



## Clinical Research

## Resistin as a predictor of cardiovascular hospital admissions and renal deterioration in diabetic patients with chronic kidney disease

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## ABSTRACT

**Background:** High resistin levels have been associated with cardiovascular disease (CVD). Cardiovascular hospitalizations are common, especially in diabetic and renal impaired patients. The purpose of this study is to determine the role of serum resistin as a predictor of cardiovascular hospitalizations in type 2 diabetic patients with mild to moderate chronic kidney disease (CKD).

**Methods:** We conducted a prospective, observational study. 78 diabetic patients with mild to moderate CKD and no previous CVD were included. The population was divided in two groups: G-1 with cardiovascular related admission ( $n = 13$ ) and G-2 without cardiovascular related admission ( $n = 65$ ). A Student's *t*-test was conducted to determine correlations between laboratory findings and hospitalization. We used logistic regression to assess predictors of cardiovascular events requiring hospitalization and Cox regression to identify predictors of end-stage renal disease (ESRD).

**Results:** eGFR, albumin, HbA1c, phosphorous, PTH, IR, CRP, resistin and active vitamin D, were related to cardiovascular admissions. In a multivariate regression model, resistin (OR = 2.074,  $p = 0.047$ ) was an independent predictor of cardiovascular hospitalization. Cox regression showed that resistin (HR = 1.931,  $p = 0.031$ ) and UACr (HR = 1.151,  $p = 0.048$ ) were also independent predictors of renal disease progression.

**Conclusion:** Resistin demonstrated to be valuable in predicting hospital admissions and progression to ESRD.

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## 1. Introduction

In humans, resistin gene is located in chromosome 19 with resistin holding a crucial part during inflammation where macrophages are the main responsible for its secretion.<sup>1–3</sup> Due to its resemblance to the traits of a cytokine and its production being associated with immune system cells, resistin has been considered as a possible inflammatory marker in humans.<sup>4–6</sup>

The kidney is where the elimination of resistin occurs, consequently resistin tends to remain in higher concentrations in patients with CKD.<sup>7</sup> Patients on hemodialysis with residual renal function have lower resistin levels, whereas patients on hemodialysis with no residual renal function have higher resistin levels, supporting the hypothesis that resistin is removed by the kidney. Moreover, in patients with CKD, it has been demonstrated that resistin levels and renal function are strongly related.<sup>8</sup> Several studies suggest that resistin serum concentrations may be increased in

CKD.<sup>6,9,10</sup> Also, high serum resistin levels have been associated with low glomerular filtration rate (GFR).<sup>11</sup> The excess of cytokines observed in the context of reduced renal function may be related to diminished clearance and renal degeneration through inflammatory pathways that can lead to death.<sup>8</sup> Nevertheless, the exact receptors for resistin are still unknown.<sup>8</sup> Alongside its importance in inflammation, recent investigations suggest that resistin plays a relevant role on several pathological pathways in complex disorders such as diabetes, CVD, liver disease, CKD and auto-immune disease.<sup>1,12</sup>

Chronic cardiovascular damage induces a state of stress which can result in cardiac hypertrophy.<sup>5</sup> The condition is outlined by enlarged cardiomyocytes, raised protein synthesis, elevated brain natriuretic peptide (BNP), atypical sarcomeric organization, as well as enhanced fibronectin production.<sup>5</sup> A recent case-control study suggested that serum resistin level was higher in patients with cardiac failure. Moreover, the levels increased according to the patient's New York Heart Association (NYHA) functional class.<sup>13</sup>

In this study our main objective is to investigate the possible role of resistin as a predictor of hospital admissions caused by cardiovascular disease in a population of type 2 diabetic patients with mild to moderate CKD. We also aim to determine the role of resistin in predicting CKD progression to ESRD.

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## 2. Subjects, materials and methods

This is a prospective, observational study in diabetic patients with mild to moderate CKD. Patients were screened and recruited in an outpatient diabetic nephropathy clinic and were followed from January 2010 to December 2018.

In this study 78 patients with type 2 diabetes and mild to moderate CKD ( $15 \text{ mL/min/1.73 m}^2 < \text{eGFR} \leq 89 \text{ mL/min/1.73 m}^2$ ) were included. The classification of diabetes followed the guidelines established by the American Diabetes Association.<sup>14</sup> All included patients were, at the time of inclusion, undergoing several pharmacologic therapies, namely: anti-hypertensive drugs such as angiotensin receptor antagonists (ARA), angiotensin converting enzyme inhibitors (ACE-I) and calcium channel blockers (CCB) anti-dyslipidemia drugs, acetylsalicylic acid (ASA), and oral antidiabetic agents.

Patients' follow up was conducted two to three times a year during in-person appointments at the nephrology clinic. Patients with more severe conditions returned approximately every 3 months, while others returned every 6 months. No patient was "lost to follow up".

### 2.1. Exclusion criteria

Patients were considered ineligible to participate in the study if they presented at least one of the following criteria: previous CVD (defined as a history of one or more of the following: non-fatal myocardial infarction, stable or unstable angina pectoris, stroke or transient ischemic attacks and heart failure), history of valvopathies (including rheumatic fever), uncontrolled hypertension under antihypertensive therapy, estimated glomerular filtration rate (eGFR)  $\leq 15 \text{ mL/min}$  or  $\geq 90 \text{ mL/min}$ , type 1 diabetes, renal disease other than diabetic nephropathy, and neoplastic or infectious diseases. Patients were not allowed to undergo therapy with thiazide and loop diuretics simultaneously, spironolactone, magnesium supplements, or any laxative or chelate agent containing magnesium. Patients with any gastrointestinal pathology that could possibly interfere with magnesium absorption were also not included in this study.

### 2.2. Data collection, analysis and ethical considerations

The evaluation and characterization of the hospitalization were based on the admission clinical record, which provides information regarding signs and symptoms, diagnostic exams, procedures, treatments, and diagnosis on the day of discharge.

Serum samples were collected at baseline in fasting patients. Samples were centrifuged, and plasma was frozen at  $-80^\circ \text{C}$ . Several laboratory parameters were analyzed: HbA1c, total cholesterol, mineral metabolism (phosphorus, PTH), inflammation (CRP), active form of vitamin D [1,25(OH)2D3] and serum creatinine.

Total cholesterol and phosphorus were measured using the ARCHITECT c Systems and the AEROSET System (Abbott Diagnostics Division, Abbott Laboratories Abbott Park, Illinois, USA). HbA1c and PTH levels were measured using a spectrophotometry technique and electrochemiluminescent immunoassays (ECLIA), respectively.

Plasma resistin levels were determined by enzyme-linked immunosorbent assay using the "Resistin (Human)" ELISA kit (Cat. No. EK-028-36, Phoenix Pharmaceuticals Inc., Burlingame, California, USA), according to manufacturer's instructions, adapted to the Triturus automatic microplate apparatus (Grifols S.A., Barcelona, Spain). Results were calculated using the apparatus curve-fitting software in 4 parameter logistics mode.

Values of serum creatinine were obtained through an enzymatic method, using the ARCHITECT device (Abbott Diagnostics Division, Abbott Laboratories Abbott Park, Illinois, USA). We estimated the glomerular filtration rate (eGFR) according to the Chronic Kidney Disease Epidemiology Collaboration (CKD-EPI) equation.<sup>15</sup>

### 2.3. Definitions

Cardiovascular events with hospitalization were classified upon discharge, considering only admissions caused by coronary heart disease (myocardial infarction, stable or unstable angina pectoris), congestive heart failure, peripheral vascular disease and cerebrovascular disease (stroke or transient ischemic attacks) based on recent international guidelines.<sup>16</sup>

According to the presence or absence of cardiovascular hospital admission during the study period, our population was divided into two groups: G-1, with cardiovascular hospitalization ( $n = 13$ ), and G-2, without cardiovascular hospitalization ( $n = 65$ ).

### 2.4. Statistical analysis

The data were inserted and arranged using a Microsoft Excel (Microsoft Corporation, Redmond, WA, USA) spreadsheet. Statistical analysis was performed using the program Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) (version 24, IBM Corporation, Armonk, NY, USA). Quantitative results were expressed as mean  $\pm$  standard deviation (SD) for continuous variables with normal distribution, in accordance with the Kolmogorov-Smirnov distribution test. Differences between groups were assessed using independent samples *t*-test and Fisher's exact test for continuous and categorical variables.

The independent variables associated with cardiovascular hospitalization were identified by regression models. Variables included in these models were: gender, age, eGFR, albumin, HbA1C, phosphorus, PTH, urine albumin/creatinine ratio (UACr), insulin resistance, CRP, resistin, and systolic blood pressure (BP). The independent variables associated with progression to ESRD were assessed by Cox regression model. The statistical tests ran with data from 77 patients due to a missing HbA1C value in one of our patients. However, in descriptive statistics we included data regarding the patient with no HbA1C value.

A *p*-value inferior to 0.05 was considered as representing statistical significance.

Before its implementation, the study was approved by the local Ethics Committee. All principles of the Declaration of Helsinki of 1975, as revised in 2000, were followed and study procedures were only conducted after obtaining patients' written informed consent. The anonymity and confidentiality of the patients was guaranteed throughout the entire study.

## 3. Results

For a better sample characterization, a set of important demographic and clinical data were included as seen in Table 1. This sample consisted of a total of 78 patients ( $n = 78$ ), age ranged from 32 to 87 years old and the mean age was 61 years and resistin ranged from 1.56 ng/mL to

**Table 1**  
Summary demographics of our cohort.

	n	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. deviation
eGFR (mL/min/1.73 m <sup>2</sup> )	78	16.20	87	42.9	21.4
Albumin (g/dL)	78	1.50	5.60	4.15	0.60
Total cholesterol (g/dL)	78	74	318	192.95	39.96
Hb (g/dL)	78	7.50	16.80	12.66	1.92
HbA1c (%) <sup>a</sup>	77	5.20	13.10	7.50	1.45
Phosphorous (mg/dL)	78	2.30	9.40	4.32	1.20
PTH (pg/ml)	78	13.00	675.00	136.31	16.18
Urinary albumin/creatinine ratio (UACr) (μg/mg)	78	36.00	550.00	245.10	27.04
HOMA-IR	78	0.34	5.75	2.13	1.75
CRP (mg/L)	78	0.01	5.80	1.60	1.34
Resistin (ng/mL)	78	1.56	11.80	5.98	3.50
Active vitamin D (ng/mL)	78	7.40	34.00	19.45	8.10

<sup>a</sup> There was one missing value for HbA1c.

**Table 2**

Differences between groups (G-1 with cardiovascular hospital admission and G-2 without cardiovascular hospital admission).

	G-1 (n = 13)		G-2 (n = 65)		p
Gender (f/m)	4/9		26/39		0.384
BMI (kg/m <sup>2</sup> )	24.16	±2.67	24.07	±3.26	0.289
eGFR	22.64	±10.11	44.51	±24.30	<0.001
Albumin	3.70	±0.82	4.24	±0.51	0.003
Total cholesterol (g/dL)	178.15	±41.63	195.91	±39.23	0.145
Hb	12.25	±1.60	12.75	±1.98	0.395
HbA1c <sup>a</sup>	6.55	±0.68	7.69	±1.49	<0.001
Phosphorous	5.25	±1.44	4.13	±1.07	0.002
PTH	243.92	±146.71	114.78	±81.89	<0.001
UACr	249.54	±110.74	244.21	±119.07	0.882
HOMA-IR	3.54	±0.86	1.86	±1.75	<0.001
CRP	2.69	±0.48	1.39	±1.36	<0.001
Resistin	9.08	±1.56	5.35	±3.45	<0.001
Active vitamin D	9.32	±1.46	21.48	±7.32	<0.001
Renin-angiotensin system inhibitor (%)	78.7		80.7		0.184
Renoprotective CCB (%)	35.6		48.6		0.151

<sup>a</sup> For HbA1c G-1 had n = 13 and G-2 n = 64, due to a missing value.

11.80 ng/mL with a mean of 5.98 ng/mL. Out of the 78 patients, 13 had hospital admissions related to newly diagnosed cardiovascular events.

Subjects were classified into two groups according to cardiovascular hospital admission during the study period: G-1 with cardiovascular related hospital admission (n = 13) and G-2 without cardiovascular related hospital admission (n = 65).

A Student's t-test was conducted to compare the mean values of each variable with and without hospital admission due to cardiovascular events. Table 2 illustrates the differences between the two groups. G-1 patients had higher Phosphorous ( $p = 0.002$ ), PTH ( $p < 0.001$ ), insulin resistance ( $p < 0.001$ ), CRP ( $p < 0.001$ ), resistin ( $p < 0.001$ ) and lower eGFR ( $p < 0.001$ ), albumin ( $p < 0.003$ ), HbA1C ( $p < 0.001$ ) and active vitamin D ( $p < 0.001$ ). There was no difference between groups in gender, BMI, cholesterol, Hemoglobin (Hb), UACr or in antihypertensive therapy.

A multivariate logistic regression model showed that resistin (OR = 2.074, 95% CI (1.557–7.729)  $p = 0.047$ ) was an independent predictor of cardiovascular hospital admissions in diabetic patients with mild to moderate CKD (Table 3).

From our total population, 19 patients progressed to ESRD, requiring renal function replacement techniques such as hemodialysis or peritoneal dialysis. We used Cox regression to investigate predictors of renal deterioration and resistin (HR = 1.931,  $p = 0.031$ ) and UACr (HR = 1.151,  $p = 0.048$ ) was an independent predictor of renal disease progression when adjusted to other variables (Table 4).

#### 4. Discussion

Our findings suggest that resistin levels can predict cardiovascular related hospital admissions in type 2 diabetic patients with CKD.

**Table 3**

Logistic regression: predictors of cardiovascular event related hospital admission.

	OR	95% CI	p
Gender	1.308	0.367–3.004	0.460
Age	1.002	0.900–1.500	0.152
eGFR	0.450	0.708–2.405	0.125
Albumin	0.678	0.305–1.300	0.200
HbA1C	0.473	0.126–1.004	0.084
Phosphorous	1.334	0.563–4.084	0.075
PTH	1.019	0.993–1.046	0.148
UACr	1.001	0.989–1.013	0.915
Insulin resistance	0.082	0.004–1.632	0.101
CRP	3.238	0.400–6.224	0.271
Resistin	2.074	1.557–7.729	0.047
Systolic BP	1.026	0.923–1.139	0.638

**Table 4**

Predictors of renal disease progression.

	HR	95% CI	p
eGFR	0.961	0.929–1.994	0.222
Age	0.994	0.955–1.035	0.765
Gender	1.389	0.478–4.036	0.546
BMI	0.946	0.813–1.100	0.470
Phosphorous	1.187	0.734–1.921	0.485
UACr	1.151	1.097–2.004	0.048
HgA1c	0.875	0.509–1.503	0.875
Albumin	0.909	0.302–2.732	0.909
Insulin resistance HOMA	1.156	0.573–2.334	0.686
CRP	0.854	0.391–1.863	0.691
Resistin	1.931	1.014–3.310	0.031
Active vitamin D	0.973	0.872–1.084	0.616
Cardiovascular hospital admission			
G-2	Ref	Ref	R
G1	0.978	0.570–3.450	0.058

Resistin and UACr were independent predictors of progression to ESRD. In addition, we observed a relation between unregulated mineral metabolism, poor glycemic control, deteriorated renal function and inflammation with cardiovascular events requiring hospitalization.

Diabetes mellitus (DM) and CKD represent a major global health concern. DM is the single most important risk factor for renal disease with predictions pointing at a total of 10% of adults suffering from diabetes in the next ten years.<sup>17,18</sup> When compared to the nondiabetic population, these patients are more susceptible to severe renal disease and cardiovascular morbidity.<sup>17,19</sup> A study by Menzaghi et al. proved that patients with type 2 DM have a higher risk of developing CVD when compared to the nondiabetic population, underlining cardiovascular complications as the main cause of death amongst these patients.<sup>20</sup>

Preceding studies have linked resistin with obesity and the etiology of DM.<sup>21,22</sup> Additionally, inadequate glycemic control in diabetic patients has been linked to cardiovascular deterioration.<sup>23–25</sup> One particular study concluded that patients with increased HbA1c variation had higher risk of cardiovascular incidents, but only for eGFR above 60 min/mL/1.73 m<sup>2</sup>. They did not demonstrate any relation in patients with eGFR lower than 60 min/mL/1.73 m<sup>2</sup>. Our results underline poor glycemic control as a risk factor for cardiovascular events. Insulin resistance (IR) represents an inadequate response to insulin and has been observed not only in diabetic patients, but also in the nondiabetic population with CKD.<sup>26</sup> Although previous studies had conflicting results regarding IR and its role in cardiovascular disease,<sup>18</sup> other studies involving diabetic and nondiabetic populations suggested that IR is an independent risk factor for CVD,<sup>27–29</sup> which is concordant to our findings that homeostatic model assessment insulin resistance (HOMA-IR) is a risk factor for cardiovascular deterioration in diabetic patients.

The importance of mineral metabolism for heart disease is well established.<sup>30</sup> It has been previously observed that vitamin D plays an important cardioprotective role.<sup>31–33</sup> Even though, two large studies failed to conclude that vitamin D improves heart function,<sup>34,35</sup> further research on these studies and their cohort, revealed better outcomes with less cardiovascular hospital admissions in the groups taking vitamin D. More recently, it has been verified that administering vitamin D to diabetic model rats reduced heart volume and fibrosis, which strengthens the previous hypothesis that vitamin D decreases cardiovascular remodeling.<sup>36</sup> Phosphorous has been associated with left ventricular hypertrophy (LVH), but the literature lacks studies without confounding factors.<sup>36</sup> Nevertheless, a recent study demonstrated that phosphorous was not only individually implicated in ventricular hypertrophy, but also in cardiovascular hospital admissions in patients with CKD.<sup>37</sup> PTH has also been associated to LVH in recent studies, however the results are also susceptible to confounding factors.<sup>38,39</sup> In our study we identified mineral metabolism deficiencies as a risk factor for cardiovascular event hospitalization, which is in agreement with what is suggested in recent literature. However, more investigation is

required to exclude confounding factors, such as fibroblast growth factor 23 (FGF-23).

It is known that several traditional risk factors are associated with CKD and CVD. However they have not been able to completely explain the morbidity and mortality in CKD.<sup>18</sup> A study by Stuveling et al. focused on a group of biochemical risk markers in renal patients and found relations with cardiovascular disease, renal deterioration and mortality. In another study of a population of type 2 diabetic patients, it has been proposed that serum resistin levels are higher in patients with lower GFR, and that increasing resistin levels contribute to a decrease in GFR.<sup>40</sup>

As far as we know, although previous investigations aimed to study the role of resistin as a predictor of CVD, our study was the first to relate resistin and CVD in type 2 diabetic patients with mild to moderate CKD. In previous studies of type 2 diabetic populations there was no relation between serum resistin and cardiovascular events.<sup>41,42</sup> Nevertheless, several other studies have linked higher resistin levels with cardiac complications. It was observed that resistin levels are raised in patients with heart failure, and higher levels are associated with higher classes in the NYHA classification.<sup>43,44</sup> Furthermore, a previous study focusing patients on hemodialysis concluded that the effects of resistin in CVD and mortality were evident when the levels of adiponectin (ADPN) were low.<sup>45</sup> Also, multiple studies in different populations and under different conditions, have demonstrated that resistin can predict cardiovascular events.<sup>7,20,45–48</sup>

It has also been suggested, in studies involving resistin, an association between heart failure and its progression with high serum resistin.<sup>49</sup> It has been shown that patients with repetitive coronary events after an acute coronary syndrome had higher serum resistin levels.<sup>50</sup> Moreover, resistin levels predict adverse cardiovascular events in patients with coronary artery disease, including those who were submitted to coronary artery stenting.<sup>51</sup>

In addition, a recent study demonstrated a relation between resistin levels and hospitalization for heart failure in patients already diagnosed with coronary heart disease,<sup>52</sup> which is in line with our findings.

A previous study on a Japanese population demonstrated that serum resistin levels were important for the progression of CKD after adjusting for confounding factors and the mean values of resistin were higher even in early stages of CKD.<sup>53</sup> Our findings after following-up on our population demonstrated that resistin could predict further renal deterioration eventually leading to ESRD. These findings suggest that resistin may have an important part perpetuating renal damage over time in CKD, probably by maintaining an inflammatory environment, which contributes for the progression of the disease. Another study in a hypertensive population concluded that resistin not only was a risk factor for CKD, but also contributed to a poor evolution of the disease by inducing continuous renal damage.<sup>54</sup>

Regardless, our study has limitations. The size of our sample, though large enough to obtain statistically significant results, especially after being divided in G-1 and G2, may not have been sufficiently strong when data were submitted to statistical analysis.

Also, resistin was only measured once and even with strict inclusion/exclusion criteria, we could not account for all confounding factors at the time of measurement. Also, the time between resistin measurement and cardiovascular hospitalization was not considered in our study. Including the time variable in addition to multiple resistin measurements over time would probably provide extra valuable information.

In conclusion, in our type 2 diabetic population with mild to moderate CKD, resistin levels can predict hospitalization due to cardiovascular events. Resistin was also able to predict deterioration of CKD patients into ESRD with the necessity of renal function replacement. However, further research is required in order to understand the mechanism behind these findings and if resistin effects are only a reflection of its activity during inflammatory conditions and reduced GFR. Studies with larger cohorts may be necessary to better understand the role of resistin in diabetic and CKD patients and if it can be a viable tool for clinicians in daily practice to predict cardiovascular disease.

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