Manuscript type: Original Article

DOI: 10.5152/EurJTher.2018.602

Title: Effects of Regular Follow-up on Quality of Life and Warfarin Efficiency in Rural Patients

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Accepted: 11.06.2018

Cite this article as: Kılıç S, Saraçoğlu E, Çekici Y, Kılıç DD, Yıldırım A, Kuzu Z. Effects of Regular Follow-up on Quality of Life and Warfarin Efficiency in Rural Patients. Eur J Ther 2018; DOI: 10.5152/EurJTher.2018.602

Abstract:

Objectives: This study aims to evaluate the effects of regular follow-up and education on warfarin efficiency, satisfaction, and quality of life in rural patients.

Methods:

A total of 133 rural patients who were taking warfarin were followed-up mean of 17.4±0.5 months (mean age 58±13 years, 72.9% female). All patients were educated and follow-up by a single cardiologist prospectively. A list and a picture booklet of foods that interact with warfarin and a follow-up chart were prepared for each patient. An illustrated scheme of pills that should be taken every day was prepared for illiterate patients. The international normalized ratio (INR) values during and one year before the study were recorded from the hospital system, and the time in therapeutic range (TTR) was calculated. The Duke Anticoagulation Satisfaction Scale (DASS) was conducted at the start and end of the study to determine patients' satisfaction with warfarin use. Furthermore, the Medical Outcomes Study Form 36(SF-36) was used for determining the health-related quality of life (HRQoL).

Results: The 45.9% of patients were illiterate and 33.8% were primary school graduates. The median TTR during follow-up increased significantly compared with the previous year [40.0(IQR 36.5) vs. 62.1(IQR 29.3); $p<0.001$]. Furthermore, patients with TTR>70% increased significantly (36.8% vs. 21.1%, respectively; $p< 0.001$). Unfortunately, patients' HRQoL and satisfaction with warfarin use were found to be deteriorated significantly compared to the basal levels.

Conclusions: We found that the efficiency of warfarin increased significantly but, interestingly, HRQoL and satisfaction with warfarin use deteriorated significantly after regular education and follow-up in rural patients.

Keywords: Warfarin therapy, health-related quality of life, Duke Anticoagulation Satisfaction Scale

Introduction

Warfarin is an efficient oral anticoagulant that is used for preventing thromboembolic events in patients with atrial fibrillation (AF) or a mechanical heart valve (MHV). The efficacy and safety of warfarin strongly depends on the anticoagulation intensity measured in terms of the international normalized ratio (INR). For achieving a high-quality, safe, and minimally complicated treatment, the time in therapeutic range (TTR) is targeted at being >70 (1). Many studies have shown that TTR levels differ greatly from the desired levels in the Turkish population (2-4). Çelik et al. (4) showed that only 55% of patients taking warfarin were aware of food-drug interactions. Other studies reported that the elderly and patients with lower education were likelier to have lower awareness of warfarin treatment, possibly because they faced difficulties in understanding educational materials and communicating with healthcare providers (5). Therefore, the educational materials and their content, duration, and frequency of education should be chosen according to the target patient population. Frequent INR controls, long waits at hospitals, dietary limitations, and bleeding-related worries reduce the health-related quality of life (HRQoL) of patients taking warfarin (6). Two basic approaches are used for measuring the HRQoL of patients receiving anticoagulants: generic and condition-specific. Ideally, both approaches should be used for evaluating patients' quality of life (7).

This study aimed to evaluate the effects of regular follow-up and education on warfarin efficiency, satisfaction, and quality of life in rural patients.

Method

This prospective, observational study was performed in a secondary-level hospital in a rural region of Turkey from January 2016 to June 2017. This study was approved by the local ethical

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committee, following which recruitment started in January 2016. All patients who consent to participate study by verbal or written were recruitment. All patients were educated and followed-up by a single cardiologist during the study. Patients who agreed to participate had been taking warfarin for any reason for at least one year and who were regularly followed-up in the same hospital were recruited (n = 137). The inclusion criteria were age ≥18 years, volunteering to participate in the study, and following-up at the same hospital for at least one year. The single exclusion criterion was gap of more than 59 days between two prospective follow-ups. Hypertension (HT) was defined as repeated blood pressure measurement >140/90 mm Hg or chronic treatment with antihypertensive medications. Diabetes mellitus (DM) was defined as a previous diagnosis and/or fasting blood glucose >126 mg/dl or the use of antidiabetic medications. Hyperlipidemia was defined as low-density lipoprotein cholesterol (LDL-C) above 200 mg/dl or the use of lipid-lowering medications (8). Cigarette smoking was defined as smoking ≥ 1 cigarette a day for at least 1 year without a quit attempt. Ischemic heart disease was defined as having previous percutaneous transluminal coronary angioplasty and/or stenting, coronary bypass grafting, or stable coronary artery disease. All patients were informed in-detail on initial visit about why they are taking warfarin, how they will take it, how doses will be adjusted, and what the frequency of follow-up visits. All patients were also informed about food-drug interactions. A list of frequently consumed local foods that interacted with warfarin was given to all patients, and a booklet with pictures of these foods was provided to illiterate patients. A follow-up chart was prepared for all patients, and the daily number of warfarin pills, INR values, and next visit details were recorded. For illiterate patients, the daily numbers of warfarin pills were illustrated for each day of the week. The therapeutic range in patients with warfarin for AF or aortic valve replacement was considered as INR levels of 2.0–3.0. For patients with mitral valve or two-valve (mitral and aortic) replacement, the INR levels were considered as 2.5–3.5. All INR levels during the study and one-year period prior to the study were recorded from the hospital laboratory database, and the TTR was calculated using Rosendaal's algorithm (9). The annual INR after follow-up

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was calculated as (all INR levels in follow-up × 12)/(duration of study in months). All adverse events during the study period were recorded. Ischemic stroke was defined as neurologist-confirmed symptomatic ischemic cerebral infarction with an apparent brain lesion in imaging studies. Transient ischemic attack was defined as a neurologist-confirmed transient episode of neurologic dysfunction without a brain lesion in imaging studies. Major bleeding was defined as symptomatic bleeding in a critical organ, transfusion of two or more units of blood, or decrease in hemoglobin level of at least 2 g/L. All other bleeding was defined as minor bleeding.

Questionnaires

Two questionnaires were administered to all patients to evaluate their HRQoL and satisfaction with warfarin use at the start and end of the study. The Duke Anticoagulation Satisfaction Scale (DASS) questionnaire was used to assess satisfaction with warfarin use (10). Furthermore, the Medical Outcomes Study Form 36 (SF-36) questionnaire was used to assess HRQoL (11). The validity and reliability of the Turkish versions of both scales have been reported previously (12, 13). SF-36 comprises eight subscales that reflect both physical health (physical functioning, role-physical, bodily pain, and general health) and mental health (vitality, social functioning, role emotional, and mental functioning). The scores range from 0 to 100, where higher scores indicate better functions (11). The DASS scale includes 25 questions. The pattern of the questions is arranged to roughly correspond to three possible dimensions pertaining to anticoagulation: *limitations* (e.g., fear of bleeding, dietary restrictions); *displeasure and burdens* (regular return to medical visit and wait for blood test results), and positive *psychological impacts*. Patients respond to these questions on a 7-point Likert scale. Lower scores indicate higher satisfaction. The overall score varies from 25 to 175. The instrument is divided in three domains: limitations (score from 9 to 63), displeasure and burdens (score from 8 to 56), and psychological impact (score from 8 to 56). The subscales were

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analyzed by adding the answers to the items (varying from 1 to 7 for each item) in each domain, and the total score was obtained by adding up all questionnaire items.

Statistical Analyses

The variables were investigated using the Kolmogorov-Smirnov test to determine whether they were normally distributed. The mean and standard deviations of normally distributed variables and the median and interquartile range (IQR) of non-normally distributed variables were calculated. The TTR values and questionnaire results (DASS and SF-36) computed at the start and end of the study were compared using the paired sample t-test and Wilcoxon test. The proportions of patients with TTR values >70% at the start and end of the study were presented as a percentage, and change was compared using the McNemar test. p value less than 0.05 was considered to indicate a statistically significant result. All data were analyzed using SPSS (SPSS Inc., Chicago, IL, USA) software for Windows Version 22.0.

Results

A total of 137 patients were recruited for the study. Four patients with irregular follow-up were excluded; the remaining 133 patients (72.9% female, mean age 58.1±12 years) were followed-up for a mean of 17.4±0.5 months. Table 1 summarizes the demographic characteristics of patients. The primary indication of warfarin use was MHV and AF (72.9% and 27.1% respectively). The majority of the study population was either illiterate or had graduated from primary school (45.9% and 33.8%, respectively). The median duration for which patients had been taking warfarin was 7.0 (IQR 6) years, and 60.2% of patients had been taking warfarin for >5 years. The most frequent comorbidities were HT, heart failure, ischemic heart disease, and DM. Around 22.5% (n=30) of patients had previous history of bleeding [40% (n=12) had history of major bleeding], and 9.0% (n=12) of patients had a history of ischemic events (8 and 4 had history of transient ischemic attack and ischemic stroke, respectively). The median TTR levels during the follow-up increased significantly compared with

those in the previous year [40.0 (IQR 36.5) vs. 62.1 (IQR 29.3); p <0.001] (Figure). Moreover, the ratio of patients with TTR levels ≥70% increased significantly (21.1% vs. 36.8%; p <0.001) at the end of the study (Table 2). The basal demographic and clinical characteristics of patients who with TTR≥70% and with TTR<70 at the end of study were summarized at Table 1. There were no significant differences between two groups expect median time of warfarin use and history of all bleedings. The ratio of all bleeding was significantly higher in patients with TTR<70 and median time of warfarin use was significantly higher in patients with TTR ≥70%. The median annual INR in follow-up also increased significantly (11.7±2.8 vs. 8.8±4.0; p < 0.001). During follow-up, 17 (12.8%) patients suffered bleeding events (5 suffered major bleeding), 2 patients had transient ischemic attack, and 1 had ischemic stroke. No deaths occurred during follow-up. Table 3 shows the difference between the DASS scores at the start and end of the study. The median of the DASS score and its subscales that were evaluated separately increased significantly at the end of the study (p<0.001 for all). Similarly, the role-physical, physical functioning, mental functioning, bodily pain, general health, social functioning, vitality, and role emotional scores of the SF-36 scale decreased significantly at the end of the study (p < 0.001 for all) (Table 3). Moreover, there were no significant differences between patients with TTR≥70 and TTR<70 in term of both DASS score and SF-36 subscales.

Discussion

The present study provided two major results. First, the TTR level of rural patients who were uneducated or had low education were significantly low; however, they improved dramatically after regular education with appropriate materials and follow-up. Second, patients' satisfaction with warfarin use and HRQoL unfortunately worsened significantly after regular education and follow-up.

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Previous studies showed that the mean TTR level was low in Turkish population. In the AFTER study (epidemiology of AF in Turkey), only 41.3% of patients showed efficient INR levels (3). Turk et al. (2) conducted a multicenter prospective study and found that the mean TTR level was 42.3±18%. Similarly, the WARFARIN-TR (Awareness, Efficacy, Safety, and Time in Therapeutic Range of Warfarin in Turkish population) study reported that the 1-year average TTR level was 49.5±22.9% (4). Furthermore, a subgroup analysis of the WARFARIN-TR study showed that mean TTR levels differed significantly across different geographical regions of Turkey (14). In this analysis, the mean TTR level in the Southeastern Anatolia region was found to be 44.3±23.5%; this was significantly lower than the mean for Turkey. Similarly, our study in the Southeastern Anatolia region of Turkey reported low TTR levels (38.7±22.03) for patients in the period before the study. However, after regular education and follow-up, patients' TTR levels improved significantly. Moreover, the number patients with TTR ≥70 increased significantly. INR monitoring can be performed in hospitals, general outpatient clinics, and specialized INR outpatient clinics as well as through self-monitoring (15-18). The highest TTR can be achieved through self-monitoring; however, the most significant limitations in this regard are the patient's compatibility, ability to use necessary medical devices, and awareness of required drug dose to be set (17, 19). Self-monitoring is not applicable for our patients because most of them were illiterate or were at most primary school graduates. However, we showed that the TTR level could be improved significantly through regular follow-up at, for example, specialized INR outpatient clinics. The main difficulties faced in warfarin use are frequent food-drug interactions and the need for lifetime use. Moreover, frequent hospital visits, long waits at hospitals, and bleeding-related worries are among the primary difficulties faced in warfarin use that affect patients' quality of life and satisfaction (20-22). Although there are methodological differences between studies, long-term warfarin use was found to have significant and negative effects on the quality of life (23, 24). Previous studies revealed that the mean scores of DASS were different among populations (7, 25). The mean of the scale of the Turkish population (85.0±25.1) was found to be higher than those of the

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original scale scores (55.0±17.6) and the scores determined in the Brazilian-Portugal validation (57.9±16.5) (7, 12, 25). This result shows that the treatment satisfaction of Turkish patients is lower than that of other populations, and they perceive more problems. Our results have shown that although the mean DASS (82.1±18.1) of patients before the study was similar to that of Turkish population; unfortunately, it increased at the end of the study. Meanwhile, the SF-36 subscale scores decreased. These results show that, unexpectedly, patients' satisfaction with warfarin use and their health-related qualities of life deteriorated after regular follow-up and education. This can be attributed to factors like regular follow-up, development of awareness about the effect mechanism and adverse events related to warfarin use, dietary limitations, worries about drug interactions, and more frequent hospital visits. Shifting from a solitary and snugger (without being careful about the diet or going for follow-up visits by their own choice) follow-up pattern to a more regular and systematic follow-up design that also includes the participation of the physician might have negatively affected their quality of life. In addition, although warfarin protects patients from serious complications such as thromboembolism, it does not provide a symptomatic improvement, and it also imposes additional burdens such as bleeding risk, dietary limitations, drug interaction, and regular follow-up; these factors may explain the decreases in the patients' quality of life (26). New-generation oral anticoagulants that can be alternatives for patients taking warfarin for nonvalvular atrial fibrillation (NVAF) have come into use recently. These drugs have similar efficacy to previous ones and afford significant advantages such as not requiring close follow-up, absence of food-drug interactions, and causing less bleeding (27-30). New-generation oral anticoagulants can be preferred to warfarin for patients who have low TTR level or dissatisfaction after regular follow-up. Moreover, for patients who use warfarin due to MHV, appropriate interventions should be done considering the special conditions of the patients.

Limitations

The main limitations of our study are single-center design, low number of patients, and short follow-up duration. In addition, the pre-study INR measurements were obtained from hospital records, and we cannot exclude the possibility of other measurements at another facility. Another limitation is that because most patients were uneducated or had low education, they may have responded incorrectly to the questionnaires.

Conclusion

The present study showed that appropriate educational material and follow-up can significantly increase the TTR levels of rural patients who are mostly illiterate or primary school graduates. However, only one-third of patients had TTR levels >70%, suggesting that different approaches should be used to increase the efficiency of warfarin use. Finally, deteriorations in HRQoL can be explained by the increased awareness and additional burden that comes with regular follow-up.

Funding

This study was not funded by any company.

Conflict of interest

The authors have no conflicts of interest.

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Table 1. Basal demographic and clinical characteristics of study population.

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Parameters	Values	TTR≥%70 (n=49)	TTR<%70 (n=84)	P
Age, years, mean ± SD	58.1 ± 12.8	57.3 ± 13.3	58.4 ± 12.7	0.630
Female n, (%)	97 (72.9)	31 (63.3)	66 (78.6)	0.550
BMI (kg/m^2)	28.7 ± 4.6	29.1 ± 4.6	28.3 ± 4.6	0.330
Time of warfarin use, year, median (IQR)	7.0 (6)	5.0 (6.5)	8.0 (5.0)	0.032
Hypertension, n, (%)	55 (41.4)	19 (38.8)	36 (42.9)	0.645
Diabetes mellitus, n, (%)	32 (24.1)	13 (26.5)	19 (22.6)	0.611
Heart failure, n, (%)	45 (33.8)	15 (30.6)	30 (35.7)	0.549
Cerebrovascular events, n, (%)	12 (9.0)	2 (4.1)	10 (11.9)	0.129
Ischemic heart disease, n, (%)	31 (23.3)	14 (28.6)	17 (20.2)	0.273
Smoke, n, (%)	10 (7.5)	2 (4.1)	8 (9.5)	0.251
Chronic kidney disease, n, (%)	12 (9)	4 (8.2)	8 (9.5)	0.792
All bleeding, n, (%)	30 (22.5)	6 (12.2)	24 (28.6)	0.030
Major bleeding, n, (%)	12 (9.0)	2 (4.1)	10 (11.9)	0.129
Non steroid anti-inflammatory drug use, n, (%)	82 (61.7)	30 (61.2)	52 (61.9)	0.724
Antiplatelet use n, %	12 (9)	3 (6.1)	9 (10.7)	0.373
Education				
Illiterate, n, (%)	61 (45.9)	20 (40.8)	41 (48.8)	
Primary school, n, (%)	45 (33.8)	17 (34.7)	28 (33.3)	0.139
High school, n, (%)	19 (14.3)	6 (12.2)	13 (15.5)	
University, n, (%)	8 (6)	2 (4.1)	6 (7.1)	

BMI: Body Mass Index, IQR: interquartile range SD: standard deviation TTR: time in therapeutic range

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Table 2. Comparison of Time in Therapeutic Range pre- and post-study.

Parameters	Pre-Study	Post-Study	P¶
TTR, %, median (IQR)	40 (36.5)	62.1 (29.3)	<0.001
TTR ≥%70, n,%	28 (21.1)	49 (36.6)	0.001*
Annual number of INR, median (IQR)	8.5 (4.2)	12 (2.6)	<0.001

INR: international normalized ratio, IQR: interquartile range, TTR: time in therapeutic range

¶ Wilcoxon test, *McNemar test

This article has been accepted for publication and undergone full peer review but has not been through the copyediting, typesetting, pagination and proofreading process, which may lead to differences between this version and the Version of Record. Please cite this article as: Kılıç S, Saraçoğlu E, Çekici Y, Kılıç DD, Yıldırım A, Kuzu Z. Effects of Regular Follow-up on Quality of Life and Warfarin Efficiency in Rural Patients. Eur J Ther 2018; DOI: 10.5152/EurJTher.2018.602

Table 3. Comparison of Duke anticoagulation satisfaction scale and Medical Outcomes Study Form 36 pre-post study and between TTR≥%70 and TTR<%70

Parameters	Pre-Study Median (IQR)	Post-Study Median (IQR)	P*	TTR≥%70 (n=49)	TTR<%70 (n=84)	P
DASS						
Total, mean ± SD	82.7±18.1	135.2±15.6	<0.001¶	135.4±8.5	137.1±11.1	0.349
Limitations	31 (48)	52 (21)	<0.001	52.5±4.3	52.2±4.4	0.557
Displeasure and burdens	30 (47)	49 (45)	<0.001	48.8 ± 3.9	49.6±7.1	0.464
Positive psychological impacts	24 (22)	35 (18)	<0.001	34.5±3.2	34.9±3.4	0.451
SF-36						
Role physical	32 (26)	26 (23)	<0.001	25 (30)	26 (30)	0.771
Physical functioning	65 (30)	50 (30)	<0.001	54 (22)	48 (16)	0.080
Bodily pain	67.5 (54)	57.5 (35)	<0.001	55 (42)	60 (40)	0.177
General Health	35 (25)	25 (50)	<0.001	25 (50)	25 (80)	0.158
Social functioning	62.5 (50)	50 (50)	<0.001	50 (37.5)	50 (25)	0.721
Vitality	45 (35)	35 (25)	<0.001	37.5 (20)	35 (25)	0.585
Role emotional	35.1 (33)	20 (33)	<0.001	20 (30)	20 (25)	0.897
Mental functioning	58 (49)	44 (35)	<0.001	46 (25)	43 (30)	0.786

DASS: Comparison of duke anticoagulation satisfaction scale, IQR: interquartile range, SD: standard seviation, SF-36: Medical Outcomes Study Form 36. ¶ Paired sample t- test, * Wilcoxon test

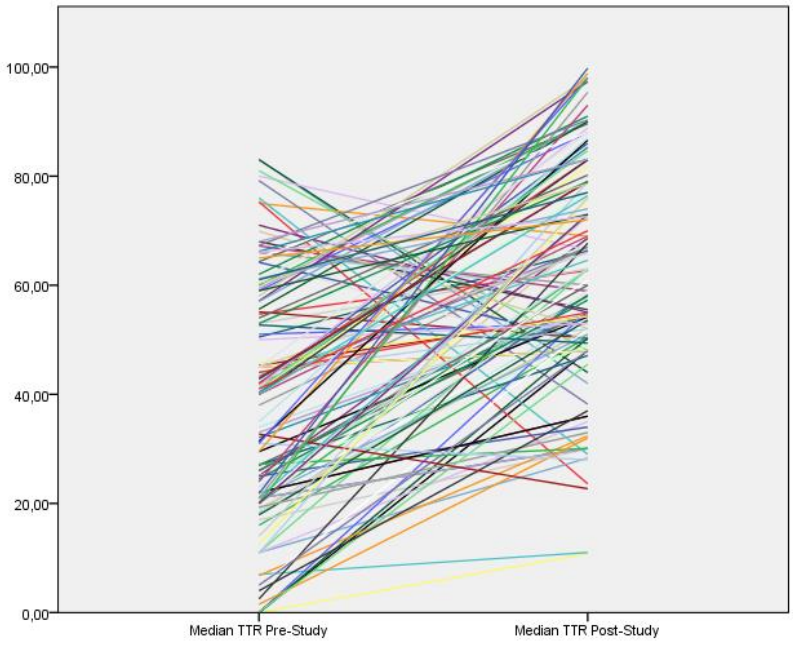

Figure: Pre- and post- study median level of TTR (time in therapeutic range) for each participant