Atriopulmonary Fontan Spontaneous Echo Contrast Improved after Cardioversion

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A 21-year-old woman with tricuspid atresia who had undergone an atriopulmonary Fontan operation at 3 years of age presented with intra-atrial reentrant tachycardia and tachycardia-induced cardiomyopathy. She had done well on no medications, and systolic function was normal on echocardiograms 3 months before this presentation. Since then, she had experienced exertional palpitations, increasing abdominal girth, loose bowel movements, vague abdominal pain, fatigue, and decreased appetite. Examination revealed a blood pressure of 120/70 mmHg, a regular tachycardic pulse, clear lungs, a pulse oximetry saturation of 97%, and a distended abdomen with ascites and hepatomegaly. Laboratory tests showed elevated alanine transaminase of 115 IU/L, brain natriuretic peptide of 556 pg/mL, an international normalized ratio of 1.4, negative stool antitrypsin (no protein-losing enteropathy), and normal renal function, lactate, and cardiac enzyme levels. An electrocardiogram showed flutter waves and 2:1 atrioventricular conduction (ventricular rate, 122 beats/min) (Fig. 1). A transthoracic echocardiogram revealed a dilated left ventricle with severely depressed systolic function, an ejection fraction of 0.25, and spontaneous echo contrast in the dilated inferior vena cava. A transesophageal echocardiogram showed no left atrial appendage thrombus; however, dense contrast was present in the dilated right atrium of the Fontan circuit (Fig. 2).

We presumed that tachycardia-induced cardiomyopathy was exacerbating the patient's Fontan circuit stasis, so we recommended terminating the tachycardia. Cardio-

Fig. 1 A 12-lead electrocardiogram shows intra-atrial reentrant tachycardia with 2:1 atrioventricular block; arrows point to flutter waves.

Fig. 2 Transesophageal echocardiogram (bicaval view) shows 2:1 intra-atrial reentrant tachycardia with dense spontaneous echo contrast.

IVC = inferior vena cava;
LA = left atrium; RA = right
atrium/atriopulmonary Fontan
circuit to pulmonary arteries

Supplemental motion image is
available for [Figure 2](#).

version yielded improvement (Fig. 3); however, contrast was still seen on cardiac magnetic resonance images (Figs. 4 and 5). The patient was placed on amiodarone, anticoagulation, and anticongestive therapy. An echocardiogram 4 months later showed improvement; the patient had mildly depressed systolic function with maintained sinus rhythm.

Comment

Usually 1 to 2 decades after initial palliation, the Fontan circuit is at risk for diminished cardiac output from

Fig. 3 Transesophageal echocardiogram (bicaudal view) after cardioversion to sinus rhythm shows improved but persistent spontaneous echo contrast.

IVC = inferior vena cava; LA = left atrium; RA = right atrium/atriopulmonary Fontan circuit to pulmonary arteries

Supplemental motion image is available for [Figure 3](#).

Fig. 4 Cardiac magnetic resonance image (axial view) shows atriopulmonary Fontan anatomy (right atrium-to-bilateral branch pulmonary artery anastomoses with visible contrast).

LPA = left pulmonary artery; RA = right atrium/atriopulmonary Fontan circuit to pulmonary arteries; RPA = right pulmonary artery

Fig. 5 Cardiac magnetic resonance image (bicaval coronal view) shows the atriopulmonary Fontan circuit with swirling spontaneous echo contrast.

IVC = inferior vena cava; LA = left atrium; RA = right atrium/atriopulmonary Fontan circuit to pulmonary arteries; SVC = superior vena cava

multiple causes, including ventricular dysfunction, arrhythmia, anatomic obstruction, or valvular regurgitation. Elevated cardiac pressures can lead to elevated Fontan pressures that present clinically as ascites, protein-losing enteropathy, desaturation, and worsening arrhythmias. This hypercoagulable state can lead to further thrombosis.¹ Escalating levels of antiarrhythmic therapies include medications, electrophysiologic study with catheter ablation, or a maze procedure as part of Fontan conversion to the more modern lateral tunnel or extracardiac conduit system.² This operation should include placement of an epicardial pacing system, which can help to prevent or abort atrial arrhythmias.³ In this complex congenital case, expedient recognition and management occurred in the setting of a collaborative team in a complex congenital heart center, as is recommended.⁴

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