID-19, szczególnie w tych ośrodkach, w których nowsze techniki ilościowego mapowania mikoardium mogą być jeszcze niedostępne.

SUMMARY IN ENGLISH

INTRODUCTION

COVID-19-associated myocardial damage can be the direct result of a viral infection or an immune response in the body [1]. Covid-19-associated myocarditis presents with diverse and nonspecific symptoms, making its diagnosis and treatment difficult. Recent studies show that even ambulatory patients can have myocardial lesions after COVID-19 [2,3]. Earlier studies suggested that myocardial involvement by the virus was associated with an unfavorable prognosis, but it is now thought that clinically significant myocardial damage occurs mainly in patients with a severe course of infection and requiring hospitalization [4, 5]. Cardiovascular

magnetic resonance (CMR) is now considered the best diagnostic tool for suspected myocarditis [6]. CMR allows detection of characteristic features of inflammation, such as myocardial dysfunction, myocardial edema, irreversible myocardial damage or fibrosis. The well-established diagnostic criteria based on CMR - the so-called Lake Louise criteria - do not always make a diagnosis of myocarditis unequivocally [7]. New techniques, such as T1 and T2 mapping and myocardial strain analysis, are helpful to improve the accuracy of diagnosing myocarditis [8]. Studies have shown that myocardial strain parameters are more sensitive as indicators of systolic dysfunction than traditional indices [9, 10]. Mapping techniques allow quantitative assessment of changes in myocardial tissue [11, 12]. Recent studies propose a multiparametric approach to myocarditis imaging that combines various new quantitative parameters in a single imaging protocol to improve sensitivity and specificity of diagnosis [13, 14].

AIMS

Publication 1

Cardiac abnormalities detected by echocardiography and cardiac magnetic resonance in healthcare professionals recovered from non-severe COVID-19

The purpose of this study was to estimate the prevalence of cardiac magnetic resonance abnormalities and to estimate the extent of myocardial damage including myocarditis in a group of healthcare professionals recovered from a mild Covid -19 infection not requiring hospitalization.

Publication 2

Cardiac Magnetic Resonance Relaxometry Parameters, Late Gadolinium Enhancement, and Feature- Tracking Myocardial Longitudinal Strain in Patients Recovered from CoVID-19. The purpose of this study was to analyze global left ventricular longitudinal strain (GLS) by magnetic resonance imaging and the effects of T1, T2 relaxation times and ECV and LGE on GLS parameters in a multiparametric imaging protocol in patients who recovered from COVID-19

Materials and methods

Ninety-five patients were enrolled in the first study, while 86 patients were included in the second study. In both studies, they were health care workers who contracted Covid -19, confirmed by reverse transcription-polymerase chain reaction (RT-PCR) smear. All patients recovered from COVID-19, and the course of infection was mild to moderate, so none of the patients were hospitalized for COVID-19. Patients had a transthoracic echo study and CMR up to 4 months after the diagnosis of infection. Transthoracic echocardiography was performed according to the guidelines of the Working Group on Echocardiography of the Polish Society of Cardiology using a VIVID E95 apparatus (GE Ultrasound, Horten, Norway). Traditional echocardiographic measurements, and in addition, global peak systolic longitudinal strain of the left ventricle (GLPS).

The CMR study performed in both studies was designed and conducted in accordance with the Declaration of Helsinki, and its protocol was approved by the Independent Bioethics Committee for Scientific Research at the Medical University of Gdansk (approval no. NKBBN/475/2021). Written informed consent was obtained from all study participants.

All participants had CMR scans performed on a 1.5-T scanner (Magnetom Aera or Magnetom Sola, Siemens Healthineers, Erlangen, Germany) with an 18-channel cardiac coil, using standard imaging protocols. These included long- and short-axis kinetic series for anatomical and functional assessment, cardiac parametric mapping sequences for longitudinal (T1) and transverse (T2) relaxation time measurements (MOLLI (Modified Look-Locker) sequence for T1 measurement and bSSFP sequence for T2 measurement; MyoMaps, Siemens Healthineers, Erlangen, Germany), as well as routine assessment of LGE in standard long and short axes using both rapid single-pulse bSSFP inversion recovery sequences and segmented phase-sensitive inversion recovery sequences performed 7-15 minutes after injection of 0. 1 mmol/kg gadobutrol (Gadovist, Bayer AG, Leverkusen, Germany). The left ventricle was divided into 16 segments according to American Heart Association (AHA) guidelines.

GLS of the left ventricle was measured using feature tracking, which involves detecting "feature patterns" or "irregularities" at the endocardial border that are tracked in consecutive frames of routine CMR cine. Quantitative data on left ventricular longitudinal myocardial orientation deformations were then.

Evaluated using Circle CVI version 4.2 software (Circle Cardiovascular Imaging, Calgary, AB, Canada), the presence of fibrosis was assessed visually using late gadolinium enhancement (LGE) and subcategorized based on subendocardial, transmural, full-thickness, or diffuse patterns. Assessment of diffuse fibrosis was based on calculations of extracellular volume, while edema was determined using the ratio of the signal intensity (SI) of the heart muscle to the signal intensity (SI) of the skeletal muscles on T2-weighted images. All analyzes were conducted by two doctors: a cardiologist and a radiologist. The cardiologist had 5 years of experience, whereas the radiologist had 11 years of experience in CMR analysis utilizing SyngoVia VB40, the commercial software from Siemens Healthineers in Erlangen, Germany. This was done to ensure the accuracy and consistency of the results while maintaining objective evaluations.

Statistical analysis

Publication 1

Continuous data are presented as mean standard deviation (SD) for

variables with a normal distribution, categorical data were expressed as percentages. The Shapiro-Wilk test was performed to assess the normality of the data distribution. Calculations were performed using Statistica version 13.3. A P value <0.05 was considered statistically significant.

Publication 2

Continuous data were presented as mean standard deviation (SD).

Categorical data were presented as a percentage of the total. The Kolmogorov-Smirnov test was used to check normality of distribution. Continuous data from the two groups were compared using Student's t-test or Mann-Whitney U-test, depending on the depending on the type of distribution. Categorical data were compared using the chi-square test and the Fisher's exact test. Correlations were assessed using the Pearson correlation test or the Spearman, depending on the distribution of the variables. We looked for independent factors risk for a diagnosis of global burden less than -15% using univariate logistic regression, and then we analyzed variables with p < 0.10. using multivariate logistic regression. Analysis of the receiver operating characteristic curve receiver operating characteristic (ROC) curve was used to assess the predictive value of the global T1 for a global strain of less than -15% and to determine the best cutoff point for global T1 using the ratio method. Youden (J) method. A p-value less than 0.05 was considered statistically significant. Data were analyzed using SPSS v. 21 software (IBM, Armonk, NY, USA).

Results

Publication 1

In our studies of TTE and CMR on the analyzed group, we found that myocardial damage, defined as a decrease in ejection fraction, occurred in 29% of the patients, while impaired longitudinal function of the left ventricular myocardium was observed in 39% of the subjects. CMR examination revealed 32% of patients with elevated native T1 (a non-specific finding commonly observed in acute myocardial injury/edema, fibrosis, or infiltration). 39% had elevated T2 (marker of acute myocardial injury/edema) and 57% had LGE (marker of acute myocardial injury, fibrosis, or scar).

Longitudinal relaxation time T1 was prolonged in at least one segment in 29 (32%) patients, most commonly affecting the septum and inferior-lateral wall. Overall, longitudinal relaxation time T1 was elevated in 185 out of 1068 segments (17%). Eight patients (9%) had an elevated mean T1 calculated for all 12 LV segments.

T2 transverse relaxation time was prolonged in at least one segment in 35 patients, accounting for 39% of participants, and similarly to prolonged T1, it most affected basal and mid-septal segments, as well as the inferolateral wall. In total, 228 segments (21%) had elevated T2. Seventeen patients (19%) had elevated mean T2 calculated for all 12 LV segments.

Publication 2:

Patients with GLS less than -15% had significantly lower LVEF (53.6% ± 8.9 vs. 61.6% ± 4.8; <0.001) and significantly more frequently had prolonged T1 (28.6% vs. 7.5%; p = 0.019). GLS of the left ventricle significantly correlated with T1 (r = 0.303; p = 0.006) and LVEF (r = -0.732; p < 0.001). A negative GLS of the left ventricle less than -15% was 7.5 times more likely in patients with prolonged T1 (HR 7.62; 95% CI 1.25-46.64). Reduced basal longitudinal strain of the inferior-lateral segment had a significant impact on global longitudinal strain of the left ventricle. ROC analysis results indicated that a GLS value of 14.5% predicted prolongation of T1 relaxation time with the best sensitivity and specificity.

SUMMARY

CMR is an imaging technique that diagnoses changes occurring in acute myocardial inflammation through a combination of scanning sequences detecting edema, hyperemia, and fibrosis. This combination of sequences constitutes the basis of the Lake Louise criteria (LLC) in the primary diagnosis of myocarditis [4]. However, newer quantitative imaging methods, such as T1 and T2 cardiac relaxometry parameters, can improve the diagnostic accuracy of CMR and are currently recommended for clinical use by an expert panel [5]. Additionally, implementing feature tracking (FT) technology and ultimately analyzing cardiac muscle deformation can contribute to enhancing the initial assessment of patients with acute myocarditis. Our findings suggest that regional inflammatory processes may lead to local cardiac muscle dysfunction, thus segmental assessment of cardiac muscle deformation can be

considered as a non-invasive parameter of myocardial damage during myocarditis-related inflammatory processes.

Changes in global and segmental longitudinal deformation of the left ventricle on CMR are associated with prolonged T1 relaxation time and can serve as a readily accessible new parameter for detecting global and regional myocardial injury and dysfunction in COVID-19 patients suspected of myocardial involvement, particularly in centers where newer techniques of quantitative myocardial mapping may still be unavailable.

Publikacje wchodzące w skład rozprawy doktorskiej / manuscripts included in the doctoral dissertation:

SHORT COMMUNICATION

Cardiac abnormalities detected by echocardiography and cardiac magnetic resonance in healthcare professionals recovered from non-severe COVID-19

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INTRODUCTION

 Marcin Irjankurssy, mux, Filly, The Department of Cardiology, Medical University of Gdansk, Debinki 7, 80–211 Gdańsk, Doland,
 Patients with COVID-19 typically present with symptoms and signs of respiratory tract infection. Cardiac manifestations have also been described, however, the prevalence and characteristics of myocardial injury due to COVID-19 are still unknown [1].

Healthcare professionals are at the highest personal risk of infection. The majority of healthcare professionals have undergone infection with no or mild to moderate symptoms. However, some studies suggest the presence of myocardial inflammatory process after recovery from COVID-19 infection even in asymptomatic or mildly symptomatic patients [2]. The impact of COVID-19 disease on this particularly large group of patients should be fully elucidated, as the long-term effect on the health status of healthcare professionals remains important for the maintenance of the healthcare system.

Our objective was to characterize myocardial injury in healthcare professionals recovered from non-severe COVID-19 as detected by transthoracic echocardiography (TTE) and cardiac magnetic resonance (CMR).

METHODS

We enrolled 95 healthcare workers who survived COVID-19 confirmed in a reverse transcription-polymerase chain reaction (PCR) swab test. They included medical doctors, nurses, and paramedics who have been working at the hospital during the pandemic. We performed TTE and CMR up to 4 months from the diagnosis of the SARS-CoV-2 infection. TTE and CMR were performed from December 2020 to April 2021. No significant ST/T changes on the standard 12-lead electrocardiogram were noted. The Local Ethics Committee approved the study protocol, and written informed consent was obtained from all the participants.

Transthoracic echocardiography was performed according to the Working Group on Echocardiography of the Polish Cardiac Society using VIVID E95 (GE Ultrasound, Horten, Norway) [3]. Traditional echocardiographic measurements were obtained, and additionally, global right (RV) and left ventricle (LV) longitudinal peak systolic strain (GLPS) was quantified.

CMR wasperformed on a 1.5T scanner (Magnetom Sola, Siemens, Munich, Deutschland) using a comprehensive standardized protocol for myocarditis including steady state free precession cine for function evaluation, T1 and T2 mapping, extracellular volume fraction (ECV), and late gadolinium enhancement (LGE). All parameters were analyzed for 12 LV segments (6 basal and 6 mid-ventricular) — a total of 1068 segments were evaluated and compared to the institutional scanner-specific reference range. Three experienced cardiologists and two radiologists reviewed echocardiography and CMR examinations.

Statistical analysis

Continuous data are presented as means (standard deviation [SD]) for normally distributed variables while categorical data are expressed in proportion. The Shapiro-Wilk test was performed to assess the normality of the distribution of continuous data. Computations were performed using Statistica version 13.3. A *P*-value <0.05 was considered to be statistically significant.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The mean time between COVID-19 diagnosis and CMR was 72 (30) days (range, 22–126 days). Six subjects were excluded from the study due to technical issues (poor acoustic window — 1, inadequate breath-holding — 2, or severe artifacts — 3). Eighty-nine were included in the study:69 (77%) females, mean age 42 (10) years, mean BMI 26 (4) kg/m², with no previous significant cardio-vascular disorders, 17 (19%) patients had well-controlled arterial hypertension, 2 had hyperlipidemia and one had diabetes mellitus. None of the enrolled subjects required hospitalization for the SARS-CoV-2 infection, 57 (64%) patients suffered from moderate symptoms and 32 (36%) had mild or no symptoms.

TTE: mean left ventricular ejection fraction (LVEF) was 57 (5)%; range 38%–70%, mean GLPS was –19.6 (2.3)%; range 12.7%–22.7%. Two patients (2.2%) had an enlarged LV. Right ventricle (RV) parameters: RVID 33 (3.9) mm, TAPSE 22.6 (2.2) mm, S'11.6 (1.3) cm/s and RV free wall 27.9 (4.0)%.

CMR: mean LVEF was 60 (5)%; range 45%–70% but 29% subjects had LVEF below lower limit for age and sex. Mean EDV was 144 (27) ml, and mean ESV was 60 (15) ml. Six patients (6.7%) had an enlarged LV.

Native T1 mapping: 29 (32%) patients had at least one segment with native T1 elevation (mean 6 [2] segments per patient), mostly in the septum and infero-lateral wall. In total, native T1 was elevated in 185 of 1068 segments (17%). Eight patients (9%) had elevated mean T1 calculated for all 12 LV segments. Mean native T1 for the entire cohort was 1003 (23) ms (range: 959–1056 ms) while the scanner-specific reference range in our institution in healthy subjects is 951–1035 ms.

T2 mapping: 35 (39%) patients had at least one segment with T2 elevation (mean 6.5 [2.5] segments per patient), mostly in the septum and basal and mid-ventricular segment of the infero-lateral wall. A total of 228 segments (21%) had elevated T2. Seventeen patients (19%) had elevated mean T2 calculated for all 12 LV segments. Mean T2 for the entire cohort was 45 (3) ms (range: 38–54 ms), scanner-specific reference range in our institution in healthy subjects was 39–49 ms.

ECV analysis: 30 (34%) patients had at least one segment with high ECV, (mean 9 [3] segments per patient), mostly in the septum and basal and mid-ventricular segment of the infero-lateral wall. A total of 269 segments (25%) had elevated ECV. Eight patients (9%) had high mean ECV calculated for all 12 LV segments, mean ECV was 26.5 (2.7)% (range: 20%–39.8%) while the reference range in our institution in healthy subjects was 22%–30%.

LGE analysis: 51 subjects (57%) had at least one segment with LGE, mean 1.9 (1.1) LGE segments (range: 1–6 segments) were involved per patient, with a predominance of the basal and midventricular infero-lateral segments. Positive LGE was found in a total of 93 segments (9%), mostly epicardial or midwall (i.e. non-ischemic) patterns.

Three patients (3.5%) fulfilled the original Lake Louise Criteria for myocardial injury due to active inflammatory process: co-existing myocardial edema evaluated by STIR and LGE (+) for the same region. Two of these patients had symptoms (mild dyspnea on exertion).

The updated Lake Louise criteria based on parametric mapping (i.e. elevated T2 and at least one of the T1-based criteria including elevated native T1, high ECV, or LGE) were positive in 14 (15%) patients (Figure 1). The majority of these patients were asymptomatic.

Myocardial injury detected by TTE and CMR among healthcare professionals, convalescents from non-severe COVID-19 has not been fully evaluated so far [4, 5]. Left ventricular ejection fraction was decreased in 29% of cases, assessed by both TTE and CMR, and LV longitudinal myocardial function was also slightly decreased in 39% of the subjects. CMR identified 32% of patients with elevated native T1 (a nonspecific finding seen with acute myocardial injury/edema, fibrosis, or infiltration), 39 % with elevated T2 (a marker of acute myocardial injury/edema), and 57% with LGE (a marker of acute myocardial injury, fibrosis, or scar). To date, only a few CMR studies that evaluated COVID-19-related myocardial injury in several patient groups were published and the findings are ambiguous. For example, in competitive student athletes, the prevalence of myocarditis was very low (1.4%). On the other hand, in an unselected cohort of 100 patients, tissue characterization abnormalities were common (raised native T1 in 73% cases, raised T2 in 60% cases, LGE 32%) [1, 2]. In another study evaluating 26 athletes, in line with our results, 15% of participants had findings consistent with myocarditis and 46% had LGE [6]. Our results are also in agreement with findings of another study on 139 healthcare workers with a confirmed past SARS-CoV-2 infection, where cardiac magnetic resonance features of myocarditis were observed in 37% of the participants at a median of 10 weeks after infection [4]. According to the latest meta-analysis, nearly half of recovered COVID-19 patients exhibited one or more abnormal CMR findings, but it is still debatable if CMR should be a frontline and widespread screening tool, or rahter than a clinically indicated and selective downstream test as part of cardiovascular risk stratification [7, 8].

Our study has some limitations. There is no control group to evaluate CMR changes among healthy subjects. Baseline CMR to compare or a serum laboratory test, such as troponin level, were not obtained. Furthermore, detection of mild myocardial injury may have been missed because the optimal

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Figure 1. Patient 1. Cardiac magnetic resonance (CMR) findings consistent with acute inflammatory injury. **A.** Basal short axis T2-weighted short tau inversion recovery image (T2 STIR). **B.** Basal short axis T2 map with locally elevated T2 values. Both **A** and **B** indicated edema in the basal infero-lateral segment (arrows). **C.** Basal short axis native T1 map with locally elevated T1 values (arrows). **D.** Basal short axis. **E.** 3-chamber long axis late gadolinium enhancement images, indicating irreversible myocardial injury/fbrosis of the infero-lateral segment (phase-sensitive inversion recovery sequence; arrows). **Patient 2.** CMR findings consistent with non-acute myocardial injury: T2-weighted short tau inversion recovery image (T2 STIR; **F**) and T2 map (**G**) showed no abnormalities (arrows). **H.** Basal short axis native T1 map showed slightly increased local native T1 values limited to areas where irreversible myocardial injury/fibrosis for basal infero-lateral (arrows) and basal anteroseptal segments (arrows) was demonstrated on late gadolinium enhancement images (phase-sensitive inversion recovery sequence), in the basal short axis (I) and in the 3-chamber long axis (J)

^aThe apparent late gadolinium enhancement area in the anteroseptal segment can be an artifact related either to the proximity of the aortic root or to the contrast media lingering in the RV septal trabeculations and should be interpreted with caution

time to perform CMR appears to be unknown. It should be underlined that the interpretation of LGE images is, to some extent, subjective. However, our standard protocol includes re-acquisition of the suspected LGE lesions in a plane perpendicular to the index plane, as well as re-acquisition using an alternative phase encoding direction.

To conclude, cardiac involvement revealed by CMR among healthcare professionals who recovered from a non-severe SARS-CoV-2 infection is common. These subjects need to be monitored, followed up and should not engage in physical activity. Further research is needed to demonstrate whether CMR evidence of myocardial injury after recovery from COVID 19 is associated with short- and long-term adverse outcomes in this particular cohort.

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Cardiac Magnetic Resonance Relaxometry Parameters, Late Gadolinium Enhancement, and Feature-Tracking Myocardial Longitudinal Strain in Patients Recovered from COVID-19

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Abstract: COVID-19 infection is associated with myocarditis, and cardiovascular magnetic resonance (CMR) is the reference non-invasive imaging modality for myocardial tissue characterization. Quantitative CMR techniques, such as feature tracking (FT) and left ventricular global longitudinal strain (GLS) analysis, have been introduced as promising diagnostic tools to improve the diagnostic accuracy of suspected myocarditis. The aim of this study was to analyze the left ventricular global longitudinal strain (GLS) and the influence of T1 and T2 relaxation times, ECV, and LGE appearance on GLS parameters in a multiparametric imaging protocol in patients who recovered from COVID-19. The 86 consecutive patients enrolled in the study had all recovered from mild or moderate COVID-19 infections; none required hospitalization. Their persistent symptoms and suspected myocarditis led to cardiac magnetic resonance imaging within 3 months of the diagnosis of the SARS-CoV-2 infection. Results: Patients with GLS less negative than -15% had significantly lower LVEF (53.6% \pm 8.9 vs. 61.6% \pm 4.8; <0.001) and were significantly more likely to have prolonged T1 (28.6% vs. 7.5%; p = 0.019). Left ventricular GLS correlated significantly with T1 (r = 0.303; p = 0.006) and LVEF (r = -0.732; p < 0.001). Left ventricular GLS less negative than -15% was 7.5 times more likely in patients with prolonged T1 (HR 7.62; 95% CI 1.25-46.64). The reduced basal inferolateral longitudinal strain had a significant impact on the global left ventricular longitudinal strain. ROC results suggested that a GLS of 14.5% predicted prolonged T1 relaxation time with the best sensitivity and specificity. Conclusions: CMR abnormalities, including a myocarditis pattern, are common in patients who have recovered from COVID-19. The CMR feature-tracking left ventricular GLS is related to T1 relaxation time and may serve as a novel parameter to detect global and regional myocardial injury and dysfunction in patients with suspected myocardial involvement after recovery from COVID-19.

Keywords: non-ischemic cardiac injury; cardiac magnetic resonance imaging; coronavirus disease; late gadolinium enhancement; myocarditis; myocardial longitudinal strain

1. Introduction

COVID-19-associated myocardial injury is common and may occur as a direct result of myocardial viral infection or indirectly as a result of systemic inflammation, endothelial dysfunction, or microvascular thrombosis [1]. Previous studies have shown that myocardial involvement is associated with a worse prognosis in patients with COVID-19 [2,3]. When myocarditis is suspected, cardiovascular magnetic resonance (CMR) is the key non-invasive diagnostic tool [4]. Because of its exceptional combination of morphological and functional assessment with myocardial tissue characterization, CMR is an optimal imaging modality

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Copyright © 2023 by the authors. Licensee MDPI, Basel, Switzerland. This article is an open access article distributed under the terms and conditions of the Creative Commons Attribution (CC BY) license (https:// creativecommons.org/licenses/by/ for detecting the typical signs of acute myocardial inflammation, such as contraction abnormalities, edema, hyperemia, and fibrosis. Although the current "Lake Louise Criteria" (LLC), [4] recently updated to include contemporary parametric techniques [5] for CMR-based diagnosis of myocarditis, have been well evaluated, additional parameters could improve the accuracy and precision of the diagnosis [6,7].

Wall motion assessment is paramount for the detection of contractile functional impairment. With good endocardial border delineation and high tissue contrast, CMR offers significant advantages in this regard. However, given subjectivity and operator dependence, the need for quantification seems self-explanatory. Quantitation of myocardial deformation provides a more sensitive and robust evaluation of both atrial and ventricular function and has recently been a fast-advancing field of CMR, allowing for the detection of subclinical myocardial disease in a variety of cardiovascular conditions. Recent clinical studies have shown that global longitudinal strain (GLS) is a better diagnostic tool than left ventricular ejection fraction (LVEF) for many cardiac abnormalities, especially for detecting mildly impaired left ventricular function, allowing for early diagnosis [8]. These studies also reported a significant decrease in GLS without overt impairment of global LV systolic function. Strain analysis by echocardiography, including GLS, has been shown to predict total cardiovascular mortality more accurately than abnormalities in LVEF [9]. In addition, reduced GLS correlates with histologic findings of myocardial fibrosis, even in the absence of significant LVEF impairment, in the early stages of the disease [10]. Several techniques for CMR strain assessment have been proposed, but most (such as myocardial tagging [MT], displacement encoding [DENSE], and strain encoding [SENC]) require dedicated additional sequences and therefore are unlikely to be widely adopted in the nearest future. Recently, new quantitative CMR methods, such as feature tracking (FT)-based strain analysis, have been presented as powerful imaging tools to improve the diagnosis of myocarditis [11]. This parameter can be obtained and computed by many widely available CMR software brands and it utilizes the most basic widely available cine images, making this type of advanced analysis essentially possible at any cardiac-enabled MR scanner [12]. The parameters for CMR feature tracking myocardial strain are related to myocardial deformation and, in parallel to speckle tracking strain analysis by echocardiography, are believed to be a more sensitive parameter of functional abnormalities than LVEF [13]. Recent studies have suggested that clinicians seeking a more accurate diagnosis of myocarditis should consider a multi-parametric imaging protocol that combines several of the modern quantitative parameters [14].

To our knowledge, few studies have attempted to evaluate the relationship between myocardial longitudinal strain and other MRI parameters, especially in patients who have recovered from COVID-19. The aim of the present study was to analyze FT-derived left ventricular global longitudinal strain (GLS) and the influence of T1 and T2 mapping, ECV, and LGE extent on GLS parameters in a multiparametric imaging protocol in patients after recovery from COVID-19.

2. Materials and Methods

2.1. Study Population

A total of 86 consecutive patients who met all inclusion criteria and had no exclusion criteria were enrolled in the study at the post-COVID-19 cardiology outpatient clinic. The study's inclusion criteria were as follows: 1. SARS-CoV-2 infection confirmed by reverse transcription-polymerase chain reaction (RT-PCR) swab; 2. Absence of clinical symptoms of active COVID-19 pneumonia; 3. Persistent symptoms, including chest pain, arrhythmia, dyspnea, or fatigue, suggestive of cardiac involvement. Exclusion criteria were a history of cardiac disease (except arterial hypertension) and general contraindications to contrast-enhanced CMR (including end-stage chronic kidney disease and severe claustrophobia). Patients with other known cardiac diseases were also excluded to minimize the effect of non-COVID-19-related diseases on CMR results. All subjects had recovered from COVID-19, and the course of the infection was mild or moderate; none of the patients

required hospitalization. Due to persistent symptoms and suspected myocarditis, CMR was performed, with a median time between the scheduled CMR evaluation and the initial COVID-19 disease diagnosis of 10 (6–14) weeks.

The study was designed and conducted in accordance with the Declaration of Helsinki, and its protocol was approved by the Independent Bioethics Committee for Scientific Research at the Medical University of Gdansk (Approval No. NKBBN/475/2021). Written informed consent was obtained from all study participants.

2.2. CMR Image Acquisition and Analysis

Details of CMR acquisition and analysis have been described previously [3,5]. All participants underwent CMR examination on a 1.5-T scanner (Magnetom Aera or Magnetom Sola, Siemens Healthineers, Erlangen, Germany) with an 18-element phased-array cardiac coil, using the standardized imaging protocols described previously [3,5]. These included long-axis and short-axis cine series for anatomy and functional assessment, followed by cardiac parametric mapping sequences for longitudinal (T1) and transverse (T2) relaxation time measurements (MOLLI (Modified Look-Locker) sequence for T1 and a T2-prepared bSSFP sequence for T2 measurement; MyoMaps, Siemens Healthineers, Erlangen, Germany), as well as routine LGE assessment in the standard long axes and a short-axis stack using both fast single-shot bSSFP inversion recovery and segmented phase-sensitive inversion recovery sequences, performed within 7–15 min after injection of 0.1 mmol/kg gadobutrol (Gadovist, Bayer AG, Leverkusen, Germany) [15]. The left ventricle was divided into 16 segments according to the American Heart Association (AHA) [16,17].

The GLS of the left ventricle was measured using CMR feature tracking, which involves the detection of "patterns of features" or "irregularities" in the endocardial border that are tracked and followed in successive frames of routine CMR cine [18]. Quantitative data on the deformation of the longitudinal orientation of the left ventricular myocardium were then analyzed using the Circle CVI software (Circle Cardiovascular Imaging, Calgary, AB, Canada) [19]. As the universal feature tracking strain reference values were not published to date, the GLS value was defined as significantly reduced when it was less negative than a threshold of -15%, which represents the lower limit (-2SD) of the reference range in well-established echocardiographic strain assessment [20]. To the best of our knowledge, the reported cut-off values for unequivocally abnormal FT longitudinal strain were variable, depending on methodology, cohort, and the presence or absence of a control group within these studies [21,22]. The cutoff of -15% seemed justified as, on one hand, it corresponds to the echocardiography cut-off and several authors reported FT-GLS values within a similar range [23], and on the other hand, it seems away from the potential grey zone for CMR-FT GLS, which has well-reported reference values in a meta-analysis of over 650 healthy individuals [12]. The presence of fibrosis by LGE was assessed visually and further categorized into epicardial, mid-wall, or diffuse/transmural patterns.

Diffuse fibrosis was assessed by extracellular volume calculations. Edema was determined by the signal intensity (SI) ratio of the myocardium to the skeletal muscle SI on T2-weighted images. All analyses, including traditional CMR features, were performed by the same two physicians (a cardiologist and a radiologist, with 5 and 11 years of experience in CMR, respectively, blinded to patient baseline characteristics and outcomes) using commercial software (SyngoVia VB40, Siemens Healthineers, Erlangen, Germany). In the case of discordant results, a consensus decision was reached with a third experienced CMR reader. In a second step, CMR-FT was performed independently, with the readers further blinded to all other CMR findings, including LGE and LVEF.

2.3. Statistical Analysis

Continuous data are presented as the mean and standard deviation (SD). Categorical data were presented as a percentage of the total. The normal distribution was tested using the Kolmogorov-Smirnov test. Continuous data from two groups were compared using the Student's *t*-test or Mann-Whitney U test, depending on the distribution type. Categorical

data were compared using the chi-squared test and Fisher's exact test. Correlations were assessed with the Pearson or Spearman correlation test, depending on the distribution of the variables. We searched for independent risk factors for a diagnosis of global strain less negative than -15% using univariate logistic regression and then analyzed variables with p < 0.10 using multivariate logistic regression. Receiver operating characteristic (ROC) analysis was used to evaluate the predictive value of global T1 for global strain less negative than -15% and to determine the best cutoff for global T1 using the Youden index (J) method. A p value less than 0.05 was considered statistically significant. Data were analyzed using SPSS software v. 21 (IBM, Armonk, NY, USA).

3. Results

Finally, 81 patients (aged 42 \pm 11 yrs; 59 [73%] females) were included in the study; 5 patients were excluded because the quality of their CMR images did not allow CMR feature tracking strain analysis due to artifacts.

The baseline characteristics of the included patients are presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Study population characteristics.

Age, years	41.8 ± 10.6
Female, n (%)	59 (73)
BMI, kg/m ²	25.8 ± 4.4
History	
Smoking, n (%)	5 (6.0)
Hyperlipidemia, n (%)	3 (4.0)
Chronic kidney disease, n (%)	1 (1.2)
Hypertension, n (%)	13 (16)
Bronchial asthma, n (%)	5 (6.0)
Hyperthyroidism, n (%)	12 (15)
Clinical presentation	
Respiratory symptoms, n (%)	43 (53)
Chest pain, n (%)	42 (52)
Palpitation, n (%)	47 (58)
Dyspnea, n (%)	28 (35)
Initial blood testing	
Troponin L, ng/mL	0.003 ± 0.001
Hemoglobin, g/dL	13.8 ± 1.3
CRP, mg/L	3.2 ± 5.2
Hematocrit, (%)	40.4 ± 3.6
Glucose, mg/dL	94.3 ± 10.1
LVEF. (%)	59.4 ± 5.9

LVI

The mean GLS was $-16\%\pm$ (–3), mean T1 was 1005 \pm 34 ms mean T2 was 47.7 \pm 3.7 ms, and mean ECV was $27\pm$ 5. Prolonged T1 was noted in 12 (15%) patients, prolonged T2 in 21 (26%) patients, and higher ECV in 13 (16%) patients. LGE was present in 52 (64%) patients. Overall, 7 (8.5%) patients met the LLC criteria for active myocarditis. Representative examples of longitudinal strain curves and LGE images from a patient with acute myocarditis are shown in Figure 1.

Patients with reduced left ventricular global longitudinal strain (GLS) had significantly lower LV ejection fraction, significantly more prolonged T1, and significantly more positive late gadolinium enhancement (Table 2).



Figure 1. T1 relaxation time mapping for LV mid-segments in a mid-ventricular short axis slice (A), left ventricular peak longitudinal strain values bull's eye (**B**). The strain curve graph shows the longitudinal strain of each LV segment versus time (green curves). The average peak longitudinal strain (violet curve) is decreased, and T1 is prolonged in the mid-inferior, mid-inferoseptal and mid-inferolateral segments in the patient with acute myocarditis. (**C**) Green for LV segments, violet or purple for average.

Table 2. CMR LV myocardial parameters in patients with and without significantly reduced GLS.

	GLS More Negative or Equal —15 n = 53	GLS Less Negative than —15 n = 28	p
T1(ms), mean \pm SD	1004.1 ± 23.0	1007.7 ± 37.0	0.642
T1 > norm, (>1035 ms)	4 (7.5)	8 (28.6)	0.019
T2 (ms), mean \pm SD	47.5 ± 1.8	47.6 ± 3.8	0.898
T2 > norm, (>49 ms)	14 (26.4)	7 (25.0)	0.89
ECV (%), mean \pm SD	27.0 ± 2.2	28.3 ± 8.9	0.519
ECV > norm, (>29%)	7 (13.2)	6 (21.4)	0.356
LVEF (%), mean \pm SD	61.6 ± 4.8	53.6 ± 8.9	< 0.001
LGE (+)	30 (56.6)	22 (78.6)	0.05

GLS—global longitudinal strain; ECV—extracellular volume fraction; LVEF—left ventricular ejection fraction; LGE—late gadolinium enhancement.

Left ventricular global longitudinal strain correlates positively and significantly with T1 and negatively and significantly with LVEF (Table 3). There were no statistically significant correlations between LVEF and T1, T2 and ECV, where r = -0.38 (p = 073), r = -0.059 (p = 0.60), and r = -0.026 (p = 0.82), respectively.

Table 3. Correlation of GLS with T1, T2, ECV, and LVEF.

64	GLS (%)		
	r	p	
T1 (ms)	0.303	0.006	
T2 (ms)	0.193	0.084	
ECV (%)	-0.049	0.667	
LVEF (%)	-0.732	< 0.001	

GLS—global longitudinal strain; ECV—extracellular volume fraction; LVEF—left ventricular ejection fraction. T1- global longitudinal relaxation time of the myocardium, measured as a mean value of the global T1 in basal and midventricular slices.

Multivariate logistic regression analysis revealed that, among the selected variables, prolonged T1 was a significant independent predictive factor for an abnormal GLS less negative than -15% (HR 7.62; 95% CI 1.23–46.64) (Table 4).

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Table 4. Multivariate logistic regression analysis for impaired global longitudinal strain (less negative than -15%).

GLS Less Negative than -15%	Univariate Logistic Regression		Multivariate Logistic Regres	sion
	р	р	HR	95% CI
High global T1 (ms)	0.017	0.028	7.62	1.25-46.64
High global T2 (ms)	0.89	0.313	0.51	0.14 - 1.88
High global ECV (%)	0.342	0.584	0.61	0.10-3.66
LGE (+)	0.054	0.079	2.69	0.89-8.16

GLS-global longitudinal strain, ECV-extracellular volume fraction, LGE-late gadolinium enhancement.

Univariate and then multivariate logistic regression were performed on CMR parameters, including segmental longitudinal strain and the continuous variables T1, T2, and ECV, for each of the 16 LV segments to evaluate the effect on reducing global LV longitudinal strain (GLS). Both longitudinal strain and T1 of three inferolateral LV segments (numbers 5, 6, and 10) were significantly affected in patients with reduced GLS in univariate logistic regression. However, only longitudinal strain for segment number 5 was significantly reduced in patients with reduced GLS in multivariate logistic regression (Table 5).

Table 5. Univariate and multivariate logistic regression of SLS, F1, T2, and ECV was used to evaluate the effect of impaired left ventricular GLS less negative than -15%.

GLS Less Negative than -15 Continuous Variables	Univariate Logistic Regression		Multivariate Logistic Regression	
	p	p	HR	95% CI
SLS seg 5	0.001	0.039	1.66	1.03-2.68
T1 seg 5	0.016	0.748	1.01	0.96-1.06
T2 seg 5	0.423			
ECV seg 5	0.268			
SLS seg 6	0.01	0.279	1.17	0.88-1.57
T1 seg 6	0.009	0.409	1.03	0.97-1.09
T2 seg 6	0.655			
ECV seg 6	0.123			
SLS seg 10	0.002	0.952	0.99	0.71-1.39
T1 seg 10	0.089	0.371	0.98	0.93-1.03
T2 seg 10	0.782			
ECV seg 10	0.232			

SLS: segmental longitudinal strain; GLS: global longitudinal strain; ECV: extracellular volume fraction.

The ROC analysis was performed, and the results suggested that GLS equal to 14.5% predicts prolonged T1 relaxation time with the best combination of sensitivity (0.67) and 1-specificity (0.12), and borderline significance (p = 0.06) (Figure 2).



Figure 2. ROC for the T1 relaxation time and global longitudinal strain (GLS).

In this study, we evaluated the global longitudinal strain (GLS) of the left ventricle derived from feature tracking and the effect of T1 and T2 mapping, ECV, and LGE on GLS in patients who had recovered from COVID-19.

The main findings of this study are as follows:

- CMR abnormalities, including myocarditis patterns, are common in patients who have recovered from COVID-19 and presented with protracted symptoms that could have resulted from cardiac involvement.
- Patients with GLS less negative than -15% had significantly lower LVEF and a significantly higher number of segments with prolonged T1.
- Left ventricular GLS was significantly positively correlated with T1 and significantly negatively correlated with LVEF.
- Left ventricular GLS less negative than -15% was 7.5 times more likely in patients with prolonged T1.
- Reduced longitudinal strain in the basal inferolateral segment had a significant effect on the global left ventricular longitudinal strain.
- ROC results suggested that a GLS of -14.5% predicted prolonged T1 relaxation time with the best combination of sensitivity and specificity.

In our previous study, we evaluated the myocardial injury detected by TTE and CMR in healthcare workers recovering from non-severe COVID-19 [6]. Left ventricular ejection fraction was reduced in 29% of these cases as assessed by both TTE and CMR, and global LV longitudinal strain as assessed by echo was also slightly reduced in 39% of the subjects. Puntmann et al. demonstrated cardiac involvement by CMR in 78% of patients who recovered from COVID-19, where the majority of patients were asymptomatic or had at most mild symptoms. The results also indicated an increased likelihood of subsequent myocardial injury in both symptomatic and asymptomatic coronavirus infections and the possibility of cardiac damage. Of note, the outcomes were not related to the presence of symptoms of SARS-CoV-2 infection [24]. Further, CMR research revealed the possibility of persistent cardiac involvement in patients who have recovered from COVID-19. In fact, myocardial edema or fibrosis was observed in 58% of patients who had recently recovered from COVID-19 [25]. Another study by Xie et al. found that patients with COVID-19 infection have a high risk of cardiovascular involvement, including pericarditis and myocarditis, more than 30 days after infection, regardless of the need for hospitalization [26]. The prevalence of CMR abnormalities within 3 months of infection in the present study was similar to the previously analyzed studies.

The efficacy of regional left ventricular systolic dysfunction assessed by longitudinal strain in echocardiography is well established in patients with myocarditis. Leitman et al. demonstrated a high correlation between regional longitudinal strain and LGE detection in the same left ventricular regions in patients with myocarditis [27]. The investigators also showed that the locations of regional wall motion abnormalities and inflammatory features were similar for both STE and CMR and were mostly found in the lateral, inferior, and posterior wall segments. In the present study, the inferior and posterolateral segments of the left ventricle were also most commonly affected by infection. Similar results were shown by Kostakou et al. [28], who demonstrated that patients with acute myocardial infection had significantly reduced global longitudinal left ventricular strain assessed by echocardiography, regardless of normal LV ejection fraction. Furthermore, the presence of regional LV contractile abnormalities assessed by echocardiographic longitudinal strain was consistent with LGE findings in the same LV segments. This demonstrated that reduced segmental longitudinal strain in the inferolateral segments of the LV has a particularly high sensitivity and specificity for the diagnosis of myocarditis. It was also found that the reduced longitudinal strain of segment 5 had a significant effect on the reduction of global LV deformation. It is worth noting, that location of the reduced regional longitudinal strain in post-COVID-19 cohorts seems largely non-specific considering the recent literature [29,30]. In a study by Gao et al. including 47 patients with non-COVID-19 myocarditis and 39 healthy controls, myocardial injury detected by reduced myocardial strain was most commonly found in the inferior and inferolateral segments, which is consistent with our results [30]. In contrast, in patients with non-COVID-19-related myocarditis, these inferolateral regional changes were accompanied by frequent involvement of the septum. However, one large multicenter study reported a fairly frequent mild septal LGE in a group of 550 post-COVID-19 patients with protracted symptoms suggestive of cardiac involvement [31]. Left ventricular systolic deformation assessed by 2D strain echocardiography also highly correlated with the amount and region of edema detected by CMR in patients with acute myocarditis. In patients with persistent myocarditis with normal LVEF, global left ventricular longitudinal strain was also reduced, in contrast to results obtained in healthy subjects [32]. Our present results are in line with these findings because the mean left ventricular GLS was reduced and the mean LVEF was within the normal range

CMR is an imaging modality that can characterize the acute inflammatory myocardial process using a combination of scanning sequences that detect edema, hyperemia, and fibrosis. This combination of sequences represents the foundation of the Lake Louise criteria (LLC) [4]. However, more recent quantitative imaging modalities, such as cardiac T1 and T2 maps, may improve CMR diagnostic accuracy and are currently recommended for clinical use by the expert panel [5]. In addition, another recently introduced technique, feature tracking (FT), may further improve the initial assessment of patients with acute myocarditis. The feature tracking modality is able to analyze segmental and global myocardial strain using routinely obtained cardiac magnetic resonance cine series; however, the usefulness of myocardial strain analysis as an additional diagnostic tool in CMR is not yet well established.

Several studies have investigated whether myocardial strain analysis could discriminate patients with acute myocarditis from healthy subjects and to what extent myocardial strain deformation is associated with other myocardial inflammatory parameters such as prolonged T1 and/or T2. It has also been extensively investigated which type of strain (global, regional, longitudinal, radial, or circumferential) provides the best value in the diagnostic process of patients with acute myocarditis [33,34]. Global peak systolic longitudinal strain (GLS) was shown to be the only strain parameter significantly correlated with global native T1 relaxation time [35].

In our study, GLS was also significantly correlated with T1 relaxation time. Overall, the evidence suggests that longitudinal strain can detect even mild myocardial dysfunction. The newer parameters of myocardial inflammation, especially T1 and T2 relaxation times, have a high diagnostic performance in detecting acute myocardial edema with excellent diagnostic accuracy [11]. The fact that only T1 and not T2 were significantly related to GLS can be because T1 increases can be found in both the acute and chronic phases of myocardial injury, the latter being far more prevalent in our group.

Our results suggest that regional inflammatory processes can lead to regional myocardial dysfunction. Therefore, segmental myocardial strain assessment can be considered a noninvasive parameter of regional myocardial injury in the course of the myocardial inflammatory process. Fisher et al. showed in their univariate analysis that GLS was significantly associated with major adverse cardiovascular events. In a multivariable model adjusted for clinical variables (age, sex, body mass index, and infection intensity parameters) and established CMR parameters (LVEF and LGE amount), LV global longitudinal strain remained independently associated with cardiovascular outcomes [30]. The authors suggested that myocardial strain using feature tracking by CMR has independent prognostic value in addition to clinical data, LVEF, and LGE in patients with myocarditis. Thus, GLS may be a novel marker to improve risk stratification in patients with acute myocarditis. The mean GLS of the entire population in this study was $-12.5 \pm 4.5\%$, which indicated a greater degree of impairment compared to our results. This difference could be explained by the fact that the patients in Fisher's study were referred for CMR with suspected myocarditis and had more severe symptoms and a lower mean LVEF. In contrast to our work, parametric T1 and T2 mapping and extracellular volume were not available in this study. In addition, GLS worse than -13.1% was associated with a higher likelihood of MACE. In our study, left ventricular GLS worse than -15% was associated with a 7.5-fold higher probability of prolonged T1, a well-established marker of myocardial injury and edema. Additionally, the ROC curve suggested that a GLS of -14.5% could predict prolonged T1 relaxation time with the best combination of sensitivity and specificity, but with borderline significance.

To our knowledge, the current study is the first to evaluate FT-derived left ventricular GLS in patients who recently recovered from COVID-19. The CMR-FT used in this study is a technique that has not yet been performed on a routine basis in the clinical setting. However, it may be an important tool for a more detailed characterization of myocardial injury and prognostication in this clinical scenario.

Limitations

One limitation of this study is that acute myocarditis was not confirmed by endomyocardial biopsy, although biopsy is not a standard diagnostic tool in all cases of suspected acute myocarditis. The strain analysis was also limited to global and segmental longitudinal strains, and no control group without COVID-19 infection was evaluated. Another important consideration is that in patients with cardiac symptoms, CMR provides a noninvasive and clinically useful differential diagnosis across a spectrum of myocardial disease, beyond myocarditis [36]. Therefore, changes in left ventricular deformation are non-specific and can be detected in various cardiac conditions, such as patients with myocardial infarction, left ventricular hypertrophy, amyloidosis, or subclinical coronary artery diseases [37]. It should be underlined that our results cannot be extended to all patients with suspected myocarditis, as only patients with suspected myocarditis after SARS-CoV-2 infection were enrolled, and myocardial strain results should be interpreted in the appropriate clinical context. Additionally, due to the limited sample size of this observational study, the results should be considered hypothesis-generating and need to be validated in a larger cohort with a control group.

5. Conclusions

CMR abnormalities, including a myocarditis pattern of nonischemic late gadolinium enhancement, are common findings in patients with prolonged symptoms who have recovered from COVID-19. Changes in CMR global and segmental longitudinal left ventricular strain are related to prolonged T1 relaxation time and may serve as a readily available novel parameter to detect global and regional myocardial injury and dysfunction in patients with suspected myocardial involvement after recovery from COVID-19, thus improving the global diagnostic potential of CMR, including facilities where newer quantitative techniques may not yet be available.

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Oświadczenia autorów

Publikacja 1

Gdańsk . dnia. 03.07.2023r

Mgr.Anna Glińska (tytuł zawodowy, imię i nazwisko)

OŚWIADCZENIE

Jako współautor pracy pt. "Cardiac abnormalities detected by echocardiography and cardiac magnetic resonance in healthcare professionals recovered from non-severe COVID-19"

oświadczam, iż mój własny wkład merytoryczny w przygotowanie przeprowadzenie

i opracowanie badań oraz przedstawienie pracy w formie publikacji to:

anolize statysty are , storonie den a

Jednocześnie wyrażam zgodę na przedłożenie w/w pracy przez lek. Jadwigę Fijałkowską jako część rozprawy doktorskiej w formie spójnego tematycznie zbioru artykułów opublikowanych w czasopismach naukowych.

Oświadczam, iż samodzielna i możliwa do wyodrębnienia część ww. pracy

wykazuje indywidualny wkład lek. Jadwigi Fijałkowskiej przy opracowywaniu koncepcji, wykonywaniu części eksperymentalnej, opracowaniu i interpretacji wyników tej pracy.

(podpis współautora)

Prof.dr.hab Marcin Gruchała (tytuł zawodowy, imię i nazwisko)

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i opracowanie badań oraz przedstawienie pracy w formie publikacji to: <u>krytywne prene</u> <u>poprave i ostotedno akcepte y e monu skryp</u>tu

Jednocześnie wyrażam zgodę na przedłożenie w/w pracy przez lek. Jadwigę Fijałkowską jako część rozprawy doktorskiej w formie spójnego tematycznie zbioru artykułów opublikowanych w czasopismach naukowych.

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(podpis współautora)

Dr n.med.Radosław Nowak (tytuł zawodowy, imię i nazwisko)

OŚWIADCZENIE

Jako współautor pracy pt. "Cardiac abnormalities detected by echocardiography and cardiac magnetic resonance in healthcare professionals recovered from non-severe COVID-19"

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Oświadczam, iż samodzielna i możliwa do wyodrębnienia część ww. pracy

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Lek.Jakub Sobolewski (tytuł zawodowy, imię i nazwisko)

OŚWIADCZENIE

Jako współautor pracy pt. "Cardiac abnormalities detected by echocardiography and cardiac magnetic resonance in healthcare professionals recovered from non-severe COVID-19"

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Oświadczam, iż samodzielna i możliwa do wyodrębnienia część ww. pracy

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Dr n.med.Marta Żarczyńska-Buchowiecka (tytuł zawodowy, imię i nazwisko)

OŚWIADCZENIE

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Oświadczam, iż samodzielna i możliwa do wyodrębnienia część ww. pracy

M. Zen. Prod

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OŚWIADCZENIE

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i opracowanie badań oraz przedstawienie pracy w formie publikacji to: projektevenie boalanie zbierenie olonych interpretocje dlanych

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Oświadczam, iż samodzielna i możliwa do wyodrębnienia część ww.

pracy

Trabele Pisarohl

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Prof. dr.hab Marcin Fijałkowski (tytuł zawodowy, imię i nazwisko)

OŚWIADCZENIE

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Oświadczam, iż samodzielna i możliwa do wyodrębnienia część ww. pracy

Marca Fordon (podpis współautora)

Dr n.med Karolina Dorniak (tytuł zawodowy, imię i nazwisko)

OŚWIADCZENIE

Jako współautor pracy pt. "Cardiac abnormalities detected by echocardiography and cardiac magnetic resonance in healthcare professionals recovered from non-severe COVID-19"

oświadczam, iż mój własny wkład merytoryczny w przygotowanie przeprowadzenie

i opracowanie badań oraz przedstawienie pracy w formie publikacji to: wrytyczne ocene, poprevo c ostołewne okceptecje monusky ptu

Jednocześnie wyrażam zgodę na przedłożenie w/w pracy przez lek. Jadwigę Fijałkowską jako część rozprawy doktorskiej w formie spójnego tematycznie zbioru artykułów opublikowanych w czasopismach naukowych.

Oświadczam, iż samodzielna i możliwa do wyodrębnienia część ww. pracy

Koudans Deserve

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Oświadczam, iż samodzielna i możliwa do wyodrębnienia część ww. pracy

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(podpis współautora)

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OŚWIADCZENIE

Jako współautor pracy pt. "Cardiac abnormalities detected by echocardiography and cardiac magnetic resonance in healthcare professionals recovered from non-severe COVID-19"

oświadczam, iż mój własny wkład merytoryczny w przygotowanie przeprowadzenie

i opracowanie badań oraz przedstawienie pracy w formie publikacji to: projektowowie badenia ostategna okaptacje monu skryptu

Jednocześnie wyrażam zgodę na przedłożenie w/w pracy przez lek. Jadwigę Fijałkowską jako część rozprawy doktorskiej w formie spójnego tematycznie zbioru artykułów opublikowanych w czasopismach naukowych.

Oświadczam, iż samodzielna i możliwa do wyodrębnienia część ww. pracy

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Publikacja 2

Gdańsk . dnia. 03.07.2023r

Mgr.Anna Glińska (tytuł zawodowy, imię i nazwisko)

OŚWIADCZENIE

Jako współautor pracy pt. "Cardiac magnetic resonance relaxometry parameters, late gadolinium enhancement, and feature-tracking myocardial longitudinal strain in patients recovered from COVID-19" oświadczam, iż mój własny wkład merytoryczny w przygotowanie przeprowadzenie i opracowanie badań oraz przedstawienie pracy w formie publikacji to: <u>zbie rowie obenych</u>, <u>analize</u>, <u>stoły styczne</u>

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Oświadczam, iż samodzielna i możliwa do wyodrębnienia część ww. pracy

wykazuje indywidualny wkład lek. Jadwigi Fijałkowskiej przy opracowywaniu koncepcji, wykonywaniu części eksperymentalnej, opracowaniu i interpretacji wyników tej pracy.

Anne aliske

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Lek, Katarzyna Sienkiewicz (tytuł zawodowy, imię i nazwisko)

OŚWIADCZENIE

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Oświadczam, iż samodzielna i możliwa do wyodrębnienia część ww.

Katawiye Saile min (podpis współautora)

Dr n.med Dorota Kulawiak-Gałaska (tytuł zawodowy, imię i nazwisko)

OŚWIADCZENIE

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Oświadczam, iż samodzielna i możliwa do wyodrębnienia część ww. pracy

Donabe Ger

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Prof. dr.hab Edyta Szurowska (tytuł zawodowy, imię i nazwisko)

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lek. Jadwigę Fijałkowską jako część rozprawy doktorskiej w formie spójnego tematycznie zbioru artykułów opublikowanych w czasopismach naukowych.

Oświadczam, iż samodzielna i możliwa do wyodrębnienia część ww. pracy

(podpis współautora)

Dr hab. Joanna Monika Pieńkowska (tytuł zawodowy, imię i nazwisko)

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Oświadczam, iż samodzielna i możliwa do wyodrębnienia część ww. pracy

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Dr n.med.Karolina Dorniak (tytuł zawodowy, imię i nazwisko)

OŚWIADCZENIE

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Jednocześnie wyrażam zgodę na przedłożenie w/w pracy przez lek. Jadwigę Fijałkowską jako część rozprawy doktorskiej w formie spójnego tematycznie zbioru artykułów opublikowanych w czasopismach naukowych.

Oświadczam, iż samodzielna i możliwa do wyodrębnienia część ww. pracy

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OŚWIADCZENIE

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