

Supplemental Information

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Acute Pancreatitis: Assessment and Management in the First 24 Hours

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Introduction and expanded definitions.

Systemic Inflammation. Systemic inflammation is a cytokine-driven condition with activation of leukocytes of the innate immune system within the blood stream affecting multiple organs, i.e. the “cytokine storm”⁽¹⁻³⁾. The condition is diagnosed clinically as the *Systemic Inflammatory Response Syndrome (SIRS)* when specific diagnostic criteria are met: heart rate (HR) >90 beats/min, core body temperature of <36°C or >38°C, white blood cell (WBC) count of <4000 or > 12000/mm³ and respiratory rate (RR) of >20/min or PCO₂ <32 mmHg⁽⁴⁾. Thus, it is easy to measure clinically.

SIRS is a clinical syndrome seen in patients with AP, polytrauma, extensive burns and sepsis⁽⁵⁻⁸⁾, among other insults. It is a non-specific syndrome, but it is a useful indicator in patients with AP, because it informs caregivers that immune response to injury is affecting the *entire body*. In some cases, the symptoms resolve quickly, while in others, SIRS persists. Persistent SIRS (lasting ≥ 48 hours) is associated with progression to MOF^(4, 9). SIRS appears to be the bridge between local pancreatic inflammation and MOF since the *absence of SIRS* accurately predicts that MOF is unlikely (e.g. negative predictive value, NPV = 0.88 to 0.96⁽¹⁰⁾). However, the *presence of SIRS* alone is *highly inaccurate* in predicting MOF (e.g. positive predictive value, PPV = 0.11 to 0.43⁽¹⁰⁾). These data indicate that there are additional critical factors linking SIRS to MOF.

Multi-organ Failure (MOF). MOF in AP (also called *multi-organ dysfunction syndrome*, MODS) is determined by evaluating clinical biomarkers of dysfunction in three systems: cardiovascular, pulmonary and renal.⁽⁴⁾ MOF is diagnosed using the *Modified Marshall Score*^(4, 11) with scores of 0 to 4 for progressive dysfunction of the three systems. A score of 2 or more for any of the organ systems is considered organ failure, and severe AP (**SAP**) is defined by (a) Single OF, or (b) MOF (following Banks⁽⁴⁾).

Progression and Evolution. Progression of AP to MOF is dependent on the presence of SIRS, but it also includes additional factors that appear to cause endothelial cell injury and dysfunction leading to capillary leak syndrome (CLS).⁽¹²⁾ SIRS is associated with altered capillary permeability allowing albumin to leak out of plasma over the first few days of AP. In contrast, MOF is associated with endothelial cell toxicity resulting in a breakdown of the endothelial barrier and loss of both albumin and large plasma proteins.⁽¹²⁾ The loss of post-capillary oncotic pressure minimizes fluid reabsorption from the interstitial space, leading to venous hypovolemia and eventually hypovolemic shock. Transudation of plasma from the vascular compartment to the interstitial space and the “third space” results in pulmonary edema and acute respiratory distress syndrome (ARDS), hypovolemia and cardiovascular shock, pre-renal azotemia with acute kidney injury (AKI), pancreatic hypoperfusion and risk for pancreatic necrosis (PNec).⁽¹²⁾ Likewise, hypoperfusion of intestinal epithelial cells leads to increased intestinal permeability with translocation of bacteria and other intestinal contents into the lymphatics that continuously drive

SIRS in a vicious cycle (e.g. >48 hours). Thus, optimal care requires both detecting capillary leak, which develops in a subset of AP patients, and preventing hypovolemia.

Multi-Organ Failure. Once MOF is established, management is primarily supportive. Treatment requires: for pulmonary failure, mechanical ventilation in the intensive care unit (ICU); for cardiac failure, fluid resuscitation and vasopressors; for renal failure, hemodialysis and for gut failure, nasojejunal tube feedings. Pancreatic necrosis (PNec) requires expectant observation and minimally invasive debridement when it becomes infected (i.e. endoscopic, percutaneous catheter placement or laparoscopic following a step-up approach).

Question 3. How is AP diagnosed?

Abdominal imaging. Abdominal imaging is used to detect biliary lithiasis and complications such as an impacted gallstone with ascending cholangitis or persistent cholestasis. CT imaging is seldom required to make the diagnosis of AP⁽⁴⁾ and performance of CT scan in patients with persistent SIRS does not result in any change of management.⁽¹³⁾ Two scenarios where a contrast enhanced CT imaging may be helpful are 1) Patients with recurrent idiopathic AP where autoimmune pancreatitis needs to be ruled out. One of the cardinal diagnostic criteria of autoimmune pancreatitis is imaging features (the other being histology). 2) Patients 40 years or older in whom obstructive malignancy needs to be ruled out. Evaluation of these potential etiologies should be done after inflammation from AP has subsided.

Question 5 How should severity be determined and predicted in an AP patient?

Revised Atlanta Criteria. Currently, the revised Atlanta criteria (RAC) are widely used to classify the severity of AP into mild, moderate, and severe.⁽⁴⁾ Mild AP is characterized by the absence of any local or systemic complications or organ failure. Moderately severe AP is characterized by the presence of local (i.e. pancreatic

necrosis) or systemic complications and/or transient organ failure (<48 hours). Severe AP is characterized by persistent failure of a single or multiple organs (SOF and MOF), where organ failure (or dysfunction) refers to the lungs, cardiovascular system and kidneys using criteria defined by the Modified Marshall scoring system.⁽⁴⁾ Pancreatic necrosis is a serious complication of AP and is included in the RAC as moderately severe AP. The RAC also highlights the importance of SIRS in the evolution of pancreatitis, but it is persistent SOF or MOF, rather than persistent SIRS or even pancreatic necrosis⁽⁹⁾ that defines severe AP. Furthermore, by definition, severe AP cannot be diagnosed until day 3 of AP (i.e. >48h).

SIRS and MOF. Recent concepts recognize that SIRS as a clinically defined syndrome based on heart rate, body temperature, WBC level and respiratory rate (or PCO₂) that may or may not lead to MOF, depending on the etiology and driving factors of SIRS. In the absence of pre-existing conditions or medications that may alter body temperature, heart rate or WBC, the prognosis of patients with AP without SIRS is excellent. Most of the morbidity and mortality in AP is derived from MOF. This typically develops in a subset of patients with SIRS who progress to an unregulated CLS leading to major fluid shifts with intravascular hypovolemia, visceral organ hypoperfusion with pre-renal azotemia, pancreatic necrosis, pulmonary edema/adult respiratory distress syndrome (ARDS) and hypovolemic shock.⁽¹²⁾ These events often lead to metabolic acidosis which can worsen pancreatic injury, thereby providing more substrates to perpetuate SIRS and CLS (i.e., disease-associated molecular patterns -> inordinate immune response -> CLS).⁽¹⁴⁾ Presence of metabolic acidosis can often be recognized by RR >20 as the respiratory system attempts to compensate for the acidosis. CLS often begins in the context of SIRS with the MOF being delayed by 12-24 hours⁽¹²⁾, and its onset typically is within the first week. So the absence of MOF on an early examination does not preclude development of MOF a few hours (or days) later. For this reason, a clinical decision support tool to aid bedside forecasting of prognosis and track important prognostic parameters is crucial to early identification of impending MOF.

Bedside clinical decision support tools: However, there are a number of challenges to implementing the available prognostic scores and parameters for bedside use: 1) Currently, there are more than 20 prognostic models developed for use in AP but it is difficult for clinicians to know which one to utilize, let alone compute the

probability of impending MOF. 2) Even though the ER providers are on the frontline to seeing AP patients early in the course, there are no ER specific guidelines to guide them for prognostication of AP and most of the prognostic model studies are published in the GI-specific journals. These barriers to implementation into clinical practice highlight a need for a clinical decision support tool that is accessible, easy to use, and is maintained with a database of prognostic models that can be implemented into clinical practice. To this end, tools such as ADAPT represents a front-runner to bringing prognostic models to the bedside to aid decision making.⁽¹⁵⁾ The ADAPT tool is currently available on a user-friendly web-based platform (<https://adapt-demo.arielmedicine.com/>) where clinicians can go to the website and enter relevant patient data for computation of 13 prognostic model scores that aids classification of AP patient into predicted severe vs non-severe.⁽¹⁵⁾

Question 6. Etiology-based evaluation and management.

Ascending cholangitis - persistent bile duct obstruction. Features of the initial history and physical examination suggesting acute biliary pancreatitis include female sex, obesity, older age, sudden onset of pain, prior gallstones or biliary colic, and prior gallstone pancreatitis. Signs of ascending cholangitis include the Charcot's triad of right upper quadrant abdominal pain, jaundice and fever, with the addition of mental confusion and septic shock (Reynold's pentad) being less specific because confusion and shock may overlap with the presentation of severe AP.⁽¹⁶⁾ Further diagnostic evaluation should include assessment of liver injury/function tests (LFT) and abdominal imaging. Following initial resuscitation and stabilization, further evaluation should begin with transabdominal abdominal ultrasound (TUS) to detect biliary sludge, gallstones or dilated common bile duct (e.g. >8mm). When the above imaging tests are inconclusive, endoscopic ultrasound (EUS) is highly sensitive and specific, especially for distal biliary stones or sludge to determine whether an urgent ERCP is indicated^(17, 18). Laboratory indices favoring biliary etiology include elevated serum alanine aminotransferase (ALT) >150 U/L or 2X ULN and acute elevation of direct bilirubin (DBili) or total bilirubin (TBili) above the ULN with no other confounding etiology.⁽¹⁷⁻¹⁹⁾ Elevated WBC does not aid in determining etiology. In one study female sex, age >58 years and serum AST >150 U/L were independent predictive factors for biliary cause of AP.⁽¹⁷⁾ The positive predictive value of ALT value > 150 U/L is 95%, but it lacks sensitivity.^(17, 18) Both bile duct dilation (or visualized stone) on

transabdominal ultrasound and a total bilirubin >4 mg/dL have a specificity of approximately 94% for finding a stone at ERCP.⁽²⁰⁾ For the initial 24 hour assessment, a TUS is recommended, as it is noninvasive (unlike endoscopic procedures), doesn't require nephrotoxic contrast (as in cross-sectional imaging), and is widely available.

The purpose of diagnosing gallstone pancreatitis is to further determine whether there is ascending cholangitis, or a gallstone impacted at the level of the ampulla. Multiple studies and clinical guidance suggest that urgent ERCP is of no added benefit in patients without ascending cholangitis, and around two-thirds of patients could be spared an invasive procedure from which they gain no benefit but could have procedure-associated complications, especially if the patients are unstable from severe AP and have pulmonary edema and evolving ARDS⁽¹⁹⁾ However, there are remaining questions as to whether ERCP is beneficial in patients with biliary pancreatitis without cholangitis or persistent cholestasis. The APEC trial from the Dutch Pancreatitis Study Group⁽¹⁹⁾ concluded that urgent ERCP with sphincterotomy did not reduce the composite endpoint of major complications or mortality, compared with conservative treatment, but the rate of subsequent cholangitis was slightly higher in the conservative management group (10%) than the urgent ERCP with sphincterotomy group (2%, NS). From the same group, the results of the APEC-2 trial, where patients with predicted severe pancreatitis underwent EUS, 58% of patients had gallstones/sludge in the bile duct. All of these underwent immediate ERCP with biliary sphincterotomy. Compared to the control group of APEC-1, no difference in the primary endpoint (~41% in each group), were met. Thus, the results of this study further support that ERCP is not beneficial for patients with predicted severe gallstone pancreatitis even when bile duct disease is present in the absence of cholangitis.⁽²¹⁾

Hypertriglyceridemic acute pancreatitis (HTG-AP). HTG-AP can be defined as the diagnosis of AP with triglyceride (TG) levels of at least 500 mg/dL with other common AP etiologies being excluded.⁽²²⁾ It is likely that HTG both induces AP and also results in more severe AP regardless of etiology. The risk of AP is directly related to fasting TG levels with progressively higher risk for TG levels above >177 mg/dL.⁽²³⁾ The etiology of HTG is also complex with a different mix of genetic, environmental and metabolic factors in different people. Several homozygous or compound heterozygous gene mutations causing familial chylomicronemia syndrome (FCS).^(24, 25)

Multifactorial chylomicronemia syndrome (MCS) is common and reflects as complex mix of genetic factors⁽²⁶⁻²⁸⁾ with or without environmental or metabolic factors. Other risk factors include medications such as glucocorticoids, poorly controlled diabetes mellitus (DM), alcoholism and obesity.^(29, 30)

The diagnosis of HTG-AP should be suspected from the family history, the patients past medical history, medication review, physical examination, and laboratory findings of lipemic serum and elevated TG on a lipid panel. Note that serum amylase may be falsely normal in the setting of marked hypertriglyceridemia. Surprisingly, this key etiology is often overlooked by physicians and follow-up to prevent recurrence is often overlooked.⁽³¹⁾ Early identification of HTG-AP is important since there is a high risk of lipotoxicity, which is closely associated with SIRS and MOF due to the types of fatty acids released by circulating pancreatic lipase.⁽³²⁻³⁴⁾

Hypercalcemia. Hypercalcemia is considered a risk factor when total ionized calcium levels are ≥ 12.0 mg/dL or ≥ 3 mmol/L.⁽³⁵⁾ Total calcium levels are affected by serum albumin and total protein, and conversion formulas are available to adjust for low serum protein. Approximately 90% of cases of hypercalcemia are caused by primary hyperparathyroidism (PHPT) or hypercalcemia of malignancy, with the rest typically associated with genetic disorders, sarcoidosis, chronic kidney disease (CKD), or other factors.^(35, 36) During the acute phase of AP, total serum calcium levels may be deceptively within normal limits because of concurrently low albumin and/or fat saponification “consumes” calcium. This necessitates the need for measuring its level potentially serially upon recovery especially in patients where etiology is uncertain. For treatment, see text.

Diabetic ketoacidosis (DKA). Diabetic ketoacidosis is a medical emergency defined by elevated blood glucose, elevated blood/urine ketones, and intravascular metabolic acidosis. It is caused by insufficient insulin and seen with type 1 DM, especially during illness or stress. AP may develop in DKA in the presence of metabolic acidosis with serum pH below 7.2 (e.g. pH 7.15 +/- 0.14 in one study⁽³⁷⁾).⁽³⁸⁻⁴⁰⁾ The mortality of patients with DKA-AP was found to be 2.3 times higher than for those with AP alone ($P < .001$; CI 1.8–3.0) in a study of an administrative database, but in the same study HTG-AP was found to have lower risk of mortality than AP alone.⁽⁴¹⁾

The diagnosis of DKA should be suspected in patients with a history of DM, smell of acetone on the patient's breath, and hyperventilation as a respiratory compensation for metabolic acidosis. The diagnosis is made based on elevated serum blood sugar of >250 mg/dL and presence of ketones in the serum or urine and metabolic acidosis (arterial blood gas [ABG] with $\text{pH} \leq 7.3$, serum bicarbonate of ≤ 18 mmol/L and anion gap of >10).⁽⁴²⁾ Serum lactate levels should also be measured to evaluate tissue ischemia and hypovolemic shock.

Apart from the "urgent" etiologies discussed above, there are many additional causes of pancreatitis that may be identified by history, laboratory or specialized testing. Assessment for these causes can be pursued in sequential fashion based upon clinical features, though this is not critical early on. Such assessments could include genetic counselling and testing (e.g. for *PRSSI*), IGG subclass analysis (to identify IGG-4 Related disease), EUS (to assess for intraductal papillary mucinous neoplasia or a small pancreatic mass), or a secretin enhanced MRI (particularly w/ recurrent pancreatitis to identify a potential structural cause, such as pancreas divisum). In patients with recurrent pancreatitis where explicit alcohol use is involved, counseling with referral to addiction treatment should be offered to reduce recurrence risk. Where surreptitious alcohol consumption seems likely, testing for carbohydrate deficient transferrin (CDT) or phosphatidylethanol may be of use.⁽⁴³⁾

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