

15

PROGRESS
IN CARDIOLOGY

Edited by

PAUL N. YU, M.D.

and

JOHN F. GOODWIN, M.D

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PROGRESS IN CARDIOLOGY

Symposium on New Therapeutic Approaches to
(Chapters 1-5)

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Symposium on New Therapeutic Approaches to Cardiac Arrhythmias
(Chapters 1 – 7)

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PREFACE

We are pleased to publish the Symposium on New Therapeutic Approaches to Cardiac Arrhythmias in Volume 15 of Progress in Cardiology. It is our distinct honor to have Dr. Douglas P. Zipes as the guest editor of the Symposium.

The important issues dealt with in the Symposium, which comprises the first seven chapters of this volume, are succinctly summarized in the Foreword written by Dr. Zipes.

In Chapter 8, Dr. Abela and associates describe the uses of laser therapy in cardiovascular disease. They first discuss laser physics and tissue interactions. The characteristic properties of laser energy include precise direction and transmission through an optic fiber, selective absorption, and photocoagulation of tissue. All of these qualities suggest that laser beams may be useful for recanalization of obstructed vessels or widening of channels through partially obstructive lesions.

Subsequently, the authors review clinical trials describing preliminary applications of lasers to the management of peripheral and coronary artery disease. Other possible uses for laser energy include His-bundle or arrhythmia-focus ablation, direct cardiac muscle revascularization, and direct myectomy in hypertrophic cardiomyopathy. Finally, the potential hazards of laser therapy are mentioned. The use of laser energy may be associated with electric shock, fire, explosion of ignitable gases, and production of toxic fumes or ultraviolet radiation. In

animals and human patients, three potential problems that may be associated with laser therapy are thrombosis, embolism, and perforation of blood vessels. Of these, the last is the most serious.

In Chapter 9, Dr. Padmavati presents a review of rheumatic fever and rheumatic heart disease in India. Data sources include several pilot research projects, including collaborative studies conducted in India, epidemiologic data, and an international cooperative program. The prevalence of rheumatic heart disease, the incidence of acute rheumatic fever, and epidemiologic data in India are discussed. The clinical features, laboratory findings, and treatment of acute rheumatic fever are fully described. The high costs to the public of rheumatic heart disease and its surgical management are discussed. The author recommends proper measures for both secondary and primary prophylaxis against acute rheumatic fever and rheumatic heart disease.

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CONTENTS

SYMPOSIUM ON NEW THERAPEUTIC APPROACHES TO CARDIAC ARRHYTHMIAS (Chapters 1 – 7)

FOREWORD	1
<i>(Douglas P. Zipes, M.D.)</i>	

I. NEW CONCEPTS OF ANTIARRHYTHMIC DRUG ACTION	5
<i>(Bertram G. Katzung, M.D., Ph.D.)</i>	
Scope and Historical Aspects	5
Selective Depression	5
Modes of Action of Antiarrhythmic Drugs	6
Suppression of Abnormal Automaticity	6
Reduction of Conduction Velocity in Depressed Tissue	8
Reduced Heterogeneity of Repolarization	8
Reduction of Sinoatrial Rate	9
Antifibrillatory Actions	9
Modulated Receptors	10
Voltage-Sensitive Channels Other than Sodium Channels	10
Use Dependence and Effect of Rate	12
Voltage Dependence and Resting Potential	12
Voltage Dependence and Plateau Duration	13
Time Dependence and Refractory Period	13
Interactions of Antiarrhythmic Drugs	14
Summary	16

2. NEW CONCEPTS IN ANTIARRHYTHMIC DRUG

PHARMACOKINETICS	19
<i>(Dan M. Roden, M.D.)</i>	

Indices of Drug Disposition	20
Absorption	20
Distribution	22
Metabolism and Elimination	23
Other Modulators of Drug Disposition	24
Recent Advances	25
Pharmacogenetics	25
Active Drug Metabolites	27
Antiarrhythmic Drug Interactions	28
Population Pharmacokinetics	29
Methods of Drug Delivery	30
Compartmental Concepts	30
Forecasters	33
Summary	33

**3. EFFECTS OF ANTIARRHYTHMIC DRUGS ON CARDIAC
ACTION POTENTIAL AND IN VIVO CARDIAC
ELECTROPHYSIOLOGY**

(Bramah N. Singh, M.D., D. Phil.) 37

Electrophysiologic Considerations	37
Types of Cardiac Action Potentials and Their Ionic Basis	38
Sodium Current	38
Calcium Current	39
Outward or Repolarizing Currents in the Myocardium	41
Delayed Rectification	41
Transient Outward Current	41
Pacemaker Current	41
Excitability, Threshold, and Refractoriness in Cardiac Muscle	42
Cardiac Action Potentials and the Autonomic Nervous System	42
Effects of Antiarrhythmic Agents on Cardiac Action Potentials	45
Fast-Channel Blockers	46
Sympathetic Antagonists	60
Antiarrhythmic Agents that Act Principally by Lengthening Cardiac Repolarization	62
Slow-Calcium-Channel Blockers	73
Summary	78

**4. USE OF NEW AND INVESTIGATIONAL DRUGS IN TREATING
CARDIAC ARRHYTHMIAS**

(David E. Haines, M.D., and John DiMarco, M.D., Ph.D.) 87

Tocainide	87
Electrophysiologic and Electrocardiographic Effects	87
Clinical Pharmacology	90
Hemodynamic Effects	90

Toxicity	90
Clinical Studies	90
Dosage and Administration	91
Mexiletine	91
Electrophysiologic and Electrocardiographic Effects	91
Clinical Pharmacology	92
Hemodynamic Effects	92
Toxicity	93
Clinical Studies	93
Dosage and Administration	93
Flecainide	94
Electrophysiologic and Electrocardiographic Effects	94
Clinical Pharmacology	94
Hemodynamic Effects	94
Toxicity	95
Clinical Studies	95
Dosage and Administration	95
Encainide	95
Electrophysiologic and Electrocardiographic Effects	96
Clinical Pharmacology	96
Hemodynamic Effects	96
Toxicity	96
Clinical Studies	97
Dosage and Administration	97
Lorcainide	98
Electrophysiologic and Electrocardiographic Effects	98
Clinical Pharmacology	98
Hemodynamic Effects	99
Toxicity	99
Clinical Studies	99
Dosage and Administration	100
Propafenone	100
Electrophysiologic and Electrocardiographic Effects	100
Clinical Pharmacology	101
Hemodynamic Effects	101
Toxicity	101
Clinical Studies	101
Dosage and Administration	102
Amiodarone	102
Electrophysiologic and Electrocardiographic Effects	102
Clinical Pharmacology	103
Hemodynamic Effects	104
Toxicity	104
Clinical Studies	105
Dosage and Administration	105
5. ELECTRICAL TREATMENT OF CARDIAC ARRHYTHMIAS	113
<i>(John J. Seger, M.D., and Jerry C. Griffin, M.D.)</i>	
General Concepts	113
Electrical Devices for Tachyarrhythmia Control	114

Externally Triggered Devices	115
Automatically Activated Devices	115
High-Energy Devices	117
Electrical Treatment of Supraventricular Arrhythmias	118
Electrical Treatment of Ventricular Arrhythmias	118
Evaluation for Therapy	119
Future of Antitachycardia Devices	120
6. ELECTRODE CATHETER ABLATION (FULGURATION) IN THE TREATMENT OF CARDIAC ARRHYTHMIAS	123
<i>(Guy Fontaine, M.D., R. Frank, M.D., J. L. Tonet, M.D., A. Cansell, M.D., C. Funck-Brentano, M.D., Y. Gallais, M.D., and Y. Grosgeat, M.D.)</i>	
Method	123
Physical Effects	124
Selection of Patients	125
His-Bundle Fulguration	126
Specific Methods	126
Clinical Series	126
Results	126
Follow-up	128
Discussion	128
Accessory Pathway Fulguration	130
Specific Methods	130
Clinical Series and Results	130
Discussion	131
Ventricular Tachycardia Fulguration	132
Specific Methods	132
Clinical Series	134
Results	134
Complications and Relapses	134
Mortality	135
Discussion	135
7. SURGICAL TREATMENT OF TACHYCARDIAS: INDICATIONS AND ELECTROPHYSIOLOGIC ASSESSMENT	139
<i>(George J. Klein, M.D., Gerard M. Guiraudon, M.D., Arjun D. Sharma, M.D., and Simon Milstein, M.D.)</i>	
Wolff-Parkinson-White Syndrome	139
Indications for Surgical Treatment	140
Ancillary Assessment	140
Preoperative Electrophysiologic Assessment	140
Intraoperative Electrophysiologic Assessment	141
Postoperative Assessment	143
Supraventricular Tachycardia Not Involving Accessory Pathways	144
Ablation of the Atrioventricular Node and His Bundle	144
Atrioventricular Nodal Modification	145
Partial Atrial "Exclusion"	145
Direct Focal Ablation or Excision	145

Ventricular Tachycardia	145
Indications for Surgical Treatment	146
Ancillary Assessment	146
Preoperative Electrophysiologic Assessment	146
Intraoperative Electrophysiologic Assessment	147
Postoperative Assessment	151
8. LASER THERAPY IN CARDIOVASCULAR DISEASE.....	155
<i>(George S. Abela, M.D., Enrico Barbieri, M.D., and C. Richard Conti, M.D.)</i>	
Potential Clinical Application	155
Laser Physics and Tissue Interaction	155
Optical Fibers	157
Experimental Studies of Effects on Biologic Substances	158
Immediate Effects	158
Debris Production	160
Long-Term Effects	160
Photosensitization Studies	163
Clinical Trials	163
Recanalization of Occluded Peripheral Arteries	163
Recanalization of Occluded Coronary Arteries	164
Other Possible Uses for Laser Energy	164
His-Bundle and Arrhythmia-Focus Ablation	164
Direct Cardiac Muscle Revascularization	166
Cardiac Myectomy in Patients with Hyperdynamic Cardiomyopathy ...	166
Potential Hazards	166
Summary	166
9. RHEUMATIC FEVER AND RHEUMATIC HEART DISEASE IN INDIA	169
<i>(S. Padmavati, M.D.)</i>	
Sources of Data	169
Prevalence of Rheumatic Heart Disease	169
Hospital Statistics	169
Population Surveys	169
School Surveys	169
Incidence of Acute Rheumatic Fever	172
Epidemiologic Features	173
Income Groups Affected	173
Age of Onset and of Maximal Prevalence	173
Sex	173
Nutritional Status	173
Severity of Disease	173
Number of Children at Risk	173
Clinical Features	173
Rheumatic Manifestations	173
Arthralgia	175
Valvular Lesions	175
Applicability of the Jones Criteria	175

Laboratory Data	176
Throat Cultures	176
Serologic Studies	176
Immunologic Studies	176
HLA Mapping	176
Treatment of Acute Rheumatic Fever	176
Surgical Treatment of Rheumatic Heart Disease	177
Secondary Prophylaxis	177
Feasibility	177
Initiation	177
Duration	177
Dropout Rate	177
Residual Heart Disease	177
Cost	177
Choice of Regimen	178
Primary Prophylaxis	178
Size of Problem	178
Seasonal Measures	178
Present Position of Rheumatic Fever Control in India	178
Feasibility Studies	179
ISFC/WHO Assistance	179
Transfer of Technology to all Indian States	179
Research	181
Summary	181

SYMPOSIUM ON NEW THERAPEUTIC APPROACHES TO CARDIAC ARRHYTHMIAS (Chapters 1 - 7)

FOREWORD

The purpose of this symposium is to place into perspective newer avenues of antiarrhythmic therapy, including drugs and non-pharmacologic approaches.

A variety of antiarrhythmic drugs are available, either conventional or investigational. They can be divided into groups of drugs that exert blocking actions predominantly on fast sodium, potassium, or calcium channels or on beta-adrenergic receptors. The expert information provided in Chapter 1 by Dr. Katzung in this area is insightful.

Extensive subclassification of these drugs does not seem to be useful at present, primarily because it does not help in choosing effective drug therapy for a given patient. The classifications also are limited because they are based on the electrophysiologic effects exerted by an arbitrary concentration of the drug, generally on normal Purkinje fibers, often not even in arrhythmic models. As reviewed by Dr. Singh in Chapter 3, the effects of these drugs depend on tissue type, species, the degree of acute or chronic damage, heart rate, membrane potential, the ionic composition of the extracellular milieu, and other factors. Many drugs exhibit actions that belong in multiple categories or operate indirectly, such as by altering hemodynamics, myocardial metabolism, or autonomic

innervation. Not all drugs in the same class have identical effects, whereas some drugs in different classes have similar actions. Some drugs have active metabolites that exert effects different from the parent compound. Thus, the pharmacokinetic studies of Dr. Roden in Chapter 2 are critical.

Antiarrhythmic therapy, like antibiotic therapy, must be individualized, but unlike choosing a specific antimicrobial drug by testing its efficacy against the specific offending organism cultured from the patient, the appropriate and selective antiarrhythmic agent must be determined empirically. The need for such empiricism in treating many patients with supraventricular tachycardias has been modified dramatically over the past decade or more, in part because of results from invasive electrophysiologic studies that test the patient's response to a drug. These studies have made it possible to deduce the pathways in the presumed reentrant mechanism and to determine their electrophysiologic properties. The effects on these pathways of drugs with known and different mechanisms of action have been established, and these drugs can be anticipated to exert predictable effects because the pathways respond, for the most part, in a predictably normal electrophysiologic manner. This predictability is a key factor in choosing therapy.

Selecting therapy for the patient with ventricular tachyarrhythmias is much more difficult to approach as logically and predictably as one can for supraventricular tachycardias. Individual pathways in the tachycardia cannot be studied, for the most part because the area of reentry, if it is the responsible mechanism, occurs in a small portion of the ventricle and precludes accurate electrophysiologic assessment with relatively gross extracellular-stimulating and recording techniques. The right ventricle, generally remote from the origin of the ventricular tachycardia, is often the site of recording and stimulating and cannot be expected to provide electrophysiologic data relevant to a reentrant loop or an automatic focus originating in the left ventricle. Even if the left ventricle is explored, the electrophysiologic properties of the microreentrant pathways cannot be discerned with the present tools. Data from a variety of studies suggest, however, that if these pathways could be studied electrophysiologically, they probably would be complex, including both normal and diseased tissue. In some cells, propagation or automaticity may depend on slow-channel activity, and in others, on the fast sodium channel. Because the damaged area is so complex, in sharp contrast to the predictable responses for many patients with supraventricular tachycardias, its response to antiarrhythmic agents with mechanisms of action based on data obtained in normal tissues cannot be predicted accurately.

Damaged ventricular myocardial and Purkinje tissues generally depolarize when injured, at least initially, and probably cell groups with several levels of maximum diastolic membrane potential exist, influenced by the nature and degree of damage, healing, and interposed scar-tissue matrices. In addition, alterations of the autonomic nervous system, heterogeneous blood-flow patterns creating heterogeneous tissue concentrations of drugs, modulation of drug effects by active and inactive channel states, diastolic membrane potential and heart rate, varying drug pharmacokinetics due to genetic and other factors that influence the serum concentration of the parent compound and active metabolites, hemodynamic events, and other

confounding variables may affect the cellular response to the drug and, consequently, the drug's efficacy or toxicity. Although a predictable drug response can be anticipated for a few patients with unique types of ventricular tachycardia, it is not surprising that a focused therapeutic attack with a predictably high degree of success is difficult to anticipate for a specific patient with a ventricular tachyarrhythmia. Even the ideal end point upon which to judge the therapeutic response, such as the suppression of spontaneous ventricular ectopic activity or the response to programmed electrical stimulation, still is not settled.

We do not now have, and it is not likely that we will have in the near future, that elusive Holy Grail of antiarrhythmic therapy: the single antiarrhythmic agent with minimal side effects and ideal pharmacokinetics that is uniformly and predictably effective in preventing recurrences of ventricular tachyarrhythmia in a large percentage of patients with life-threatening arrhythmias. Unless an arrhythmia results from a common cause, such as ischemia, that can be prevented uniformly in a predictable fashion with a closely related group of drugs, such as beta-adrenergic receptor blockers, it is not likely that one drug will be effective "across the board." Each of the new, and old, drugs successfully suppresses electrically induced arrhythmias in approximately the same percentage of patients, about 20 to 30% of those patients referred for treatment of drug-resistant ventricular arrhythmias. Drugs suppress a higher percentage of spontaneously occurring ventricular arrhythmias. Although one drug may be effective in one patient and not in another, it is not certain that any one of them is clearly more efficacious overall than the others. Amiodarone may be an exception. Because only one drug chosen from a wide selection may be effective in a given patient, however, and because the drugs produce different side effects and degrees of tolerance, a wide variety from which to choose may be justified. In Chapter 4, Haines and DiMarco admirably review the investigational drugs currently thought to show promise.

Should drug therapy prove ineffective or poorly tolerated, surgery, as reviewed in Chapter 7 by Dr. Klein and co-workers, an experi-

enced surgical team, or electrical devices as summarized in Chapter 5 by Drs. Seger and Griffin, pioneers in this form of treatment, may be considered alone or in combination. The antiarrhythmic efficacy of electrical and chemical ablation techniques awaits documentation from further experience. In the meantime, the early, carefully documented experiences of Dr. Fontaine and co-workers (Chapter 6) a group with years of leadership in experimental invasive approaches, are of great value.

No doubt exists that in vitro and in vivo electrophysiologic studies in animals and humans have advanced our knowledge of the mechanisms of arrhythmogenesis and of drug action and that such studies must continue. Advances in understanding the actions of antiarrhythmic drugs that have directly benefited the patient with ventricular arrhythmias have been slow, however, and we have progressed little clinically,

except for a wider choice of agents than 25 years ago. Despite the formulation of these new drugs, most are simply another iteration of existing drugs, with different efficacies or side-effect profiles. Progress must come from knowledge of the autonomic, metabolic, or cellular changes associated with the genesis of cardiac arrhythmias, to provide insight into therapy that actually corrects basic defects rather than simply suppresses them. This symposium, written by experts creating the innovative approaches, presents "where we're at, 1986."

Indianapolis, Indiana

Douglas P. Zipes

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