Transient Global Amnesia and the Risk of Ischemic Stroke

Atul Mangla, MBBS; Babak B. Navi, MD; Kelly Layton, MPH; Hooman Kamel, MD

Background and Purpose—Whether transient global amnesia (TGA) represents an arterial insult that heralds ischemic stroke remains unclear. Therefore, we examined stroke risk after TGA in a population-based cohort.

Methods—After performing chart review at our institution to validate the International Classification of Diseases, 9th Edition, Clinical Modification diagnosis code for TGA, we used administrative claims data to identify all patients discharged from nonfederal California emergency departments or acute care hospitals between 2005 and 2010 with a primary discharge diagnosis of TGA. Patients with a primary discharge diagnosis of migraine, seizure, or transient ischemic attack were included as controls. Kaplan–Meier statistics were used to calculate rates of ischemic stroke, and Cox proportional hazards analyses were used to compare stroke risk among the 4 exposure groups while controlling for traditional stroke risk factors.

Results—International Classification of Diseases, 9th Edition, Clinical Modification code 437.7 had a sensitivity of 86% and a specificity of 95% for TGA. The cumulative 1-year rate of stroke was 0.54% (95% confidence interval [CI], 0.36–0.81) after TGA, 0.22% (95% CI, 0.20–0.25) after migraine, 0.90% (95% CI, 0.83–0.97) after seizure, and 4.72% (95% CI, 4.60–4.85) after transient ischemic attack. After adjustment for demographic characteristics and stroke risk factors, TGA was not associated with stroke risk when compared with migraine (hazard ratio, 0.82; 95% CI, 0.61–1.10). The likelihood of stroke after TGA was lower than after seizure (hazard ratio, 0.57; 95% CI, 0.44–0.76) or transient ischemic attack (hazard ratio, 0.27; 95% CI, 0.20–0.35).

Conclusions—Compared with patients diagnosed with migraine or seizure, patients diagnosed with TGA do not seem to face a heightened risk of stroke. (Stroke. 2014;45:00-00.)

Key Words: amnesia, transient global ■ stroke

Transient global amnesia (TGA) is characterized by a sudden deficit of anterograde and retrograde memory that usually lasts for a few hours and is not accompanied by other focal neurological symptoms or signs.1 Fisher and Adams1 introduced the term in 1964, although Bender2 and separately Guyotat and Courjon3 had initially described a syndrome consistent with TGA in 1956. The incidence of TGA ranges from 3 to 8 per 100,000 people per year.4–6 Most episodes (75%) occur in people between 50 and 70 years, and TGA rarely occurs in patients <40 years old.7 Although neurologists generally view TGA as a benign entity, its exact prognosis remains unclear. Although many studies have supported the benign nature of TGA,8–17 others have suggested that TGA may be a vascular prelude18 that confers the same risk of stroke as transient ischemic attack. After adjustment for demographic characteristics and stroke risk factors, TGA was not associated with stroke risk when compared with migraine (hazard ratio, 0.82; 95% CI, 0.61–1.10). The likelihood of stroke after TGA was lower than after seizure (hazard ratio, 0.57; 95% CI, 0.44–0.76) or transient ischemic attack (hazard ratio, 0.27; 95% CI, 0.20–0.35).

Validation of the TGA Diagnosis Code

Because the accuracy of the International Classification of Diseases, 9th Edition, Clinical Modification (ICD-9-CM) code for TGA (437.7) has not been validated, we first performed a retrospective chart review at our institution to determine its sensitivity and specificity. To do so, we identified 25 ED visits or hospitalizations from 2008 through 2010 with a discharge diagnosis of TGA. Using statewide administrative claims data collected by the California Office for Statewide Healthcare Planning and Development, all nonfederal acute care emergency departments (EDs) and hospitals in California use standardized methods to collect and electronically submit discharge data about all patient visits and hospitalizations.24 These data are checked for inconsistent or invalid elements and codes before being provided in a deidentified format to the Healthcare Cost and Utilization Project of the Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality.25 An anonymous, patient-specific record number allows longitudinal tracking of patients across visits.26

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From the Department of Neurology and the Brain and Mind Research Institute, Weill Cornell Medical College, New York, NY.
Correspondence to Hooman Kamel, MD, 525 East 68th St, F610, New York, NY 10065. E-mail hsk9010@med.cornell.edu

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2012 with a primary ICD-9-CM discharge diagnosis of 437.7, as well as 25 discharges with other primary cerebrovascular diagnosis codes (eg, TIA) and no TGA code. A single board-certified neurologist (A. Mangla) reviewed the medical records from these 50 encounters while blinded to their ICD-9-CM diagnoses, and adjudicated cases of TGA based on its standard definition as the sudden onset of anterograde and retrograde memory lasting <24 hours and unaccompanied by other neurological deficits. Using his clinical determination of the primary diagnosis as the gold standard, we calculated the sensitivity and specificity of ICD-9-CM code 437.7 for TGA.

**Patient Population**

After validating the TGA diagnosis code, we used it to identify a cohort of all patients discharged from a nonfederal California ED or acute care hospital between 2005 and 2010 with a primary discharge diagnosis of TGA.

As control groups, we identified all patients discharged from a nonfederal California ED or acute care hospital from 2005 through 2010 with a primary discharge diagnosis of migraine (ICD-9-CM code 346.x), seizure (345.x), or TIA (435.x). We selected migraine and seizure as negative controls given that these are paroxysmal neurological complaints referable to the central nervous system and are not typically treated as stroke heralds, and we chose TIA as a positive control given its well-established risk of subsequent stroke.

In all 4 groups, we excluded patients with any concurrent secondary diagnoses of ischemic stroke (ICD-9-CM code 433.x, 434.x, or 436), intracerebral hemorrhage (431), or subarachnoid hemorrhage (430) at baseline. Furthermore, to focus our analysis on incident cases of stroke, we excluded patients with any diagnoses of ischemic stroke at visits before baseline. Finally, to maximize our ability to ascertain follow-up events, we excluded patients who were not California residents at baseline.

**Measurements**

The primary outcome was any hospital discharge diagnosis of ischemic stroke (ICD-9-CM code 433.x, 434.x, or 436) without concurrent codes for rehabilitation (V57), trauma (800–804 or 850–854), intracerebral hemorrhage (431), or subarachnoid hemorrhage (430) at baseline. This code schema has been validated to have a sensitivity of 86% and a specificity of 95% when compared with detailed medical record review. Additionally, we excluded patients after their first stroke hospitalization, a strategy that has been shown to create stroke samples with a specificity of 95% when compared with detailed medical record review. Across California between 2005 and 2010, we identified 4299 eligible patients with TGA, 170400 with migraine, 71087 with seizure, and 115105 eligible patients with TIA. At baseline, patients with TGA were older than those with migraine or seizure and younger than those with TIA (Table 1). Their burden of cardiovascular comorbidities and risk factors was much lower than those with TGA, generally similar to those with seizure, and much higher than those with migraine (Table 1).

The cumulative 1-year rate of ischemic stroke after TGA was 0.58% (95% CI, 0.36–0.81) compared with 0.22% (95% CI, 0.20–0.25) after migraine, 0.90% (95% CI, 0.83–0.97) after seizure, and 4.72% (95% CI, 4.60–4.85) after TIA. This rate was 0.54% (95% CI, 0.36–0.81) compared with 0.22% (95% CI, 0.20–0.25) after migraine, 0.90% (95% CI, 0.83–0.97) after seizure, and 4.72% (95% CI, 4.60–4.85) after TIA. The cumulative 5-year rates of ischemic stroke were 2.4% (95% CI, 1.86–3.21) after TGA, 0.86% (95% CI, 0.50–0.91) after migraine, 2.90% (95% CI, 2.72–3.10) after seizure, and 12.23% (95% CI, 12.00–12.46) after TIA. After adjustment for demographic characteristics and traditional stroke risk factors (Table 2), TGA was not associated with stroke when compared with migraine (hazard ratio, 0.82; 95% CI, 0.61–1.10). The likelihood of stroke after TGA was lower than after seizure (hazard ratio, 0.57; 95% CI, 0.44–0.76) or TIA (hazard ratio, 0.27; 95% CI, 0.20–0.35). We found no significant evidence of interaction between TGA and the control exposures.

The results of our multivariable analyses did not substantially change when we stratified exposures by ED visits only or hospitalizations only, or when we performed sensitivity analyses using a more sensitive definition of ischemic stroke.

**Discussion**

In a large and demographically heterogeneous population, we found that patients discharged from an ED or hospital with a primary diagnosis of TGA faced a low risk of subsequent ischemic stroke. Their risk was similar to the risk of stroke after a diagnosis of migraine, lower than the risk after presentation with seizure, and much lower than the risk after TIA.

Our results are consistent with several smaller studies that suggest that TGA is benign in terms of future vascular...
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and our results do not support other studies that suggest that TGA heralds stroke in a similar fashion as TIA. Furthermore, our findings do not support the proposed pathogenic explanation of TGA as a form of arterial ischemia. Our findings are not inconsistent with alternative and still unproven explanations of TGA as a manifestation of venous insufficiency or migrainous phenomena, but our epidemiological analysis cannot further inform the debate about the exact pathogenesis of TGA. From a practical standpoint, our study suggests that patients with classical presentations of TGA do not require a vascular evaluation or any specific intensification of stroke risk factor treatment, even if they have vascular comorbidities.

The results of our study should be interpreted in light of several limitations. First, our analysis relied on administrative data and ICD-9-CM diagnosis codes without detailed clinical data, and therefore may be susceptible to incorrect or biased ascertainment of TGA cases; we also lacked access to ICD-10 codes, which are likely to offer advantages such as greater specificity. This concern is somewhat mitigated by our validation of the TGA ICD-9-CM code via detailed chart review, whose results indicate that cases identified on the basis of this diagnosis code are likely to be representative of patients evaluated in an ED or hospital for TGA. Second, our use of administrative data may have led to underascertainment of strokes. However, the rate of stroke after TIA in our sample is broadly consistent with rates in recent population-based prospective studies, suggesting adequate capture of incident strokes in our study. Furthermore, even if our overall ascertainment of strokes were insensitive, there is no obvious reason to suspect differential misclassification of strokes in patients with TGA versus migraine or seizure, which supports our finding that TGA is not a risk factor for stroke compared with these negative controls. Third, this was a hospital-based study in that we lacked access to ambulatory care visits, and therefore our results cannot be generalized to patients

Table 1. Baseline Characteristics of Patients with TGA Compared With Negative Controls (Migraine and Seizure) and Positive Controls (TIA)*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Characteristics</th>
<th>TGA (N=4299)</th>
<th>Migraine (N=170 400)</th>
<th>Seizure (N=71 087)</th>
<th>TIA (N=115 105)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Age, mean (SD), y</td>
<td>65 (13)</td>
<td>38 (12)</td>
<td>44 (16)</td>
<td>71 (15)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>2239 (52.1)</td>
<td>140120 (82.2)</td>
<td>23695 (46.0)</td>
<td>65067 (56.5)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Race</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White</td>
<td>3202 (79.4)</td>
<td>92705 (58.0)</td>
<td>37328 (55.5)</td>
<td>73869 (67.8)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black</td>
<td>94 (2.3)</td>
<td>16643 (10.4)</td>
<td>10011 (14.9)</td>
<td>8113 (7.4)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hispanic</td>
<td>367 (9.1)</td>
<td>41047 (25.7)</td>
<td>16016 (23.8)</td>
<td>18664 (17.1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>368 (9.1)</td>
<td>9315 (5.8)</td>
<td>3946 (5.9)</td>
<td>8265 (7.6)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Payment source</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Medicare</td>
<td>1752 (40.8)</td>
<td>13905 (8.2)</td>
<td>20559 (28.9)</td>
<td>73924 (64.2)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Medicaid</td>
<td>81 (1.9)</td>
<td>35371 (20.8)</td>
<td>16571 (23.3)</td>
<td>7066 (6.1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Private</td>
<td>2184 (50.8)</td>
<td>89105 (52.3)</td>
<td>18414 (25.9)</td>
<td>27581 (24.0)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self-pay</td>
<td>184 (4.3)</td>
<td>23036 (13.5)</td>
<td>10934 (15.4)</td>
<td>3571 (3.1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hypertension</td>
<td>1792 (41.7)</td>
<td>16740 (9.8)</td>
<td>15424 (21.7)</td>
<td>72206 (62.7)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Diabetes mellitus</td>
<td>380 (8.8)</td>
<td>6243 (3.7)</td>
<td>7473 (10.5)</td>
<td>28160 (24.5)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CHD</td>
<td>314 (7.3)</td>
<td>1227 (0.7)</td>
<td>3279 (4.6)</td>
<td>21242 (18.5)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Atrial fibrillation</td>
<td>172 (4.0)</td>
<td>376 (0.2)</td>
<td>1599 (2.2)</td>
<td>12301 (10.7)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CHF</td>
<td>53 (1.2)</td>
<td>379 (0.2)</td>
<td>1581 (2.2)</td>
<td>7514 (6.5)</td>
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<tr>
<td>CKD</td>
<td>71 (1.7)</td>
<td>609 (0.4)</td>
<td>2304 (3.2)</td>
<td>7004 (6.1)</td>
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<tr>
<td>COPD</td>
<td>73 (1.7)</td>
<td>1158 (0.7)</td>
<td>2376 (3.3)</td>
<td>7534 (6.5)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PVD</td>
<td>56 (1.3)</td>
<td>181 (0.1)</td>
<td>664 (0.9)</td>
<td>4619 (4.0)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

CHD indicates coronary heart disease; CHF, congestive heart failure; CKD, chronic kidney disease; COPD, chronic obstructive pulmonary disease; PVD, peripheral vascular disease; SD, standard deviation; TGA, transient global amnesia; and TIA, transient ischemic attack.

*Data are presented as number (%) of participants unless otherwise specified.

Figure. Cumulative rates of ischemic stroke after diagnoses of transient global amnesia (TGA) compared with diagnoses of migraine, seizure, or transient ischemic attack (TIA).
Table 2. Baseline Characteristics of Patients, Stratified by the Occurrence of Ischemic Stroke*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Characteristics</th>
<th>Stroke (N=11,674)</th>
<th>No Stroke (N=349,217)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Age, mean (SD), y</td>
<td>71.4 (14.7)</td>
<td>50.1 (20.2)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>6699 (57.4)</td>
<td>233,422 (66.8)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Race</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White</td>
<td>7185 (65.0)</td>
<td>199,919 (60.8)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black</td>
<td>1225 (11.1)</td>
<td>33,636 (10.2)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hispanic</td>
<td>1896 (17.2)</td>
<td>74,198 (22.6)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>741 (6.7)</td>
<td>21,153 (6.4)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Payment source</td>
<td>Medicare</td>
<td>Medicaid</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-----------------</td>
<td>------------</td>
<td>----------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>7865 (67.4)</td>
<td>102,275 (29.3)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

CHD indicates coronary heart disease; CHF, congestive heart failure; CKD, chronic kidney disease; COPD, chronic obstructive pulmonary disease; PVD, peripheral vascular disease; and SD, standard deviation.

*Data are presented as number (% of participants unless otherwise specified. P<0.001 for all comparisons.

References


Presenting with TGA in such settings, however, this would have biased our study in a conservative direction because patients diagnosed with TGA in the ambulatory setting would most likely have been less severely ill than those who presented to the hospital, and therefore be unlikely to face a higher risk of stroke.

In summary, patients with TGA do not seem to face a heightened risk of ischemic stroke compared with patients diagnosed with migraine or seizure. Our findings may be helpful in reassuring patients with this dramatic and distressing syndrome that their prognosis is good, and in reassuring clinicians that these patients do not need extensive testing or specific therapy if the clinical evaluation is consistent with TGA.

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Disclosures

None.
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