



Biologic and social factors predict incident kidney disease in type 1 diabetes: Results from the T1D exchange clinic network

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ABSTRACT

Aims: Diabetic kidney disease (DKD) is a major complication of type 1 diabetes (T1D). To better understand the development of DKD in modern clinical practice, we evaluated risk factors in participants from the T1D Exchange Registry who completed 5-years of longitudinal follow-up.

Methods: Participants had T1D duration ≥ 1 year, age ≥ 10 years, eGFR ≥ 60 ml/min and no albuminuria at enrollment, and at least two serum creatinine and urine albumin measurements recorded during follow-up. Adverse kidney outcomes were defined as eGFR < 60 ml/min and/or albuminuria (ALB) defined by as two consecutive albumin/creatinine ratios or two out of the past three measurements $\gg 30$ $\mu\text{g}/\text{mg}$ at any follow-up data collection. Associations of baseline characteristics with adverse kidney outcomes were assessed.

Results: Among 3940 participants (mean age 41 ± 15 yrs, T1D duration 21 ± 13 yrs), 653 (16.6%) experienced an adverse kidney outcome: 268 (6.8%) experienced incident ALB only, 322 (8.2%) had eGFR decline to < 60 ml/min without ALB, and 63 (1.6%) experienced eGFR < 60 ml/min with ALB. In a multivariable analysis, higher HbA1c, higher SBP, lower DBP, older age and lower education level were associated with the development of adverse kidney outcomes (all p values ≤ 0.03).

Conclusions: Improving modifiable risk factors, including glucose and blood pressure control, remain important to reduce the risk of DKD in T1D.

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1. Introduction

Diabetic kidney disease (DKD) is a risk factor for both progression to end-stage renal disease (ESRD) and for mortality in persons with type 1 diabetes (T1D). While diabetic kidney disease was initially identified by the presence of albuminuria, more recent reports suggest that kidney function decline can occur without concurrent albuminuria in persons with T1D.^{1,2} Kidney biopsies in T1D patients with evidence of kidney damage show similar glomerular lesions in those with and without

albuminuria early in the disease process with variable pathology findings emerging over time.^{3,4} Consequently, the definition of DKD has expanded to include the presence of albuminuria at any level of kidney function or renal function decline in the absence of detectable albuminuria.^{5,6}

Despite recommendations for improvements in glucose control, blood pressure, and greater use of renin-angiotensin system (RAS) blockers over the past decades, persons with T1D continue to develop albuminuria and loss of kidney function.^{7–9} Long-term follow-up of patients in the Diabetes Control and Complications Trial (DCCT) and the subsequent observational study, Epidemiology of Diabetes Interventions and Complications (EDIC), clearly demonstrates that early intensive therapy compared to conventional therapy reduces later

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development of renal complications, including both the appearance of albuminuria and reduced kidney function.^{2,10–12} Guidelines for blood pressure targets and treatment with angiotensin-converting enzyme inhibitors are based on studies that have demonstrated slowing of progression of kidney disease in persons with T1D and proteinuria.^{5,13,14}

In the initial report of the T1D Exchange Clinic Network and Registry, the frequency of DKD was 8% of the entire cohort, and increased with the duration of T1D.¹⁵ In persons with T1D duration \gg 30 years, \gg 20% had DKD. In persons with T1D duration \gg 50 years, \gg 29% had DKD.¹⁵

Here we report the rate of and risk factors for incident DKD in persons who were followed over 5 years in the T1D Exchange Clinic Network and who were without evidence of DKD at the baseline evaluation. This cohort reflects a broad spectrum of persons with T1D and current care practices across academic centers and private practice settings in the US.

2. Subjects, materials and methods

The T1D Exchange Clinic Network includes over 80 US-based pediatric and adult endocrinology practices that provide specialized diabetes care. Details on Registry participant eligibility criteria, the informed consent process, and data collection have been published previously.¹⁵ Over 25,000 individuals with T1D were enrolled between September 2010 and August 2012. Core data were updated annually from medical record data extraction.

This report includes data from 3940 Registry participants who were at least 10 years old with at least 1 year diabetes duration, had absence of kidney damage as evident from an albumin/creatinine ratio \ll 30 mg/g creatinine and normal kidney function (estimated glomerular filtration rate (eGFR) \geq 60 ml/min) at a 2010–2012 baseline visit, and who completed 5 or more years of study follow-up. Demographic data on sex, race/ethnicity, annual household income, and education level were collected through comprehensive participant questionnaires at the initial visit. Information about age, diabetes duration, insulin modality (pump or multiple daily injections), use of a continuous glucose monitor (CGM), blood pressure, use of anti-hypertensive medications, height, albuminuria status, serum creatinine level, and HbA1c levels obtained as part of usual care were collected from clinic medical records. Albuminuria was defined as two consecutive albumin/creatinine ratios or two out of the past three measurements \geq 30 μ g/mg. Clinic sites were instructed to enter all serum urine albumin and serum creatinine measures not previously recorded on annual data collections.

2.1. Statistical methods

Calculation of eGFR was determined using the Schwartz equation for participants \ll 19 years old and using the CKD-Epi equation for participants \geq 19 years old.^{16,17} Adverse renal outcome was defined as eGFR \ll 60 ml/min and/or the presence of albuminuria (2 consecutive or 2 out of 3 measurements) reported on at least one data collection form after baseline. Renal outcome was further categorized as: 1) never experienced eGFR \ll 60 ml/min or albuminuria, 2) experienced only albuminuria, 3) experienced only eGFR \ll 60 ml/min, and 4) experienced both eGFR \ll 60 ml/min and albuminuria.

The associations between binary adverse renal outcome and baseline demographic and clinical characteristics were assessed using chi-square tests for categorical characteristics and Wilcoxon Rank-Sum tests for continuous characteristics. The association also was assessed using a multivariable logistic regression model with a stepwise selection procedure. Data analyses were performed using SAS software version 9.4 (SAS Institute Inc., Cary, NC). In view of multiple comparisons, only *p*-values \ll 0.01 were considered statistically significant. All *p*-values are two-sided.

3. Results

The 3940 participants ranged in age from 10 to 85 years at the 2010–12 baseline (mean 41 ± 15 years); 55% were female and 92% were non-Hispanic White. Median diabetes duration at baseline was 19 years (interquartile range (IQR) 11, 30 years). Additional participant and clinical characteristics at baseline are presented in Table 1.

Among the 3940 participants, 653 (17%) experienced an adverse renal outcome (eGFR \ll 60 ml/min or new ALB or both); 268 (7%) experienced only ALB, 322 (8%) experienced only eGFR \ll 60 ml/min, and 63 (2%) experienced both eGFR \ll 60 ml/min and albuminuria. In adjusted analyses, the occurrence of an adverse renal outcome was associated with the following baseline characteristics (Table 2): older age (median 47 (30, 59) years versus 40 (30, 51) years in participants with adverse renal outcome vs participants without adverse renal outcome, respectively; *P* = 0.01); diagnosis of T1D as a child (59% vs 55%; *P* \ll 0.001); higher HbA1c level ($8.0\% \pm 1.3\%$ vs $7.6\% \pm 1.0\%$; *P* \ll 0.001); higher systolic blood pressure (124 ± 10 mmHg vs 122 ± 10 mmHg; *P* \ll 0.001); and lower diastolic blood pressure (71 ± 7 mmHg vs 73 ± 7 mmHg; *P* \ll 0.001). Compared with participants without an adverse renal outcome, there was a trend for individuals with adverse renal outcome to have lower education level (50% less than Bachelor degree vs 37%; *P* = 0.03) and lower CGM use (47% vs 56% CGM users; *P* = 0.04). Characteristics not meeting criteria for inclusion in the final adjusted model that had an indication of an association with an adverse renal outcome included (Table 2): longer diabetes duration (median 23 (11, 36) years vs 19^{11,28} years; unadjusted *P* \ll 0.001) and lower annual household income (31% less than \$50,000 vs 22%; unadjusted *P* \ll 0.001). We found no association between the occurrence of adverse renal outcome and race/ethnicity (*P* = 0.57) or use of an insulin pump (*P* = 0.76).

4. Discussion

Prevention of DKD is an important goal for persons with T1D and their health care providers. Attainment of HbA1c targets is problematic in children, for whom higher targets may be appropriate, in adolescents learning independent disease management and in adults who may not be diagnosed or treated appropriately early in the course of their

Table 1
Participant characteristics at baseline.

| | N = 3940 |
|--|-----------------|
| Age (years) – median (IQR) | 41 (30,53) |
| T1D duration (years) – median (IQR) | 19 (11,30) |
| Female – N(%) | 2159 (55%) |
| Race/ethnicity – N(%) | |
| Non-Hispanic White | 3600 (92%) |
| Non-Hispanic Black | 100 (3%) |
| Hispanic/Latino | 116 (3%) |
| Other race/ethnicity | 104 (3%) |
| Education level ^a – N(%) | |
| Less than bachelor degree | 1657 (42%) |
| Bachelor degree | 1393 (35%) |
| Master, professional, doctorate degree | 890 (23%) |
| Annual household income ^b – N(%) | |
| Less than \$50,000 | 749 (24%) |
| \$50,000 to less than \$75,000 | 598 (19%) |
| \geq \$75,000 | 1734 (56%) |
| CGM use – N(%) | 616 (16%) |
| Pump use ^b – N(%) | 2451 (63%) |
| HbA1c ^b – mean \pm std | 7.6% \pm 1.2% |
| Systolic blood pressure ^b – mean \pm std | 121 \pm 13 |
| Diastolic blood pressure ^b – mean \pm std | 72 \pm 9 |
| Anti-hypertensive medication use – N(%) | 2273 (58%) |

^a Highest education level for participants \geq 18 years old; highest parental education level for participants \ll 18 years old.

^b Annual household income missing for 859 participants; information on use of an insulin pump missing for 23 participants; HbA1c information missing for 159 participants; systolic blood pressure information missing for 115 participants; diastolic blood pressure information missing for 115 participants.

Table 2Association between renal status^a and baseline participant/clinical characteristics.

| | Never experienced e-GFR < 60 or albuminuria | Experienced only albuminuria | Experienced only e-GFR < 60 | Experienced both e-GFR < 60 and albuminuria | Unadjusted P-value ^b | Adjusted P-value ^c |
|---------------------------------------|--|------------------------------|--------------------------------|--|------------------------------------|----------------------------------|
| Overall – N(%) | 3287 (83%) | 268 (7%) | 322 (8%) | 63 (2%) | – | – |
| Age – median (IQR) | 40 (30,51) | 40 (28,50) | 53 (34,62) | 55 (43,63) | <<0.001 | 0.01 |
| Diabetes duration – median (IQR) | 19 (11,28) | 23 (14,33) | 20 (8,37) | 33 (18, 40) | <<0.001 | – |
| Age at diabetes onset – N(%) | | | | | 0.06 | <<0.001 |
| Pediatric (<19 years old) | 1815 (55%) | 182 (68%) | 173 (54%) | 32 (51%) | | |
| Adult (≥19 years old) | 1472 (45%) | 86 (32%) | 149 (46%) | 31 (49%) | | |
| Female – N(%) | 1781 (54%) | 151 (56%) | 193 (60%) | 34 (54%) | 0.08 | – |
| Race/ethnicity – N(%) | | | | | 0.57 | – |
| Non-Hispanic White | 3018 (92%) | 240 (90%) | 299 (93%) | 55 (87%) | | |
| Non-Hispanic Black | 79 (2%) | 14 (5%) | 5 (2%) | 2 (3%) | | |
| Hispanic/Latino | 98 (3%) | 6 (2%) | 8 (2%) | 4 (6%) | | |
| Other race/ethnicity | 85 (3%) | 8 (3%) | 10 (3%) | 2 (3%) | | |
| Education level – N(%) | | | | | <<0.001 | 0.03 |
| Less than Bachelor | 1166 (37%) | 124 (48%) | 154 (50%) | 31 (53%) | | |
| Bachelor degree | 1185 (38%) | 90 (35%) | 71 (23%) | 17 (29%) | | |
| Master/professional/doctorate | 803 (25%) | 43 (17%) | 81 (26%) | 10 (17%) | | |
| Annual income – N(%) | | | | | <<0.001 | – |
| Less than \$50,000 | 579 (22%) | 67 (31%) | 68 (30%) | 18 (42%) | | |
| \$50,000–<\$75,000 | 438 (17%) | 33 (15%) | 47 (20%) | 8 (19%) | | |
| ≥\$75,000 | 1633 (62%) | 116 (54%) | 115 (50%) | 17 (40%) | | |
| HbA1c – mean ± std | 7.6% ± 1.0% | 8.1% ± 1.4% | 7.9% ± 1.2% | 8.2% ± 1.3% | <<0.001 | <<0.001 |
| Systolic blood pressure – mean ± std | 122 ± 10 | 125 ± 11 | 123 ± 10 | 129 ± 11 | <<0.001 | <<0.001 |
| Diastolic blood pressure – mean ± std | 73 ± 7 | 73 ± 7 | 70 ± 7 | 70 ± 8 | <<0.001 | <<0.001 |
| Ever used pump – n(%) | 2384 (73%) | 193 (72%) | 233 (72%) | 43 (68%) | 0.76 | – |
| Ever used CGM – n(%) | 1856 (56%) | 130 (49%) | 151 (47%) | 24 (38%) | <<0.001 | 0.04 |

^a eGFR calculated using the Schwartz equation for participants < 19 years old and using the CKD-Epi question for participants ≥ 19 years old.

^b Bivariate *p*-value of the association between binary adverse renal outcome and demographic and clinic characteristics calculated using chi-square tests for categorical characteristics and Wilcoxon Rank-Sum tests for continuous characteristics.

^c Multivariable *p*-values calculated using a multivariable logistic regression with stepwise selection procedure adjusted for use of anti-hypertensive medication. Only factors remaining after the stepwise selection procedure will display a *p*-value.

disease. Socioeconomic factors impede treatment of a chronic disease that is expensive, time-consuming and requires attention to details. The DCCT/EDIC studies clearly demonstrate both the benefits of early glycemic control and the difficulties maintaining that level of control in 'usual care' settings.⁷ ACEi/ARB therapy has proven beneficial for preventing the progression of diabetic nephropathy,¹² but may not prevent DKD,⁸ and is not suitable for or tolerated by all (e.g., teratogenic effects can deter treatment in women of reproductive age, hypotension or hyperkalemia may prohibit use).

Follow-up of the T1D Exchange Registry cohort reveals a 17% incidence of DKD over 5 years, diagnosed by either new onset albuminuria (7%), reduced eGFR to <60 ml/min/1.73 m² (8%) or both parameters (2%) within 5 years of enrolling in the Registry. The high rate of reduced eGFR without albuminuria attests to the need to monitor both albuminuria and serum creatinine with calculation of eGFR to diagnose this important diabetes complication. Our findings also indicate that both age and duration of diabetes are important risk factors and suggest that surveillance for DKD should continue across the age spectrum in adults. The modestly higher HbA1c among those with incident DKD compared to those without (8.0% ± 1.3% vs 7.6% ± 1.0%) is a reminder that glucose control across the lifespan continues to be an important factor in the development of diabetes complications and that poor metabolic control early in the disease may have long-term consequences, as shown in the DCCT/EDIC study.^{11,18} Clinical trials report better glucose control among CGM users, providing hope that these devices may lead to reductions of both acute and chronic complications of diabetes.^{19,20} Achievement and persistence of good to excellent glycemic control remains challenging, as evidenced by recent data from the T1D Exchange Clinic Network showing that glycemic control has not improved from 2010 to 2012 to 2016–2018 despite significant increases in the use of insulin pumps and CGM systems.²¹

Hypertension has been associated with adverse renal outcomes, and blood pressure control is often recommended as a strategy to prevent DKD and other microvascular and macrovascular complications of diabetes.^{22,23} The blood pressure target of <140/90 mmHg has been

recommended by the American Diabetes Association (ADA) in recently published Standards of Care guidelines for persons with both type 1 and type 2 diabetes without distinction.^{5,24} In this observational study, mean systolic blood pressures of participants with DKD were only slightly higher than those without DKD, and were below targets recommended by ADA and KDOQI. Nonetheless, persons without incident DKD at follow-up examinations had lower systolic blood pressures than those with albuminuria, reduced eGFR, or both (*P* < 0.001). Interestingly, the diastolic blood pressure was higher in the group without incident DKD compared to groups with incident albuminuria or reduced eGFR (*P* < 0.001), suggesting that elevated pulse pressure might be a hidden risk factor for DKD. Prior studies of small vessel elasticity and pulse pressure in the prediction of microvascular complications in persons with T1D have been inconsistent.^{25,26} In the DCCT/EDIC studies, time-updated blood pressures < 120/80 mmHg were associated with substantially lower risk of adverse renal outcomes independent of initial glucose-control treatment assignment.²² This finding was true whether persons were treated or not treated for hypertension, suggesting that the blood pressure level of <120/80 mmHg is protective of adverse renal outcomes in T1D regardless of hypertension treatment.²² Whether blood pressure targets for persons with T1D should be lower than the recommended targets for all persons with diabetes is unclear due to the lack of prospective randomized clinical trials.

Socioeconomic factors have been implicated in the development of diabetes complications in multiple observational studies of persons with T1D.^{27–29} In this follow-up study of well characterized patients with T1D from the T1D Exchange Clinic Network, both lower education levels and lower household income were associated with greater risk of adverse renal outcomes (*P* < 0.001 for both characteristics in bivariate analyses). Prior studies have shown similar results. Lower attained education level was associated with ESRD and cardiovascular disease in the Pittsburgh Epidemiology of Diabetes Complications study, while lower household income predicted autonomic neuropathy and peripheral arterial disease.²⁸ A long-term follow-up study of patients with T1D in Sweden showed a much greater risk of ESRD in those with lower

personal and family education levels.²⁹ The complexity and burdens of self-care for persons with T1D may put those with limited education and resources at risk for diabetes complications, including adverse renal outcomes.

The interesting finding that continuous glucose monitoring (CGM) use was associated with lower risk of adverse renal outcomes in bivariate analysis, but was not significant in multivariate analysis deserves more study. Short-term studies have consistently shown that CGM use improves glucose control in persons with T1D, whether used in conjunction with insulin pumps or with insulin injections.^{19,20} Likewise, use of insulin pumps has been shown to improve glucose control in clinical trials, an effect confirmed in observational studies.³⁰ Long-term use of insulin pump therapy has been shown to both improve glycemic control and reduce incident albuminuria.³¹ The relatively high penetration of insulin pump use compared to CGM use may have mitigated the non-independent effects noted in this cohort.

In conclusion, multiple risk factors, including age, duration of diabetes, HbA1c, blood pressure and socioeconomic factors such as attained education level and household income were associated with incident adverse renal outcomes in this T1D Exchange Clinic Network follow-up study. While age and duration of diabetes are not modifiable, ongoing surveillance for DKD is certainly indicated throughout the lifespan of persons with T1D. Lower HbA1c, early in the course of diabetes or as soon as it can be achieved, has been shown in numerous studies to reduce the risk of adverse kidney outcomes,³² and is confirmed by this study. Whether ongoing efforts to control glucose levels by expanded use of CGM and sensor-augmented insulin pumps will reduce the frequency of these complications requires further study.³² An unexpected finding from this observational study is that lower mean diastolic blood pressure and modestly higher systolic blood pressure within the target range of <140/90 mmHg is associated with higher risk of incident adverse kidney outcomes. Review of blood pressure targets and frequency of monitoring based on diabetes duration for persons with T1D may be warranted by guideline committees. Socioeconomic factors associated with poorer outcomes in people with T1D may not be modifiable. Future research should seek to identify interventions and support systems that can improve the trajectory of complications that disproportionately impact morbidity and mortality in these high risk persons with T1D. Based on findings in this report, screening for DKD should include both urine albumin and eGFR measurements, since declining kidney function in the absence of albuminuria is a common presentation for DKD. While the minimum age for screening for DKD is not identified in this study, it is clear that screening should continue across the adult years in patients with T1D.

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