EDITORIAL COMMENT

Anemia and prognosis in acute coronary syndromes

Anemia e prognóstico das síndromes coronárias agudas

Brenda Moura

Departamento de Cardiologia, Hospital Militar Regional, Porto, Portugal

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Anemia has been shown to be an independent risk factor for cardiovascular events, in the community, in patients with heart failure, and in those undergoing percutaneous coronary intervention.

Over the last decade various authors have investigated the prognostic impact of hemoglobin levels in the context of acute coronary syndrome (ACS), both in the short-term (during hospitalization) and in the long-term (mainly up to three months, since few studies have assessed one-year outcomes).

Analyses of randomized trials report prevalence of anemia ranging between 15% and 43% in patients with myocardial infarction (MI).1,2 In theory, anemia can aggravate myocardial injury in MI patients, through both decreased oxygen supply to at-risk myocardium and increased oxygen demand resulting from increased cardiac output.

In an analysis of a database of more than 30,000 patients admitted for MI, anemia was not associated with higher one-year mortality.3 However, a study of elderly patients with MI found a significant relation between hematocrit on admission and 30-day mortality, lower hemoglobin values being associated with progressively shorter survival.2

Sabatine et al.,4 in an analysis of patients from 16 TIMI trials, reported a J-shaped relationship with clinical events at 30 days: in patients with ST-elevation MI, mortality was higher in those with hemoglobin levels below 14 g/dl or above 16 g/dl.

In an attempt to understand these mechanisms, Rousseau et al.7 assessed 746 patients with non-ST elevation ACS from the Integrilin and Enoxaparin Randomized Assessment of Acute Coronary Syndrome Treatment (INTERACT) trial who underwent continuous electrocardiographic monitoring. An
association was found between low hemoglobin levels and recurrent ischemia, advanced age, comorbidities and higher GRACE score. In multivariate analysis adjusted for these other factors, low hemoglobin maintained an independent association with recurrent ischemia. Thus, at least as far as non-ST elevation ACS is concerned, recurrent ischemia may be the factor responsible for the worse prognosis of anemic patients.

With regard to treatment of anemia, particularly blood transfusions, there is little consensus. Although low hemoglobin levels are associated with higher mortality, correcting them has been shown more often to worsen rather than to improve prognosis. In a retrospective analysis, Rao et al. assessed 2401 patients who underwent red blood cell transfusion during hospitalization for ACS. These patients were older and had more comorbidities at admission, as well as higher 30-day mortality and infarction rates (unadjusted) than those who did not undergo transfusion. Even after adjustment for other variables, mortality remained higher in the group who were transfused.

The conclusion may be drawn that anemia detected at admission for ACS identifies patients with worse prognosis, both in-hospital and at one year; these patients are usually older and with more comorbidities, which in themselves are frequently associated with anemia. Nevertheless, aggressive treatment of anemia in this context has not been shown to have a positive impact on prognosis.

Conflicts of interest

The authors have no conflicts of interest to declare.

References