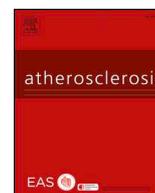




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Biomarkers of mineral metabolism and progression of aortic valve and mitral annular calcification: The Multi-Ethnic Study of Atherosclerosis



Anna E. Bortnick^a, Shuo Xu^{a,i}, Ryung S. Kim^{a,i}, Bryan Kestenbaum^b, Joachim H. Ix^c, Nancy S. Jenny^{d,1}, Ian H. de Boer^b, Erin D. Michos^e, George Thanassoulis^f, David S. Siscovick^g, Matthew J. Budoff^h, Jorge R. Kizer^{j,*}

^a Department of Medicine, Division of Cardiology, Jack D. Weiler Hospital, Montefiore Medical Center, Bronx, NY, USA

^b Kidney Research Institute, Division of Nephrology, Department of Medicine, University of Washington, Seattle, WA, USA

^c Department of Medicine, Division of Nephrology-Hypertension, University of California, San Diego and Veterans' Affairs Medical Center, San Diego, La Jolla, CA, USA

^d Department of Pathology and Laboratory Medicine, University of Vermont Larner College of Medicine, Burlington, VT, USA

^e Department of Medicine, Division of Cardiology, Johns Hopkins School of Medicine, Baltimore, MD, USA

^f Department of Medicine, Division of Cardiology, McGill University Health Center, Montreal, QC, Canada

^g New York Academy of Medicine, New York, NY, USA

^h Department of Medicine, Division of Cardiology, David Geffen School of Medicine at the University of California, CA, USA

ⁱ Department of Epidemiology and Population Health, Albert Einstein College of Medicine, Bronx, NY, USA

^j Cardiology Section, San Francisco Veterans Affairs Health Care System and Departments of Medicine, Epidemiology and Biostatistics, University of California San Francisco, San Francisco, CA, USA

HIGHLIGHTS

- FGF-23 was associated with accelerated progression of MAC, but not AVC, in a multi-ethnic cohort.
- FGF-23 and related pathways merit further studies as potential targets for MAC prevention.

ARTICLE INFO

Keywords:

Valve
Mineral
Metabolism
Fibroblast growth factor
Fetuin-A

ABSTRACT

Background and aims: Previous research has implicated dysregulation of phosphate metabolism and calcium-phosphate solubilization in cardiovascular calcification, but epidemiologic studies evaluating longitudinal associations with valvular or annular calcification by computed tomography (CT), a highly sensitive imaging modality, are lacking. Our primary aim was to investigate the associations of mineral biomarkers with incidence and progression of aortic valve calcification (AVC) and mitral annular calcification (MAC).

Methods: We evaluated the associations of serum FGF-23 (n = 6547 participants), phosphate (n = 6547), and fetuin-A (n = 2550) measured at baseline in the community-based Multi-Ethnic Study of Atherosclerosis with AVC and MAC on CT performed at baseline and at a median of 2.4 (1.6, 3.1) years later. We used linear mixed-effects models to account simultaneously for prevalence, incidence and progression of AVC and MAC.

Results: After adjustment for demographic and clinical characteristics, a significant association was documented for FGF-23 with accelerated annual progression of MAC (2.83 Agatston units (AU), 95% CI = 0.49, 5.17 AU, per standard deviation (18.46 pg/mL) of FGF-23), but this was not seen for phosphate or fetuin-A. None of these biomarkers was associated with accelerated annual progression of AVC.

Conclusions: This study provides evidence relating serum FGF-23 to accelerated annual MAC progression. Whether this mineral regulator is a risk marker or is involved in pathogenesis merits further investigation.

Abbreviations: MAC, mitral annular calcification; AVC, aortic valve calcification; FGF-23, fibroblast growth factor-23

* Corresponding author. Cardiology Section, San Francisco Veterans Affairs Health Care System, 4150 Clement Street, Mail Code 111C, San Francisco, CA, 94121, USA.

E-mail address: jorge.kizer@ucsf.edu (J.R. Kizer).

¹ Deceased.

<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.atherosclerosis.2019.04.215>

Received 7 September 2018; Received in revised form 21 February 2019; Accepted 10 April 2019

Available online 13 April 2019

0021-9150/ Published by Elsevier B.V.

1. Introduction

Calcification of the aortic valve and mitral annulus are disorders leading to major sequelae with advancing age [1,2]. Among older adults, the echocardiographic prevalence of aortic valve calcification (AVC) and mitral annular calcification (MAC) are 25% and 40%, respectively [1,2]. Severe AVC and MAC restrict leaflet opening, resulting in aortic and mitral stenosis or impaired leaflet coaptation, leading to regurgitation [1,2]. AVC is associated with cardiovascular events and MAC with atrial fibrillation and stroke [3,4]. Surgical and transcatheter aortic valve replacement are widely used for treatment of severe AVC, but MAC makes surgical replacement challenging, and may adversely impact transcatheter approaches [2,5].

Mendelian randomization studies identified low density lipoprotein (LDL) cholesterol and lipoprotein (Lp) (a) as causal risk factors for AVC and triglycerides for MAC [6–8]. Yet randomized trials of statins failed to show benefit for AVC progression, and no pharmacotherapies of proven efficacy currently exist [9]. Thus, treatment may have to target different pathways in order to be effective, like those involved in calcium or phosphorus handling.

Dysregulation of mineral metabolism is a potentially important determinant of calcific valvular disease. Knockout models demonstrate that calcification occurs when genes for fibroblast growth factor (FGF) 23 and fetuin-A are disrupted [10,11]. FGF-23 inhibits sodium-phosphate cotransporters in the kidney to increase phosphate excretion, while blocking activation of vitamin D to reduce phosphate absorption in the gut [12]. FGF-23 also binds to cardiac FGF receptors, activating the calcineurin – nuclear factor of activated T cells pathway implicated in vascular and valvular calcification [13–17]. Meanwhile, fetuin-A solubilizes calcium and phosphate, but also binds the insulin receptor, causing insulin resistance [18]. Elevated phosphate itself stimulates vascular smooth muscle cells to differentiate into an osteogenic phenotype [19].

Previous work demonstrated cross-sectional associations of phosphate with echocardiographic AVC and MAC, as well as FGF-23 and fetuin-A with MAC, but not AVC [20]. Phosphate, 25-hydroxyvitamin D and FGF-23 were studied in relation to AVC in the Multi-Ethnic Study of Atherosclerosis (MESA), in which participants underwent computed tomography (CT), a more sensitive technique for calcium quantification [21,22]. There was an association of phosphate with prevalent, though not incident AVC. For FGF-23, only an association between its highest quartile and incident AVC was detected. An inverse association of 25-hydroxyvitamin D with MAC attenuated and became non-significant after adjustment [22]. The relationship of phosphate and FGF-23 with MAC was not assessed, nor was fetuin-A evaluated in relation to either AVC or MAC. To address existing gaps, we investigated the longitudinal associations of FGF-23, phosphate, and fetuin-A with AVC and MAC in MESA. We hypothesized that these markers would be preferentially associated with MAC.

2. Materials and methods

2.1. Study population

MESA is a prospective cohort study of risk factors for cardiovascular disease (CVD) in a sample of white, African American, Hispanic/Latino and Chinese adults. Individuals with known CVD were excluded [23]. Men and women ages 45–84 years ($n = 6814$) were enrolled in 2000–02 (Exam 1) at 6 urban field centers [23,24]. MESA protocols were approved by the Institutional Review Boards at each site. Study protocols conformed to the ethical guidelines of the Declaration of Helsinki and participants provided written informed consent.

All participants ($n = 6814$) underwent cardiac CT and collection of serum for storage at -80°C at Exam 1 (baseline) (Fig. 1). A random half underwent repeat cardiac CT in 2002–04 (Exam 2) and the remaining half had cardiac CT performed in 2004–05 (Exam 3, $n = 6058$

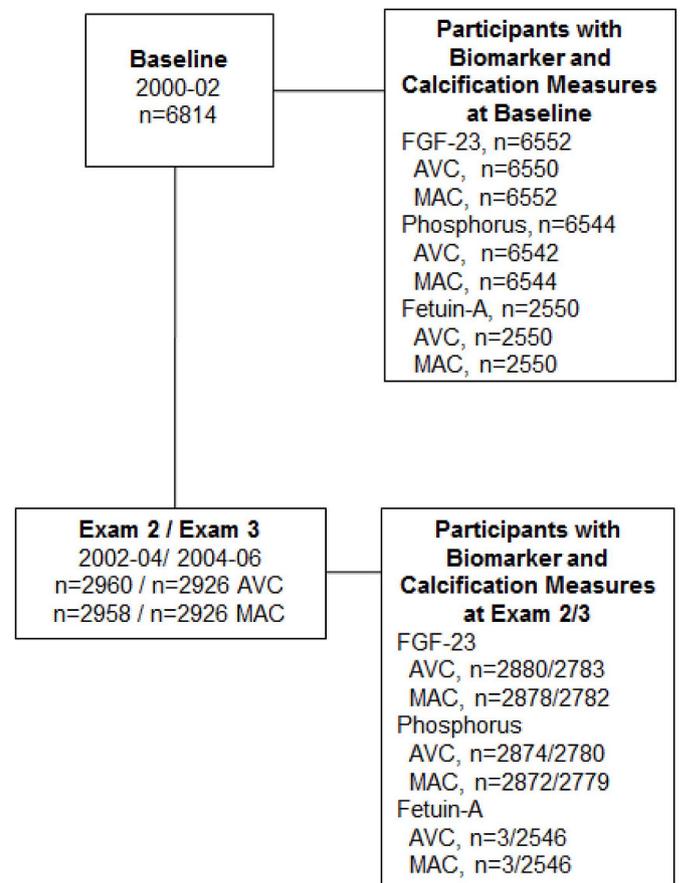


Fig. 1. Participants with calcification and biomarker measurements at different visits.

in combined Exams 2/3). Accordingly, there were no significant differences in baseline characteristics in participants who underwent cardiac CT in Exam 2 versus those who did so in Exam 3 (data not shown). Cardiac CTs at Exam 1 (baseline) and Exam 2/3 were read for AVC ($n = 6812$ at baseline, $n = 6058$ at visits 2/3) and MAC ($n = 6814$ at baseline, $n = 5895$ at visits 2/3) [21,25]. FGF-23 and phosphate measurements were completed in baseline specimens from $n = 6547$ participants [21], while fetuin-A was also measured in baseline specimens from a random subset of $n = 2550$ participants [26].

2.2. Cardiac computed tomography (CT)

Cardiac imaging was performed with electron beam CT (EBCT) or multi-detector (MD) CT at Exam 1, with subsequent exams using only MDCT. Cardiac CTs were performed in duplicate and scores were averaged [27]. There was excellent agreement for the presence and amount of calcification with kappa > 0.90 between and within readers [28]. Prevalent calcification was defined as a score > 0 at baseline. Incident calcification was defined as a score > 0 on follow-up when baseline calcification was absent. Calcification progression was defined as a positive difference between scans.

2.3. Mineral biomarkers

Fetuin-A was measured (Epitope Diagnostics) as previously described [26]. The mean intra-assay coefficient of variation (CV) was 3.0%. The mean inter-assay CVs were 5.3% and 4.8% at low and high fetuin-A concentrations, respectively. FGF-23 was measured as previously described (Kainos Laboratories, Tokyo, Japan) [29]. The CVs for high and low controls were 6.7% and 12.4%, respectively [30].

Serum phosphate was measured using timed rate colorimetry (Beckman-Coulter UniCel DxC, Indianapolis IN) with an inter-assay CV of 4.2%.

2.4. Covariates

Body mass index (BMI) was calculated as weight (kg)/height (m²). Seated blood pressure was measured three times with a Dinamap model Pro 100 automated oscillometric sphygmomanometer and the last two measurements averaged. Diabetes was defined as use of anti-hyperglycemic medication or fasting glucose ≥ 126 mg/dL. Calcium, 25 hydroxyvitamin D, intact parathyroid hormone, urine albumin-to-creatinine ratio (UACR), total cholesterol and high density lipoprotein (HDL) cholesterol were measured and LDL cholesterol calculated, as previously described [21,22]. Estimated glomerular filtration rate (eGFR) was calculated from the Chronic Kidney Disease Epidemiology Collaboration (CKD-Epi) equation [31].

2.5. Statistical analysis

Continuous variables were expressed as mean and standard deviation (SD) or, for skewed distributions, median and interquartile range, and analyzed by *t*-test or Wilcoxon rank sum test as appropriate. Categorical variables were expressed as frequency and proportion and analyzed by Pearson's chi-square test. The analytical approach for multivariable models focused on incidence or progression (hereafter referred to as progression for simplicity) of AVC and MAC in participants without or with any calcification at baseline using linear mixed-effects models (LMMs), as detailed previously [32]. This was based on LMMs' advantages over the approach of dividing the analysis by baseline presence or absence of calcification and examining incidence and progression separately. LMMs include all available observations, both at baseline and follow-up, without relying on the assumption that observations are missing at random, and account for both cross-sectional and longitudinal associations of the exposure of interest. The functional form of the association between each biomarker and outcome measure was examined using generalized additive model plots (Supplementary Fig. 1). As these revealed no obvious departures from linearity, continuous levels of predictors were used with effect estimates reported per SD increment.

For the biomarkers, we used LMMs to test if there was acceleration in AVC and MAC score over time (i.e., change in slope) per SD increment in biomarker concentration [33]. The LMM was $Y_{ij} = \beta_0 + \beta_1 t_{ij} + \beta_2 x_i + \beta_3 t_{ij} x_i + b_i + \varepsilon_{ij}$, where b_i is the random intercept for subject i and ε_{ij} is the error term for the j th measurement of the i th subject. The dependent variable Y_{ij} was the repeated measure of AVC or MAC Agatston score. The main predictors were biomarker level (x_i), years after baseline (t_{ij}), and the interaction term between the two, the parameter of interest. The within-person correlation was adjusted with a random intercept.

We added potential confounders in sequential models, chosen on the basis of known biology or prior associations. We first adjusted for age, sex, race/ethnicity, and scanner type (EBCT or MDCT) (Model 1). Next, we additionally adjusted for education (\geq high school, some college or college graduate vs. $<$ high school), BMI, systolic blood pressure, use of antihypertensive medication, diabetes, smoking (ever vs. never), LDL cholesterol, HDL cholesterol (and for MAC: triglycerides), use of statin, eGFR and UACR (Model 2). Last, we examined whether the association was independent of other measures of mineral metabolism by adjusting for calcium, phosphate, 25-hydroxyvitamin D, and/or FGF-23 (Model 3). In the case of fetuin-A, adjustment was for calcium and phosphate as possible mediators. For FGF-23, adjustment was made for 25-OH vitamin D. For FGF-23, phosphate and 25-hydroxyvitamin D may be partial mediators. For phosphate, Model 3 adjustment was for calcium, 25-hydroxyvitamin D, and FGF-23 as potential confounders. In sensitivity analyses, we excluded participants

taking warfarin, which might increase calcification [34]. A two-tailed $p < 0.05$ was used to define statistical significance.

For each biomarker, we performed exploratory analyses for three-way interactions by pre-specified covariates. Interactions with continuous levels of potential effect modifiers were first examined; when significant, interactions were assessed categorically. Accounting for multiple comparisons, we used a two-tailed $p < 0.01$ to define statistical significance for interactions.

For all biomarkers, sensitivity analyses examined AVC and MAC progression only among those with baseline calcification, using LMM (Supplementary Table 2). Linear regression was used to examine the relationship with average annual change in calcium score, and compared to LMM in the subset of participants with a follow-up calcium score measure (Supplementary Table 3). Analyses were performed in R 3.3.1 (Vienna, Austria), Stata 15 (College Station, TX), and GraphPad Prism 7 (La Jolla, CA).

3. Results

3.1. Baseline characteristics

The mean age of the MESA cohort was 62 ± 10 (range 44–84) years. Participants with baseline AVC or MAC were older, more frequently white and less commonly Chinese, were less often college graduates, more commonly had hypertension, diabetes, and statin use, and had lower eGFR and higher UACR as compared to those without calcification (Table 1). Participants with AVC were more likely to be male and those with MAC were more likely to be female, than those without. Concentrations of FGF-23 were higher, and fetuin-A lower, in participants with AVC or MAC as compared to those without.

3.2. Progression of calcification on serial CT

The median follow-up interval between scans was 2.3 (1.6, 3.1) years for participants with FGF-23 and phosphate measures, and 3.1 (2.9, 3.4) years for participants with the fetuin-A measure. Among the 5,884 participants with a follow-up CT, annual change in AVC was 2.1 ± 39.7 Agatston units (AU), while annual change in MAC was 8.4 ± 96.1 AU. Overall, the incidence of AVC was 1.71 cases per 100 person-years, while that of MAC was 1.84 cases per 100 person-years.

There were statistically significant, sex-specific differences in the incidence and progression of AVC, as previously noted [35]. Men had a higher incidence rate of AVC than women (2.09 vs. 1.40 cases per 100 person-years, $p = 0.006$) and greater progression of AVC (3.3 ± 51.8 vs. 1.0 ± 24.1 AU/year, $p = 0.040$). There were no significant sex differences in incidence of MAC (1.94 vs. 1.73 cases per 100 person-years in women vs. men, $p = 0.262$) or its progression (10.2 ± 104.0 vs. 6.4 ± 86.5 AU/year, $p = 0.425$).

3.3. Mineral biomarkers and progression of AVC and MAC

There were statistically significant associations of FGF-23 with accelerated AVC and MAC progression upon minimal adjustment (Table 2). After additional adjustment, the association between FGF-23 and AVC progression was modestly attenuated and non-significant. However, FGF-23 remained significantly associated with accelerated MAC progression. The annual increase of MAC was accelerated by 2.83 (95% CI = 0.49, 5.17) AU for every SD increment (18.5 pg/mL) in FGF-23 (Model 2). This relationship was not changed by adjustment for calcium, phosphate, and 25-hydroxyvitamin D, which could be partial mediators (Model 3). By contrast, no significant associations were observed for phosphate or fetuin-A with rate of annual AVC or MAC progression at any level of adjustment (Table 2). None of the findings was altered after excluding $n = 24$ participants receiving warfarin.

Table 1

Baseline (Exam 1) demographic, clinical and biomarker profiles in study participants with and without prevalent aortic valve (AVC) or mitral annular calcification (MAC) in the Multi-Ethnic Study of Atherosclerosis.

Characteristic	AVC			MAC		
	No (n = 5899)	Yes (n = 913)	p value	No (n = 6170)	Yes (n = 644)	p value
Agastston score, units	0	59.6 (19.6, 148.6)	–	0	87.5 (24.3, 325.25)	–
Age, years	61 ± 10	70 ± 8	< 0.001	61 ± 10	72 ± 8	< 0.001
Women, n (%)	3236 (54.9)	364 (39.9)	0.001	3215 (52.1)	386 (59.9)	0.001
Race/ethnicity, n (%)						
White	2206 (37.4)	414 (45.4)	0.001	2307 (37.4)	315 (48.9)	0.001
Chinese	737 (12.5)	67 (7.3)		767 (12.4)	37 (5.8)	
Black	1660 (28.1)	232 (25.4)		1751 (28.4)	141 (21.9)	
Hispanic/Latino	1296 (22.0)	200 (21.9)		1345 (21.8)	151 (23.5)	
Education, n (%)						
< High school	1015 (17.3)	210 (23.1)	0.001	1079 (17.5)	146 (22.8)	0.001
High school	1053 (17.9)	182 (20.0)		1093 (17.8)	143 (22.3)	
Some college	961 (16.3)	148 (16.3)		1010 (16.4)	99 (15.5)	
College graduate	2852 (48.5)	368 (40.5)		2969 (48.3)	252 (39.4)	
BMI, kg/m ²	28.3 ± 5.56	28.5 ± 5.0	0.320	28.3 ± 5.5	29.0 ± 5.7	0.003
SBP, mm Hg	125 ± 21	135 ± 22	< 0.001	126 ± 21	135 ± 23	< 0.001
Antihypertensive medication, n (%)	2030 (34.4)	505 (55.4)	0.001	2185 (35.4)	351 (54.5)	0.001
Warfarin, n (%)	17 (0.3)	7 (0.8)	0.023	17 (0.3)	7 (1.1)	0.001
Diabetes, n (%)	677 (11.5)	181 (19.8)	0.001	733 (11.9)	126 (19.6)	0.001
Smoking, n (%)						
Never	3021 (51.4)	396 (43.6)	0.001	3090 (50.2)	328 (51.3)	0.008
Former	2070 (35.2)	417 (45.9)		2234 (36.3)	253 (39.5)	
Current	790 (13.4)	96 (10.6)		828 (13.5)	59 (9.2)	
LDL cholesterol, mg/dL	117 ± 31	119 ± 34	0.170	117 ± 31	115 ± 33	0.094
HDL cholesterol, mg/dL	51 ± 15	49 ± 14	< 0.001	51 ± 15	52 ± 15	0.085
Triglycerides, mg/dL	110 (77,159)	120 (84, 172)	< 0.001	111 (78,161)	113 (80,161)	0.361
Statin, n (%)	796 (13.5)	213 (23.4)	0.001	859 (14.0)	151 (23.5)	0.001
eGFR, ml/min/1.73 m ²	78.9 ± 16.0	70.5 ± 16.4	< 0.001	78.6 ± 16.0	69.5 ± 16.8	< 0.001
Urine albumin-creatinine ratio, mg/dL	5.1 (3.2–10.3)	7.1 (4.0–17.8)	< 0.001	5.1 (3.2–10.3)	8.2 (4.7–18.2)	< 0.001
EBCT scan type, n (%)	3149 (53.4)	436 (47.8)	0.002	3289 (53.3)	296 (46.0)	0.001
Calcium, mg/dL	9.1 ± 0.5	9.1 ± 0.5	0.349	9.1 ± 0.51	9.1 ± 0.56	0.334
25-hydroxyvitamin D, ng/mL	25.3 ± 11.4	26.3 ± 12.0	0.014	25.3 ± 11.4	26.7 ± 12.1	0.003
Phosphate, mg/dL	3.7 ± 0.5	3.7 ± 0.5	0.949	3.7 ± 0.5	3.8 ± 0.5	< 0.001
PTH, pg/mL	44.3 ± 20.5	47.3 ± 28.7	0.020	44.4 ± 20.9	47.7 ± 29.1	0.099
Fetuin-A, g/L	0.48 ± 0.10	0.46 ± 0.10	< 0.001	0.48 ± 0.10	0.46 ± 0.11	0.017
FGF-23, pg/mL	39.9 ± 18.2	43.0 ± 19.5	< 0.001	40.0 ± 18.4	43.6 ± 18.1	< 0.001

BMI = body mass index, eGFR = estimated glomerular filtration rate, EBCT = electron beam computed tomography, FGF = fibroblast growth factor, HDL = high density lipoprotein, LDL = low density lipoprotein, PTH = parathyroid hormone, pM = picomoles/L, SBP = systolic blood pressure.

3.4. Assessment of effect modification

Exploratory analyses of three-way interactions for mineral biomarkers with time and pre-specified covariates, are detailed in [Supplementary Table 1](#). There was statistically significant effect modification at the $p < 0.01$ level for the association of FGF-23 with accelerated MAC progression by age, sex, race/ethnicity, and diabetes, and for fetuin-A by race/ethnicity and eGFR ([Fig. 2](#)).

The rate of annual MAC progression per SD increment in FGF-23 was accelerated particularly in female and diabetic participants, but was decelerated in Chinese participants. By contrast, the rate of annual MAC progression per SD increment (SD = 0.11 g/L) in fetuin-A was accelerated for Chinese but not for other race/ethnic groups. There was slower annual MAC progression per SD increment in fetuin-A in participants with a lower eGFR. However, dichotomizing eGFR at 60 or 30 ml/min/1.73 m² did not show statistically significant interaction, likely due to a small number of participants in these subgroups (eGFR ≥ 60 and < 60 ml/min/1.73 m² are shown in [Fig. 2](#); eGFR < 30 ml/min/1.73 m², n = 9, $\beta = -88.09$ [95% CI -315.30, 139.13] AU per SD*year, and eGFR ≥ 30 ml/min/1.73 m², n = 2762, $\beta = 0.78$ [95% CI, -2.55, 4.11] AU per SD*year). Additional interactions at the $p < 0.05$ level ([Supplementary Table 1](#)) showed the rate of annual AVC progression per SD increment in FGF-23 and fetuin-A was accelerated in women. These also signalled accelerated rates of annual MAC progression per SD increment in FGF-23 in adults ≥ 65 years; per SD increment in fetuin-A levels in diabetic participants; and per SD

increment (SD = 0.5 mg/dL) in phosphate levels in non-Chinese participants.

3.5. Sensitivity analyses

There were no statistically significant associations of biomarkers with accelerated annual AVC or MAC progression among participants with prevalent calcification (AVC or MAC score > 0, [Supplementary Table 2](#)). There were statistically significant associations of FGF-23 with MAC progression by linear regression and LMM when the analysis was restricted to those having a follow-up calcification measure on CT ([Supplementary Table 3](#)).

4. Discussion

In this multi-ethnic cohort, we found that higher levels of FGF-23 were associated with modestly accelerated rates of annual MAC progression, but not annual AVC progression. Neither circulating fetuin-A nor phosphate levels were associated with changes in the rates of MAC or AVC progression. In exploratory analyses, higher FGF-23 levels were particularly associated with greater annual MAC progression in women and participants with diabetes, and decreased annual MAC progression in Chinese participants. By comparison, higher fetuin-A levels were associated with acceleration of annual MAC progression specifically among participants of Chinese race-ethnicity and with lower eGFR.

The strengths of the present study include serial CT determinations

Table 2

Associations of biomarkers of mineral metabolism with progression of aortic valve (AVC) or mitral annular calcification (MAC).

Biomarker	AVC		MAC	
	β coefficient ^a (95% CI), <i>p</i> value		β coefficient ^a (95% CI), <i>p</i> value	
Progression of calcification				
FGF-23				
Model 1	0.92 (0.002, 1.84), 0.049		2.94 (0.61, 5.27), 0.013	
Model 2	0.82 (−0.13, 1.78), 0.091		2.83 (0.49, 5.17), 0.018	
Model 3	0.85 (−0.10, 1.81), 0.079		2.88 (0.50, 5.26), 0.018	
Phosphate				
Model 1	0.05 (−0.86, 0.96), 0.915		1.36 (−0.95, 3.67), 0.247	
Model 2	0.08 (−0.87, 1.03), 0.876		1.31 (−1.02, 3.65), 0.270	
Model 3	−0.02 (−0.97, 0.93), 0.969		1.31 (−1.07, 3.68), 0.281	
Fetuin-A				
Model 1	−0.74 (−1.95, 0.48) 0.235		1.07 (−2.33, 4.46), 0.538	
Model 2	−0.85 (−2.11, 0.41) 0.186		0.52 (−2.83, 3.86), 0.762	
Model 3	−0.91 (−2.20, 0.38), 0.168		0.63 (−2.85, 4.10), 0.723	

For FGF-23, SD = 18.5 pg/mL; for phosphate, SD = 0.5 mg/dL; for fetuin-A, SD = 0.11 g/L.

Model 1: age, sex, race/ethnicity, CT-type. Model 2: Model 1 + education, BMI, systolic blood pressure, use of antihypertensive medication, diabetes, ever smoking, LDL cholesterol, HDL cholesterol (and for MAC: triglycerides), statin use, eGFR, and UACR. Model 3: Model 2 + for FGF-23: calcium, phosphate, and 25-hydroxyvitamin D; for phosphate: calcium, 25-hydroxyvitamin D, and FGF-23; for fetuin-A: calcium and phosphate.

^a Indicating annual acceleration in Agatston units per SD increment in the biomarker.

of AVC and MAC, and analytic power of LMMs to assess three key biomarkers of mineral metabolism with incidence and progression of calcification. Our study builds on previous work in MESA that examined serum FGF-23 and phosphate in relation to AVC using these same data, but divided the analysis into separate evaluations of prevalent AVC, incident AVC among participants without baseline AVC, and progression of AVC among those with baseline AVC score > 0 [21]. LMMs integrate data from all scans and do not depend on the assumption that missingness of data is random, offering clear analytic advantages [32]. The previous analyses showed association of phosphate with prevalent AVC, but not with incidence or progression of AVC. Continuous FGF-23 levels were not associated with AVC prevalence, incidence or progression, but the highest FGF-23 quartile was associated with incident AVC alone. Our current analyses did not reveal apparent departure from linearity in FGF-23's associations in LMMs, showing no obvious threshold effects. The lack of significant associations for FGF-23 or phosphate provides further evidence excluding an all but modest relationship of either biomarker with progression of AVC over middle-term follow-up in this cohort. The present study provides new longitudinal assessment of progression of MAC, demonstrating a statistically significant association for serum FGF-23.

Our findings strengthen the premise that systemic perturbations in mineral metabolism are particularly relevant for MAC. The relationship of biomarkers of mineral metabolism with MAC, but not AVC, is consistent with our previous findings in the Cardiovascular Health Study (CHS), where mineral regulators were cross-sectionally associated only with echocardiographic MAC [20]. Consistent with these results, cross-sectional data from the Framingham Heart Study have linked echocardiographic MAC, but not AVC, to chronic kidney disease, a disorder marked by dysregulation of mineral metabolism and, typically, elevated FGF-23 levels [36].

Elevated FGF-23 was associated with major adverse cardiac events and mortality following acute coronary syndromes, an association that was independent of kidney function measures, phosphate, and vitamin

D levels [36]. Higher FGF-23 levels may be an early marker of kidney disease and impaired capacity for phosphate excretion [15]. Notably, phosphate itself was not significantly associated with MAC progression. This runs counter to experimental findings showing that higher phosphate promotes cellular transdifferentiation to an osteoblastic phenotype, and to previous data linking it to prevalent calcification in MESA (AVC) and CHS (both AVC and MAC) [21,37,38]. Although the 95% CIs still allow for the possibility of an association for serum phosphate with MAC progression at least as large as that seen for FGF-23, our findings suggest that FGF-23 may have the more prominent role. This could relate to FGF-23's status as a sensitive marker of kidney dysfunction, potentially rising before phosphate and creatinine levels become abnormal [39].

FGF-23 binds its receptor Klotho in the kidney, but exhibits direct, Klotho-independent binding to cardiac FGF receptors causing left ventricular hypertrophy, as well as calcification [13–15,40]. If high FGF-23 triggers calcification, it could be a target for intervention using existing therapies (e.g., cinacalcet, antibodies, soluble Klotho) [12,41].

Exploratory analyses of effect modification suggested that the rate of annual MAC progression in relation to FGF-23 was particularly accelerated in women and diabetic participants, but decelerated in Chinese participants. As MAC is more prevalent in women, it may have been easier to detect this association, but the finding could also reflect a sex-specific effect of FGF-23 or related pathways [2,25]. The basis for the differential associations observed for Chinese vs. non-Chinese participants is uncertain, but might have to do with the lower frequency of calcification observed in the former group. As for participants with diabetes, previous work from MESA showed that diabetes-associated kidney disease was especially related to MAC [42]. It is possible that in this cohort, the link between FGF-23 and MAC was more detectable in those with glucose dysregulation.

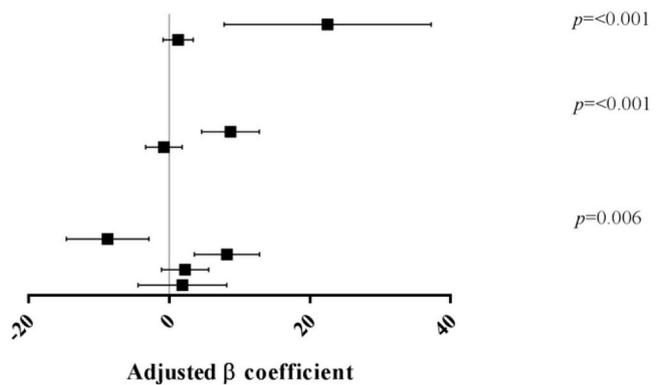
No significant associations were detected for serum fetuin-A and progression of calcification. This contrasts with the previously reported cross-sectional associations with echocardiographic MAC [20,42]. Nonetheless, the 95% CIs, especially for MAC, still allow for the possibility of a meaningful association. Findings of effect modification by race/ethnicity and eGFR will require further investigation, but diminished progression of MAC with higher fetuin-A in the context of lower eGFR does accord with a greater protective impact of this molecule against calciphylaxis as kidney function declines [42].

There are several limitations to this study. Biomarker measurement was made at baseline and levels could vary over time. MESA is a healthy cohort, reducing the ability to fully explore dose-response relationships and effects in those with severe CKD or known CVD, subgroups in whom calcification might progress more rapidly. Moreover, duration of follow-up was short for calcification progression. For FGF-23 and phosphate, valid measures were available in 96% of the baseline cohort, indicating a small proportion of missingness due to random sample collection/processing problems. For fetuin-A, measurement was performed in a random subset of participants, and while limiting power, random sampling reduces the possibility of bias. While we adjusted extensively, we cannot exclude the possibility that other factors upstream or downstream may be mediating the observed association. More generally, serum biomarkers may not be reflective of calcification at the tissue level; however, circulating proteins have been associated with histologic AVC [43]. Furthermore, it must be noted that sub-clinical valvular or annular calcification detected on CT may become symptomatic disease in some, but not all individuals. Last, the results of secondary analyses of effect-modification must be interpreted cautiously given the size of the subgroups and require additional study with more power.

In conclusion, we detected a significant association for FGF-23, but not phosphate or fetuin-A, with accelerated annual progression of MAC

(A)

Subgroup	N	β	95% CI	p value
Diabetes	859	22.53	(7.81, 37.25)	0.003
No Diabetes	5931	1.28	(-0.84, 3.40)	0.238
Female	3601	8.72	(4.62, 12.83)	<0.001
Male	3213	-0.76	(-3.36, 1.84)	0.565
Chinese	804	-8.74	(-14.61, -2.87)	0.004
Black	1892	8.22	(3.59, 12.85)	<0.001
White	2622	2.25	(-1.10, 5.60)	0.189
Hispanic/Latino	1496	1.88	(-4.42, 8.19)	0.558



(B)

Subgroup	N	β	95% CI	p value
Chinese	342	14.26	(4.87, 23.66)	0.003
Black	745	4.23	(-3.18, 11.65)	0.263
White	1123	-3.87	(-8.92, 1.18)	0.133
Hispanic/Latino	564	-4.57	(-10.93, 1.79)	0.159
eGFR \geq 60	2433	1.60	(-1.77, 4.97)	0.352
eGFR <60	338	-6.33	(-19.04, 6.37)	0.329

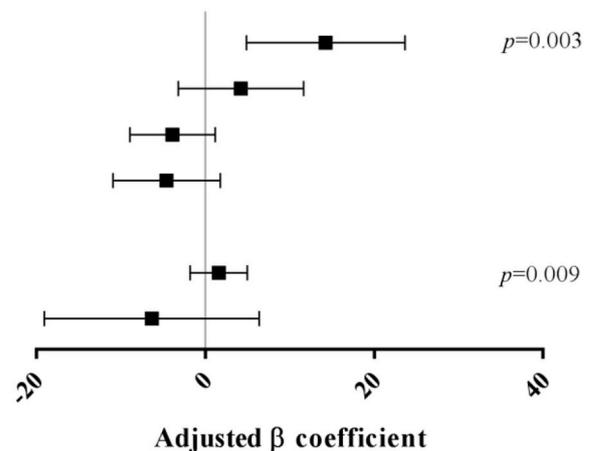


Fig. 2. Stratified analyses for interactions at the $p < 0.01$.

(A) FGF-23 and (B) fetuin-A with MAC progression. β coefficients were adjusted for covariates in Model 2 (age, sex, race/ethnicity, CT-type, education, BMI, systolic blood pressure, use of antihypertensive medication, diabetes, smoking, LDL cholesterol, HDL cholesterol, triglycerides, statin use, eGFR, and UACR) and indicate the annual acceleration in Agatston units per SD increment in the biomarker. For FGF-23, SD = 18.5 pg/mL; and for fetuin-A, SD = 0.11 g/L.

in a multi-ethnic cohort of middle-aged to older adults. None of the three biomarkers was related to the rate of AVC progression. These findings support a role for dysregulation of mineral metabolism in the development of MAC, providing impetus for further investigation of variation in different clinical subgroups. FGF-23 may be a viable target for identification, prevention and/or treatment of MAC progression in individuals at risk.

Conflicts of interest

JRK reports stock ownership in Amgen, Gilead Sciences, Johnson & Johnson, and Pfizer. During 2017–18, AEB was a site principal investigator for multi-center trials funded by Abbott, AstraZeneca, CSL Behring, sanofi-aventis, and NIH for which her institution received compensation. The other authors have nothing to disclose.

Financial support

AEB recognizes support from the Empire Clinical Research Program, American Heart Association Mentored and Clinical Population Research Award 17MCPRP33630098, and National Center for Advancing Translational Sciences Einstein-Montefiore CTSA Grant UL1-TR-001073. JRK is supported by K24 HL135493 from the National Heart, Lung, and Blood Institute. IHdB acknowledges support from R01 DK096875 from the National Institute of Diabetes and Digestive and Kidney Diseases. This research was supported by R01 HL071739 and MESA was supported by contracts N01-HC-95159, N01-HC-95160, N01-HC-95161, N01-HC-95162, N01-HC-95163, N01-HC-95164, N01-HC-95165, N01-HC-95166, N01-HC-95167, N01-HC-95168 and N01-HC-95169 from the National Heart, Lung, and Blood Institute, and by grants UL1-TR-000040, UL1-TR-001079, and UL1-RR-025005 from National Center for Research Resources. The authors thank the other

investigators, the staff, and the participants of the MESA study for their valuable contributions. A full list of participating MESA investigators and institutions can be found at <http://www.MESA-nhlbi.org>.

Author contributions

Conception or design of the work: AEB and JRK. Data collection: BK, JHI, NSJ, IHdB, DSS and MJB. Data analysis and interpretation: AEB, SX, RK, BK, JI, NSJ, IHdB, EDM, GT, DSS, MJB and JRK. Drafting the article: AEB and JRK. Critical revision of the article: AEB, SX, RK, BK, JI, NSJ, IHdB, EDM, GT, DSS, MJB and JRK. Final approval of the version to be published: AEB, SX, RK, BK, JI, NSJ, IHdB, EDM, GT, DSS, MJB and JRK.

Appendix A. Supplementary data

Supplementary data to this article can be found online at <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.atherosclerosis.2019.04.215>.

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