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Can CYP2C19 genotyping improve antiplatelet therapy efficacy in real-life practice?

Recent advances

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ABSTRACT

Clopidogrel remains the most widely used P2Y₁₂ receptor inhibitor worldwide and is often used in combination with aspirin for secondary prevention in patients with arterial disease. The drug is associated with a wide response variability with one on three patients exhibiting little or no inhibition of adenosine diphosphate-induced platelet aggregation. It is a prodrug that is mainly metabolized by hepatic cytochrome P450 (CYP) 2C19. Patients who carry a *CYP2C19 loss-of-function (LoF)* allele have reduced metabolism of clopidogrel that is associated with reduced platelet inhibition compared to non-carriers that is associated with increased risk for thrombotic event occurrences, particularly, stent thrombosis. The United States Food and Drug Administration (US FDA) issued a black box warning in the clopidogrel label highlighting the importance of presence of *CYP2C19 LOF* allele during the insufficient metabolism of clopidogrel and availability of other potent P2Y₁₂ inhibitor for the treatment in CYP2C19 poor metabolizers. Clinical trials have conclusively demonstrated greater anti-ischemic benefits of prasugrel/ticagrelor in the treatment of patients carrying the *CYP2C19 LoF* allele. However, uniform use of these more potent P2Y₁₂ inhibitors has been associated with greater bleeding and cost, and lower adherence. The

latter information provides a strong rationale for personalizing P2Y₁₂ inhibitor therapy based on the laboratory determination of *CYP2C19* genotype. However, cardiologists have been slow to take up pharmacogenetic testing possibly due to lack of provider and patient education, clear cardiology guidelines and, and lack of positive results from adequately sized randomized clinical trials. However, current evidence strongly supports genotyping of patients who are candidates for clopidogrel. Physicians should strongly consider performing genetic tests to identify *LoF* carriers and treat these patients with more pharmacodynamically predictable P2Y₁₂ inhibitors than clopidogrel.

Key words: clopidogrel, CYP2C19, genotyping, P2Y₁₂ receptor, platelets, stent thrombosis

Therapy with a P2Y₁₂ receptor blocker added to aspirin remains the cornerstone pharmacologic therapy in patients with arterial diseases to prevent recurrent ischemic event occurrences [1]. Continuous downstream intracellular signaling from the P2Y₁₂ receptor is essential for sustained platelet activation and aggregation, and subsequent stable platelet-rich thrombus generation at the site of vascular injury causing thrombotic event occurrences [2]. Antithrombotic efficacy observed in multiple randomized clinical trials provided the strong rationale to add a P2Y₁₂ receptor blocker to aspirin therapy [1]. Despite the availability of more potent P2Y₁₂ receptor blockers such as prasugrel and ticagrelor, clopidogrel remains the dominant P2Y₁₂ inhibitor used in patients with arterial diseases.

Clopidogrel is an oral, selective platelet P2Y₁₂ receptor blocker. It is a second generation thienopyridine prodrug. Following intestinal administration, 85% of clopidogrel is hydrolyzed predominantly by hepatic carboxylesterase I to an inactive carboxylic acid metabolite - SR26334 and the remaining 15% is rapidly metabolized in a two-step process by hepatic CYP enzymes to an unstable active thiolactone metabolite. CYP2C19 plays a major role in clopidogrel metabolism in both steps [3]. In modeling studies, the active thiolactone metabolite is predicted to destabilize interactions of the G-coupled oligomeric P2Y₁₂ receptor with adenosine diphosphate (ADP) by binding permanently to the free thiol of Cys97 and thereby preventing ADP-induced platelet activation and aggregation for the life of platelets [2, 4].

A pivotal study conducted in patients undergoing elective stenting in 2003 demonstrated the wide pharmacodynamic response variability to clopidogrel. Most importantly, a limited or an absence of inhibition of ADP-induced platelet aggregation was demonstrated in nearly one in three patients. This phenomenon was first described as clopidogrel “non-responsiveness” or clopidogrel “resistance” [5]. Later, it was suggested that high post-treatment platelet reactivity (HPR) to ADP is more appropriate to describe this phenomenon and more useful to correlate with recurrent ischemic event occurrences [6]. In this line, multiple translational and observational research studies linked HPR to recurrent ischemic events such as myocardial infarction (MI) and stent thrombosis in patients treated with coronary stenting. Several lines of evidence strongly suggested that variable and insufficient active metabolite generation were the primary explanation for clopidogrel response variability and nonresponsiveness, respectively [7]. Functional variability in hepatic cytochromes, particularly CYP2C19 has been reported as a major cause of clopidogrel response variability. CYP2C19 isoenzyme activity is strongly influenced by carriage of single nucleotide polymorphisms (SNPs). In addition, epigenetic factors such as demographic variables, comorbidities, and drug-drug interaction at the CYP level further influence platelet reactivity in patients treated with clopidogrel independent of SNP carriage [8].

A genome wide association study (GWAS) study conducted in healthy volunteers demonstrated that *loss-of-function (LoF)* polymorphisms of *CYP2C19* (*2 and *3) were associated with decreased clopidogrel active metabolite exposure and less platelet inhibition [9]. In a replication study of clopidogrel-treated patients treated who underwent percutaneous coronary intervention (PCI), carriers of the *LoF CYP2C19*2* allele had ~2.4× higher cardiovascular (CV) event occurrence at 1 year compared with non-carriers [9]. The influence of *CYP2C19 LoF* carrier status on clopidogrel-induced platelet inhibition has been shown to be most significant among poor metabolizers who carry two *LoF* alleles compared to patients carrying one *LoF* allele [10]. Similarly, an increased risk of the composite endpoint of CV death, MI, or stroke among carriers of one *LoF* allele (1.6×) and carriers of two *LoF* alleles (1.8×), as compared with non-carriers, was demonstrated in a collaborative meta-analysis of trials primarily involving PCI-treated patients (91%). The same meta-analysis demonstrated a dose-dependent association of *LoF* carriage with a 2.67 times increased risk of stent thrombosis among carriers of one *LoF* allele and 3.97 times increased risk of stent thrombosis among carriers of two *LoF* alleles as compared with non-carriers

[11]. The influence of the *gain-of-function allele (GoF) (CYP2C19*17)* on ADP-induced platelet function and post-PCI clinical events is less compared to that of *CYP2C19 LoF* alleles.

The prevalence of *LoF* and *GoF* alleles differ significantly by ethnicities. *LoF* allele carriage is more frequent in Asians, particularly East Asians, whereas *GoF* allele carriage occurs more frequently among Europeans and Africans [12, 13]. The genotype based *CYP2C19* metabolizer status indicating *CYP2C19* enzyme activity and their prevalence in different ethnicities are presented in the **Table 1**. However, despite the higher prevalence of *LoF* allele carriage, East Asian patients demonstrate a lower risk for post-PCI ischemic event occurrences along with elevated risk for bleeding. The latter phenomenon has been described as “East Asian Paradox” [14].

The pharmacodynamic effects of ticagrelor and prasugrel are not significantly influenced by *CYP2C19* genetic polymorphisms. These agents are associated with less response variability, greater platelet inhibition and low rates of HPR. In the genetic sub-studies of major randomized clinical trials, treatment with prasugrel and ticagrelor was associated with significantly lower MACE rates compared to clopidogrel in patients carrying a *LoF* allele [15, 16].

The International Clopidogrel Pharmacogenomics Consortium (ICPC) developed a pharmacogenomic polygenic response score (PgxRS) to study the impact of 31 candidate gene polymorphisms on platelet reactivity in coronary artery disease (CAD) patients treated with clopidogrel [17]. Earlier it was suggested that antithrombotic efficacy can be improved by treating patients with HPR or with *LoF* carriage with prasugrel or ticagrelor. It was also postulated that the reservation of potent P2Y₁₂ inhibitors for the latter patients as compared to uniform treatment of all patients with prasugrel or ticagrelor would be associated with greater safety [18]. Multiple subsequent studies have demonstrated that the anti-ischemic effects of clopidogrel are comparable to those of potent P2Y₁₂ receptor inhibitors in *LoF* non-carriers. These observations have provided a strong rationale for patients with *CYP2C19 LoF* carriage, as determined by laboratory testing, to be selectively treated with prasugrel or ticagrelor [18].

Multiple randomized clinical trials explored the utility of *CYP2C19* genetic testing to personalize P2Y₁₂ receptor based dual antiplatelet therapy (DAPT) [19–21]. The TROPICAL ACS (Testing Responsiveness to Platelet Inhibition on Chronic Antiplatelet Treatment For Acute Coronary Syndromes) trial primarily demonstrated the utility of de-escalation of prasugrel to clopidogrel therapy based on platelet function testing in ACS patients undergoing PCI. In a

genotyping sub-study of TROPICAL ACS, a significant correlation between *CYP2C19*2* and *CYP2C19*17* carrier status with platelet reactivity in patients treated with clopidogrel was demonstrated. However, with respect to the prediction of ischemic and bleeding risk, there was no added benefit of genotyping with the phenotype guided de-escalation approach [22].

In the POPular Genetics trial, patients undergoing PCI for STEMI (n=2,488) who received genotype-guided P2Y₁₂ inhibitor treatment had lower Platelet Inhibition and Patient Outcomes (PLATO) major bleeding events (9.8% vs. 12.5%; HR, 0.78; *P* = 0.04) and similar rates of net adverse clinical events (defined as death from any cause, MI, definite stent thrombosis, stroke, or PLATO major bleeding at 12 months (5.1% vs. 5.9%; *P* <0.001 for noninferiority) when compared with patients who received uniform ticagrelor or prasugrel therapy [19]. In the TAILOR PCI (Tailored Antiplatelet Therapy Following PCI) Trial a randomized investigation of 5302 CAD patients undergoing PCI, *CYP2C19 LoF* carriers treated with ticagrelor or prasugrel had lower MACE (CV death, MI, stroke, stent thrombosis, and severe myocardial ischemia) rates compared to patients randomized to conventional clopidogrel therapy (4.0% vs. 5.9%; HR, 0.66; *P* = 0.06) [20]. Interestingly, in a prespecified analysis of this trial that assessed multiple events per patient, the genotype-guided strategy was associated with a significantly lower rate of ischemic events (HR, 0.60; *P* = 0.01), with no significant difference in major/minor bleeding (HR, 1.36; *P* = 0.39) [23]. A collaborative study of 3342 patients undergoing PCI in a real-world setting demonstrated a lower rate of major thrombotic events in *LoF* carriers treated with prasugrel or ticagrelor compared to patients treated with clopidogrel (adjusted HR, 0.56), but a similar rate of thrombotic events in *CYP2C19 LoF* noncarriers (adjusted HR, 1.07) and a similar rate of bleeding with alternative therapy versus clopidogrel in both groups [24]. It was also demonstrated that there was no significant influence of *CYP2C19*17* genotype on post-PCI prescribing decisions or clinical outcomes [25].

Combining *CYP2C19* genotype testing, platelet reactivity and clinical risk factors in a pharmacogenetic-driven algorithm (POPular Risk Score [PRiS]) showed usefulness in tailoring DAPT in patients undergoing drug eluting stenting; in patients with PRiS ≥ 2 , ticagrelor was demonstrated to reduce MACE without an increase in bleeding risk as compared to uniform use of clopidogrel; in patients with PRiS <2, clopidogrel therapy was associated with a bleeding risk with comparable incidence of MACE [26]. This study highlighted the utility of combining genetic testing with platelet function testing and demographic variables to improve patient outcomes.

In addition to CAD patients, the utility of *CYP2C19* genotype testing has been explored in large scale trials of patients with stroke. In the randomized Clopidogrel in High-Risk Patients with Acute Nondisabling Cerebrovascular Events (CHANCE-2 trial), Chinese patients with *CYP2C19* *LoF* carriage and with minor ischemic stroke or transient ischemic attack (TIA), when treated with ticagrelor vs clopidogrel had a reduced risk of stroke at 90 days (6.0% vs. 7.6%; HR, 0.77; $P = 0.008$), and a similar risk of moderate/severe bleeding (0.3% vs. 0.3%) [27] (Table 2). Total bleeding events were more common in the ticagrelor group, and the clinical outcomes were consistent among the intermediate and poor *CYP2C19* metabolizers [28]. Among different subgroups, the benefit of ticagrelor over clopidogrel was seen in patients with normal renal function, single small subcortical infarction (SSSI), non-elevated remnant cholesterol (RC) levels, and without intracranial artery stenosis (ICAS) [29–32]. It is worthwhile mentioning that the time wise assessment in the CHANCE-2 trial showed benefit associated with ticagrelor therapy mainly in the first week, with only small additional benefit in the next 2 weeks and the overall superiority of ticagrelor over clopidogrel persisted at 1 year follow up [33, 34]. In a recent RCT, personalized antiplatelet therapy in acute stroke/TIA patients based on the *CYP2C19* genotype testing and urinary 11-dehydroxy thromboxane (Tx)B₂ (a marker of aspirin response) levels was associated with favorable neurological function and reduction in bleeding risk compared to a standard treatment [35]. A similar benefit was also shown in another RCT where antiplatelet therapy guided by pharmacogenomics and clinical characteristics was associated with decreased vascular event risk in patients with stroke/TIA [36]. These trials signify the higher recurrent risk of stroke in *CYP2C19* *LoF* carriers treated with clopidogrel [37].

GUIDELINES ADDRESSING *CYP2C19* GENOTYPE TESTING

In 2010, the US FDA issued a “Boxed Warning” stating that healthcare professionals should consider other antiplatelet medications or alternative dosing in patients who are poor metabolizers of clopidogrel (*CYP2C19* *LoF* carriers) [38]. Despite the demonstration of a graded effect of *CYP2C19* *LoF* carriage [11], the American Heart Association and American College of Cardiology guidelines for *CYP2C19* genotyping have not changed since 2011 when they recommended against routine genotyping — a class III (i.e., no benefit) recommendation [39]. The 2020 European Society of Cardiology guidelines for the management of ACS recommend *CYP2C19*-guided antiplatelet therapy as an alternative to 12 months of DAPT with prasugrel or ticagrelor [40]. The

latter was based on the results from POPular Genetics trial [19]. The 2022 Clinical Pharmacogenetics Implementation Consortium (CPIC) guideline recommended the use of alternative P2Y₁₂ inhibitors in *CYP2C19 poor metabolizers* in patients with acute coronary syndromes and/or those undergoing PCI (strong recommendation), and other CV/neurovascular indications (moderate recommendation) [15]. Finally, the 2023 European Society of Cardiology guidelines for the management of acute coronary syndrome briefly mention *CYP2C19* genetic testing for P2Y₁₂ therapy de-escalation [41].

The main reason for not giving a strong recommendation for genotyping is that the guidelines require high-quality evidence from more than one large RCT, meta-analyses of high-quality RCTs, or one or more RCT's corroborated by high-quality registry studies for a class I/level A recommendation (i.e., that the test should be performed) [39]. It is difficult to achieve the latter evidence at this time because it is prohibitively costly to conduct the large-scale trial with the size required to reach adequate power. Moreover, trials of personalized therapies are not of interest to most pharmaceutical companies due to concern of market share loss. Finally, it is unethical given the body of evidence currently available to randomize *CYP2C19 LoF* carriers to clopidogrel since they suffer harm. In this scenario, a non-inferiority trial like the POPular Genetics trial, and the integration of evidence across multiple studies in meta-analyses may be the only option but would not likely provide findings conclusive enough to reach a class I recommendation in the minds of the guideline writers [19].

FUTURE PERSPECTIVES

Despite the FDA's boxed warning, robust data implicating a poorer clinical outcome in *LoF* carriers treated with clopidogrel, and the cost-effectiveness of personalizing antiplatelet therapy by genotyping, the implementation of genotype testing into routine clinical practice has been less robust. Furthermore, uniform use of more potent P2Y₁₂ inhibitors is associated with greater bleeding and cost, and lower adherence, whereas clopidogrel is effective in the majority of *CYP2C19 LoF* non-carriers patients. Therefore, at this time, the totality of evidence strongly suggests that physicians should perform genetic testing to identify patients with high-risk arterial disease to determine whether they are suitable for clopidogrel therapy. However, current physician preference for P2Y₁₂ inhibitors is not genotype guided [42–44]. The current American Heart Association statement supporting genotype-guided antiplatelet therapy may provide an impetus to

change current practice [45]. Parenthetically, the seemingly absolute requirements for large RCT results stand against the requirements of guideline writers in other specialties (e.g., oncology) who have been willing to consider the entire hierarchy of evidence.

Real-time PCR (TaqMan system, laboratory-based testing) using genomic DNA from whole blood samples is time consuming and requires certified personnel and a laboratory to perform *CYP2C19* genotyping for clinical use. Point-of-care (POC) genotype testing may have its greatest impact when implemented during the hospital stay when the physician can decide on the genetically predicted optimal choice of P2Y₁₂ receptor inhibitor for loading and for maintenance. Development of advanced point of care genetic testing technology with rapid turnaround time has opened the door for personalized antiplatelet therapy strategies. Currently, a POC *CYP2C19* genotyping assay using buccal swabs (Cube, Genomadix, Kanata, ON, Canada, earlier SPATAN) are available. There is a 99.1% concordance between the Spartan assay and TaqMan genotyping assay results [20]. Genedrive, another POC testing method, is also available [46].

POC genotyping assay is simple, user friendly and can be performed even in an outpatient doctor's office for quick antiplatelet therapy personalization. In a recent study, the feasibility of a routine bedside *CYP2C19* genetic testing for guiding antiplatelet therapy in a community setting was explored using the SPARTAN System [47]. *CYP2C19* genetic testing was performed in the catheterization laboratory prior to PCI and the results were available within one hour for decision making by the interventional cardiologist. Adherence to the best practice advisory (BPA) by clinicians was noted in 93% of patients undergoing PCI; 87% of *CYP2C19* *LoF* allele carriers were prescribed prasugrel or ticagrelor, and 95 % of non-carriers were prescribed clopidogrel [47]. These finding from the community hospital study reinforce the feasibility of routine *CYP2C19* genotyping in large academic centers. In 2024 POC genotyping can be clearly used to rapidly personalize antiplatelet therapy, reserving clopidogrel for the wild type and prasugrel or ticagrelor for the *LoF* carriers.

Article information

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Haemonetics, Hikari Dx, Idorisa, Labcorp Drug Development, Novartis, Prolocor, Recor Medical, Vectura Limited, Zoll Medical Corporation; in addition, Dr. Gurbel has two patents, Detection of restenosis risk in patients issued and Assessment of cardiac health and thrombotic risk in a patient. Dr. Gurbel was an expert witness in a lawsuit associated with Plavix. Other authors report no conflict of interests.

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Table 1. Genotyping based CYP2C19 metabolizer status and their prevalence in different ethnicities

Common <i>CYP2C19</i> genotypes	Phenotype (Metabolized status)	Prevalence in different ethnicities
<i>*17/*17, *17/*1</i>	Rapid metabolizer (RM)	34% Caucasians, 30% African Americans, 4% Asians
<i>*1/*1</i>	Normal metabolizer (NM)	
<i>*1/*2</i>	Intermediate metabolizer (IM)	24% Caucasians, 30% African Americans, 46% Asians
<i>*2/*2</i>	Poor metabolizer (PM)	2% Caucasians. 3.5% African Americans, 10% Asians

Table 2. Studies supporting genotyping in clopidogrel treated patients

Study, (ref #)	Study design	Intervention	Primary endpoints	Key results
Shuldiner et al. [9]	Genome Wide Association study in Amish healthy subjects, n = 429	Clopidogrel for 7 days Clopidogrel-treated patients	Platelet aggregation in patients with <i>CYP2C19*2</i> allele	<i>CYP2C19*2</i> carriage strongly associated with diminished anti-platelet response, accounting for 12% of the variation in platelet aggregation

	Outcome study in patients undergoing coronary intervention, n = 237			to ADP ($P = 4.3 \times 10^{-11}$) <i>CYP2C19</i> *2 carriers vs non- carriers have higher risk for 1-year CV event or death (20.9% vs. 10%; HR, 2.42; 95% CI, 1.18–4.99; $P = 0.02$)
POPular Genetics [20]	RCT in patients undergoing primary PCI with stent implantation, n = 2488	Personalized P2Y ₁₂ inhibitor therapy based on early <i>CYP2C19</i> genetic testing (genotype-guided group) vs. blanket therapy with ticagrelor/ prasugrel (standard-treatment group) for 12 months	All cause death, MI, definite stent thrombosis, stroke, or PLATO major bleeding at 12 months PLATO major or minor bleeding	5.1% vs. 5.9%, absolute difference 0.7 percentage points, 95% CI, –2 to 0.7; $P < 0.01$ for non-inferiority 9.8% vs. 12.5%; HR, 0.78; 95% CI, 0.61 to 0.98; $P = 0.04$
TAILOR-PCI [21]	RCT in patients undergoing PCI for ACS or stable CAD, n = 5302	Point-of-care genotype guided group: <i>CYP2C19</i> LoF carriers: ticagrelor or prasugrel and noncarriers: clopidogrel vs. conventional group: clopidogrel	CV death, MI, stroke, stent thrombosis and severe recurrent ischemia at 12 months ^a Major bleeding ^a	4.0% vs. 5.9%; HR, 0.66; 95% CI, 0.43–1.02; $P = 0.06$ 1.9% vs. 1.6%; HR, 1.22;

				95% CI, 0.60–2.51; <i>P</i> = 0.58
Pereira et al. [22]	Meta-analysis of 7 RCTs: 77% had PCI and 98% had ACS, n = 15 949	Ticagrelor and prasugrel vs. clopidogrel in: <i>CYP2C19</i> LoF carriers <i>CYP2C19</i> LoF non-carriers	CV death, MI, stroke, stent thrombosis, and severe recurrent ischemia	7% vs. 10.3%; RR, 0.70; 95% CI, 0.59–0.83 8.8% vs. 9.2%; RR, 1.0; 95% CI, 0.80–1.25
CHANCE 2 trial [27]	Chinese patients with a minor IS or TIA who carried <i>CYP2C19</i> LoF alleles, n = 6412	Ticagrelor with aspirin vs. clopidogrel with aspirin for 90 days	New stroke within 90 days Severe or moderate bleeding within 90 days	6.0% vs. 7.6%; HR, 0.77; 95% CI, 0.64–0.94; <i>P</i> = 0.008 0.3% vs. 0.3%; HR, 0.82 95% CI, 0.34–1.98; <i>P</i> = 0.66

*The primary analysis was in patients with *CYP2C19* LoF variants where ticagrelor or prasugrel was compared to clopidogrel

Abbreviations: ACS, acute coronary syndromes; ADP, adenosine diphosphate; CAD, coronary artery disease; CHANCE, clopidogrel in high-risk patients with acute nondisabling cerebrovascular events; CI, confidence interval; CV, cardiovascular; CYP, cytochrome 450; HR, hazard ratio; IS, ischemic stroke; LoF, loss of function; MI, myocardial infarction; PCI, percutaneous coronary intervention; PLATO, platelet inhibition and patient outcomes; RCT, randomized clinical trial; RR, relative risk; TIA, transient ischemic stroke