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Biomarkers in Early Detection of Heart Disease with Special Reference to Troponin – A Critical Review

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***Abstract*—Heart diseases should be diagnosed in time to minimize complications and enhance survival. The biomarkers currently have been extremely important in identifying damage to the heart before symptoms are felt. The most effective of them is cardiac troponins, particularly high-sensitivity cardiac troponin I (hs-cTnI) and cardiac troponin T (hs-cTnT) since they are very specific to injury of heart muscle. Accuracy can be enhanced by the use of other markers like CK-MB, myoglobin, BNP/NT-proBNP and inflammatory markers like hs-CRP together. This review explains the functioning of such biomarkers, their strengths, and limitations, as well as the clinical issues. It also points out international norms, diagnostic models and access issues. Imaging, expert judgment, clinical scoring, and biomarkers are essential to effective cardiac diagnosis.**

***Keywords*—Cardiac biomarkers, High-sensitivity troponin (hs-cTnI/hs-cTnT), Heart disease diagnosis, BNP/NT-proBNP, Inflammatory markers (hs-CRP), Clinical evaluation models.**

I. Introduction

Heart disease is also the major cause of death in the world, and therefore it is important to detect it early. Numerous cardiac events are followed by small biochemical variations that can be detected using biomarkers which reflect myocardial damage or stress (Ahmad et al., 2023). The troponin tests with high sensitivity can be used to identify micro-injury earlier than the conventional tests. Nevertheless, interpretative issues, false positives, and geographical testing disparities raise the concern of critical analysis of biomarker application.

II. Biomarkers and Early Detection of Heart Disease

A. *What are Cardiac Biomarkers and what are their functions*

Cardiac biomarkers are quantifiable biological molecules that are discharged into the blood due to myocardial stress or injury, ischemia or inflammation. They are objective measures which can assist clinicians to identify heart disease at the very early stage, usually before structural or functional abnormalities are visible on imaging. Biomarkers can be used to inform diagnosis, prognosis, and response to treatment, and they are needed in the emergency care setting, in chronic disease management, and in preventive cardiology (Ansumana et al., 2020). They are useful not only in the confirmation of myocardial injury but also in excluding the cardiac causes of chest pain, triage, and risk stratification. With the rising technology of biomarkers, clinicians are able to identify even the smaller abnormalities in the heart, thus intervention at an earlier age is possible giving more promising results to their patients.

B. *Typical Biomarkers in the Diagnosis of the Heart*

1) *Troponin I and Troponin T*

The most specific and sensitive biomarkers of myocardial injury are Troponin I (cTnI), and Troponin T (cTnT). They are unique to cardiac muscle, and hence their occurrence in blood is a good indication of cardiomyocyte injury. High-sensitivity troponin tests (hs-cTnI and hs-cTnT) can identify very low concentrations of troponin and allow the diagnosis of myocardial infarction in the first one to three hours of symptoms onset (Baldacci et al., 2020). Troponin levels are also useful in distinguishing between acute MI and chronic myocardial injury through dynamic changes with time. High troponin shows worse clinical outcomes and is hence a strong prognostic factor. Even though they have their benefits, the interpretation problems can be encountered in non-ischemic

diseases like renal disease or heart failure where chronic troponin elevation can be observed.

2) CK-MB and Myoglobin

Before troponin attained the gold standard, CK-MB and myoglobin were commonly used. CK-MB increases sooner than conventional troponin detectors yet is not cardiac specific. When muscle injury occurs, myoglobin rises rapidly but fails to differentiate between cardiac and skeletal myopathy (Battaglini et al., 2022). They are used today mostly in a supportive role of multi-marker strategies.

3) BNP/NT-proBNP

BNP and NT-proBNP are a measure of stress in the ventricular wall and myocardial overload. They play a crucial role in heart failure diagnosis and monitoring and the anticipation of unfavorable outcomes. High levels are associated with a compromised ventricular functioning and inform emergency management (Bishop et al., 2023). They are used as a complement to troponin since they are used to detect hemodynamic stress and not necrosis.

4) High-sensitivity CRP

High-sensitivity C-reactive protein (hs-CRP) is an indicator of systemic inflammation and dysfunctional endothelium. Even though it is not cardiac-specific, high hs-CRP levels demonstrate that there is a higher risk of atherosclerosis and can be used to predict future cardiac events (Chew et al., 2021). hs-CRP enhances early risk stratification when used together with troponin.

5) D-dimer & New Biomarkers

D-dimer is conventionally linked with the thrombosis but also indicates the cardiovascular risk in acute presentations. Aptamers, peptides, and molecular signatures, including novel biomarkers, are promising to be used in early detection but have yet to be validated (Ciecierski-Holmes et al., 2022). These new devices can improve the accuracy of complicated heart cases.

C. Physiological Processes of Biomarker Release

Depending on the underlying cardiac condition, biomarkers are discharged into circulation via various processes, which are physiological and pathological. Troponin release occurs as a result of the irreversible damage of cardiomyocytes by the mechanisms of ischemia, disruption of the membrane, or apoptosis. The smallest amount of micro-necrosis may provoke the appearance of detectable alterations using high-sensitivity tests (Cowan et al., 2022). The cytoplasmic leakage of CK-MB occurs after a rapid cellular injury, and myoglobin is diffused into the bloodstream because it is a small molecule. The response to mechanical stretching, volume overload, and raised wall tension is secretion of BNP and NT-proBNP by the ventricular myocytes, and it is a sign of hemodynamic stress, but not necrosis. Systemic or local vascular inflammation that is caused by plaque instability or endothelial dysfunction leads to the production of inflammatory biomarkers like hs-CRP. D-dimer is elevated with fibrin degradation, which commonly is an indicator of thrombosis or pro-thrombotic conditions (Du et al., 2021). These unique release mechanisms are essential as high concentration biomarkers do not necessarily mean myocardial infarction; it may be a sign of underlying chronic disease, non-cardiac disease, or physiological stress. To interpret the biomarker profiles accurately, it is necessary to correlate the biomarkers findings with the symptoms pattern, ECG changes, imaging, and patient history.

III. Troponin and the Identification of Myocardial Injury

A. Structure and Function of Cardiac Troponin

Cardiac troponin refers to a type of protein complex that regulates muscle contraction, consisting of three subunits namely, troponin I (cTnI), troponin T (cTnT), and troponin C (cTnC). Among them, cTnI and cTnT are cardiac muscle-specific and this is why they are highly cardiac biomarkers to detect myocardial injury. Cross-reactivity is not possible since their structure is isolated with the skeletal muscle and, therefore, gives them high diagnostic specificity (Giesinger et al., 2020). In the state of normal physiology, troponin is retained in the contractile apparatus. Troponin is released into the blood in a biphasic distribution when cardiomyocytes necrose or when their membrane is disrupted- an early cytosolic release, and a delayed structural release. This biochemical phenomenon is the basis of their usefulness in the detection of acute and progressive myocardial trauma.

B. Troponin Release Kinetics in Heart Disease

1) Troponin in Acute Myocardial Infarction

Troponin release in acute myocardial infarction (AMI) has a characteristic kinetic pattern, which starts two to three hours after ischemic damage. These early increases can be detected with high-sensitivity assays earlier than traditional methods and thus AMI can be rule-in and rule-out. The levels go on increasing in the subsequent 1224 hours as the structural troponin components are broken down and released into the bloodstream (Haller et al., 2020). Troponin can be used in late presenters as it can be up to 10-14 days depending on the size of the infarct. The change in the dynamic of serial measurements or delta is especially useful in the differentiation of acute MI and chronic elevation. An increase and decrease trend proves the presence of acute injury but a constant high level indicates persistent chronic myocardial injury. Therefore, in ACS, troponin kinetics provide diagnostic and prognostic information.

2) Troponin during Unstable Angina

Myocardial damage in unstable angina is usually partial or temporary and therefore troponin levels can be normal or show only a slight increase. Such low-level increases are detected by high-sensitivity assays and are indicative of microvascular ischemia and increased risk of developing MI (Horgan et al., 2024). Even minor increases are clinically significant since they foresee negative short-term outcomes and inform early invasive treatment interventions.

3) Troponin Heart Failure and Non-Ischaemic

The increase in Troponin can also be observed in other conditions other than acute coronary occlusion. Chronic low-level troponin release is caused by chronic wall stress, apoptosis, and neurohormonal activity of the heart failure process. Other non-ischemic triggers, including the myocarditis, sepsis, pulmonary embolism, arrhythmias, renal impairment, and cardiotoxicity as a result of chemotherapy, can also increase troponin (Janelidze et al., 2020). These elevations indicate cellular stress and not infarction, which makes it hard to interpret. Clinicians in this scenario need to use correlations of troponin levels and symptoms, ECG, imaging, and clinical context to prevent misdiagnosis and unwarranted interventions.

C. Clinical Limitations and Interpretation Problems

In spite of the fact that cardiac troponin is the gold standard biomarker used to diagnose myocardial injury, its interpretation is complicated and has to be conducted with attention to clinical judgment (Pickering et al., 2020). One of the main difficulties is that it is hard to differentiate acute myocardial infarction and chronic myocardial injury because troponin can be increased during many non-ischemic conditions. The difference between patients with age, renal function, comorbidities, and physiological stress leads to diagnostic uncertainty (Komarova et al., 2022). Also, high-sensitivity assays, although enhancing early detection, enhance the rate of finding clinically insignificant increases, which are all part of overdiagnosis. Premature sampling can provide a false negative and late clearance will only increase diagnostic windows needlessly. The matter of standardisation between laboratory platforms creates inconsistencies between institutions, which have implications on the implementation of the guideline (Sim et al., 2022). Excessive use of troponin testing without combining ECG results, clinical presentation and imaging could lead to patient misclassification. So, it is necessary to know these limitations in order to interpret them correctly.

1) False Positives and Non-cardiac Causes

The elevations of troponin can take place in the absence of acute coronary syndrome in renal failure, heart failure, pulmonary embolism, stroke, sepsis and even in vigorous exercise. Such false positives are particularly problematic to diagnose, particularly in an emergency (Leite et al., 2022). To distinguish such causes, it is necessary to pay special attention to the clinical manifestations and the investigations that support them.

2) Early-Hour Sensitivity Issues

Despite the fact that high-sensitivity assays are more likely to detect troponin earlier than older-techniques, taking samples too soon after the symptom onset can result in false-negative (Manyelo et al., 2021). It is therefore necessary to have serial testing at 0/1-hour or 0/3-hour to ensure proper diagnosis of MI.

3) Biological Variability & Cut-offs

Troponin levels change depending on age, sex, comorbidity, and ethnicity. Such biological differences make it difficult to use the standard diagnostic cut-offs across the board (Neder et al., 2021). Sex-specific or individualised reference ranges are becoming more of a recommendation.

4) Problems of Standardisation

Variability of assays across manufacturers leads to inconsistency in the measurement across the laboratories. Harmonisation is hampered by differences in calibration, antibodies and detection limits (Pickering et al., 2020). This discrepancy impacts clinical decision making and guidelines implementation.

5) Relying too heavily on laboratory testing

The overuse of troponin measurements without considering clinical evaluation can result in the inappropriate admission of patients, misdiagnosis, and over-treatment (Sandoval et al., 2022). A broad based diagnostic method is still vital.

IV. Relationship Between Biomarkers and Diagnostic Systems

A. Integration with Clinical Scoring Tools

Integration Biomarkers should be applied in conjunction with clinical scoring systems, which are based on combination of symptoms, ECG findings, history, and risk profiles. The HEART, TIMI, and GRACE scores are instruments that combine both troponin trends and clinical parameters in the effort to enhance the accuracy of diagnosis and put priority on early decisions during an emergency scenario (Semeraro et al., 2021). The tools will help classify the patients in the low-risk, intermediate-risk, and high-risk category contributing to the targeted intervention and successful utilization of resources. The combination of the biomarkers with structured decision aids in the reduction of unnecessary admissions and missed diagnosis. These two systems together will aid in ensuring that the data of biomarkers will never be taken out of context.

B. Conflict and Diagnostic Dilemmas Area of Conflict

Despite the value, biomarkers present several diagnostic dilemmas particularly when used on their own. Firstly, there are many non-cardiac diseases that can mimic those of a heart disease and as a result, the troponin tests are ordered regardless of the fact that the risk of a myocardial infarction is low. This makes the emergency departments more complex where differentiation is required in a short period (Sim et al., 2022). The other issue is that of having levels of biomarkers that are high but are not correlated with ECG abnormalities or imaging findings of ischemia which generate inconclusive profile thus complicating clinical decisions.

Accessibility is also very diverse with low-resource environments potentially having no high-sensitivity assays or point-of-care testing leading to late or absent diagnosis (Wereski et al., 2021). Furthermore, with the high analytical sensitivity of the contemporary troponin measurements, minor changes that have no relationship with acute coronary syndromes are also identified and overdiagnosis occurs in abundance. Such problems highlight the significance of clinicians viewing biomarkers as a part of the overall assessment and not as separate ones.

1) Co-morbid Non-Cardiac Symptoms

Many non-cardiac conditions are similar to acute coronary syndrome such as musculoskeletal pain, anxiety, gastrointestinal or respiratory illnesses. These overlapping manifestations often trigger biomarker testing in situations whereby the probability that they did not involve the cardiac involvement is low (Thupakula et al., 2022). This could lead to false heart attack diagnosis and unnecessary tests. Biomarkers used with clinical history, physical examination and analysis of ECG are thus required to avoid misclassification during effective triage.

2) Indeterminate Biomarker Profiles

Nevertheless, biomarker results augment in additional instances without ECG alterations or radiographic discoveries, and this is a diagnostic complication. This case is characteristic of such a state of affairs as sepsis, kidney issues, or chronic heart failure (Wan et al., 2019). Clinicians must rely on serial values, symptom profiles, and clinical findings to differentiate between true myocardial infarction and non-ischemic myocardial injury.

3) Lack of Rapid Testing Access

Resource-constrained healthcare systems do not usually have high-sensitivity troponin assays or fast point-of-care. It causes the late diagnosis, increased length of stay in the emergency department, and mortality in conditions with time-sensitive specifications (Wereski et al., 2021). Without the rapid testing, clinicians are more likely to rely on clinical judgement and ECG findings and this exposes them to the risk of missing early myocardial injury.

4) 4.2.4 Overdiagnosis with High-Sensitivity Troponin

Even small increases in troponin can be detected using high sensitivity assays even in patients without acute coronary syndromes. Though it may be helpful in early diagnosis, it may result in unwarranted hospitalization, excessive prescription, and anxiety (Ahmad et al., 2023). When elevations that are actually chronic myocardial damage are incorrectly diagnosed as infarction then this is overdiagnosis. In order to interpret it correctly, it is needed to look at the alteration of delta, clinical presentation, and other causes.

V. Global Frameworks for Biomarker Use

A. WHO & International Standards

International health systems focus on early diagnosis and access to diagnostic equipment in an equal manner to decrease cardiovascular deaths. WHO recommends the combination of biomarker testing with clinical evaluation and imaging as the effective method of making the correct diagnosis of myocardial injury and in a timely manner (Ansumana et al., 2020). International standards emphasise harmonised laboratory systems, high-sensitivity assays which have been validated and quality-control processes. Such frameworks also promote the countries to focus more and more on the training, infrastructure fortification, and affordability to guarantee the reliability of biomarker utilisation in various healthcare environments.

B. Regional Cardiology Guidelines

Guidelines on cardiology have been developed in various countries that define the proper usage of biomarkers, in particular, troponins in the diagnosis of myocardial infarction. These rules offer some guided algorithms to judge in or to dismiss cases by way of serial testing and tracking of variations throughout time (Baldacci et al., 2020). They also put into consideration biological variation, resources and healthcare capacity. Although not all the practices are similar, it is agreed that the best markers are high-sensitivity troponins. Nevertheless, international disparities in access, laboratory standards, and training of clinicians are still sources of discrepancies that need international efforts to enhance standardisation.

1) European Society of Cardiology (ESC)

Guidelines on ESC suggest 0/1-hour and 0/2-hour algorithms with high-sensitivity troponin to diagnose or rule out acute myocardial infarction. These guidelines enhance the efficiency of the emergency department and minimize the hospital stays (Battaglini et al., 2022). ESC also emphasizes on quality control of the assays, standardisation and combination of findings on biomarkers with clinical and ECG measurements.

2) American Heart Association (AHA)

Biomarker-based risk stratification with high-sensitivity troponin with clinical scoring systems and imaging have priority in AHA guidelines. The AHA states the importance of analyzing changes in troponin over time and not using a single measurement (Bishop et al., 2023). It additionally suggests multimarker panels in complicated cases, especially when one has heart failure, inflammation, or thrombotic processes.

3) Asia-Pacific and Regional Standards

The guidelines in Asia-Pacific focus on enhancing access to high-sensitivity testing and point-of-care testing, as well as laboratory standardisation in a variety of resource environments. These frameworks identify regional issues like rural healthcare constraints and shortages of workforce (Chew et al., 2021). They promote scalable diagnostic approaches to make sure that the use of biomarkers is reliable in low- and middle-income nations.

VI. Diagnostic Strategies and Best Practices

A. Biomarker-Based Diagnostic Approaches

Biomarker-based pathways may be applied to identify and categorize myocardial injury in a short period of time. High-sensitivity troponin, multimarker, point-of-care, and ECG-imaging integration can improve diagnostic accuracy (Ciecierski-Holmes et al., 2022). There is also enhanced interpretation by AI. These multimodal techniques can offer quicker and more precise diagnosis of the cardiac condition especially in resource limited settings.

1) Troponin Protocols (High Sensitivity)

The 0/1-hour, 0/2-hour, and 0/3-hour algorithms are high-sensitivity troponin protocols which provide a fast rule-out and rule-in of myocardial infarction. These organized routes enhance the work of triage and minimize unjustified hospitalization (Cowan et al., 2022). Evaluating the absolute and dynamic fluctuations in the level of troponin, clinicians will be able to distinguish between the acute and chronic myocardial injury. The use of protocol-based testing in emergency departments leads to uniformity and less ambiguity in diagnosis.

2) Multi-marker Panels

Multi-marker panels are those that include troponin with other biomarkers like BNP/NT-proBNP, hs-CRP, D-dimer, and CK-MB to give a more detailed evaluation of the cardiac activity. Such combinations increase the diagnostic accuracy in complicated cases where single biomarkers cannot be used (Du et al., 2021). Multi-marker approaches come in handy especially in discriminating between the ischemic and non-ischemic causes of the chest pain or dyspnea.

3) Point-of-Care Testing

The turnaround time of the point-of-care troponin Techno is minimal, and the data can be received in a short time, reducing the diagnostic period in case of emergencies (Giesinger et al., 2020). They can especially be applied in rural, ambulatory and under-resourced hospitals which have little infrastructure on the laboratory side.

4) + ECG Imaging

ECG findings and imaging of the echocardiography and CT angiography help reduce the biomarker testing and misdiagnosis. Combination of such tools can provide structural and functional data that are not possible to provide with biomarkers (Haller et al., 2020). The combination of this technique enables the proper discrimination of infarction, myocarditis, as well as non-cardiac sources of chest pain.

5) Interpretation of Artificial Intelligence

AI applications approximate the dynamics of biomarkers, patient records, and electrocardiogram data to increase the accuracy of diagnosis (Horgan et al., 2024). They are also useful in reducing human error and other prediction of risks in emergency care.

B. Diagnostic Systems Strengthening

The improvement of diagnostic systems will give the right meaning of biomarkers and similarity to the care of patients. Lab capacity becomes improved, assays are standardised, and they become more accessible, enabling timely and reliable testing (Janelidze et al., 2020). Clinician training and periodic audits can also help in the improvement of the decision-making process and quality control and develop a robust and equitable diagnostic ecosystem.

1) Enhancing Laboratory Capacity

Improved laboratory facilities guarantee proper, timely testing of biomarkers and high-sensitivity testing which needs advanced analytical instruments (Komarova et al., 2022). Enhancing the laboratory networks can minimize turnaround time, enhance emergency response, and provide a nationwide diagnostic consistency.

2) Biomarker Assays Standardisation

Standardisation ensures that the results of troponin can be compared across hospitals reducing diagnostic error. The harmonisation of assay calibration, reference ranges, and analytical sensitivity assists in the consistent clinical decision-making (Leite et al., 2022).

3) Improving Diagnosis Availability

Increased access to biomarker testing, such as mobile diagnostics, point-of-care, and increased laboratory coverage, decreases health disparities (Manyelo et al., 2021). Early diagnosis is more effective in cases where underserved populations will be able to have timely tests.

4) Interpretation Training of clinicians

Misdiagnosis is minimised by training clinicians to read the biomarker kinetics, delta changes, and multimarker profiles (Neder et al., 2021). Correct differentiation between acute infarction and non-cardiac elevations or chronic ones requires skillful interpretation.

5) Diagnostic Accuracy Auditing

Frequent audits can help to follow the guidelines, detect mistakes, and enhance the reliability of diagnosis (Pickering et al., 2020). Auditing enhances the pathway of constant improvement in the cardiac care.

VII. Case Studies

A. United States

High-sensitivity troponin-based tests have now become the norm in emergency departments in the United States, allowing myocardial infarction to be ruled in or out within a short period of time. These tests dramatically decrease unjustifiable admissions through clinicians being in a position to detect extremely minor troponin alterations at an early stage (Komarova et al., 2022). The full combination of AI-based risk tools and the integration with the decision-making enhances the process of triage in large hospitals.

B. India

The capacity to perform diagnosis in India is also highly variable but in rural and district hospitals high-sensitivity assays are frequently unavailable. A significant number of patients continue to use CK-MB or rapid qualitative troponin strips, which are not very accurate (Leite et al., 2022). In spite of these, the increased investment in point-of-care testing is slowly enhancing the early cardiac diagnosis in low resource areas.

C. Europe

The use of multi-marker panel consisting of troponin, BNP, and inflammatory biomarkers is becoming more prevalent in European hospitals in order to enhance the accuracy of diagnosing the patient. The strategy is consistent with the ESC guidelines and improves the timely identification of complicated heart diseases (Manyelo et al., 2021). Europe is also on the forefront in adopting standardised laboratory procedures across countries, minimising the variability in the diagnosis.

D. Japan

Japan is the country that employs BNP and NT-proBNP tests in order to identify the early heart failure. This, together with high-sensitivity tests of troponin, enables the proactive approach and minimizes the adverse events (Neder et al., 2021). The primary-specialist routes in Japan allow quicker diagnosis and follow up.

VIII. Discussion

The biomarkers, in particular, high-sensitivity troponins, have improved the cardiac diagnostics by allowing rapid diagnosis and better differentiation between myocardial infarction and non-ischemic injury. They can be used to give a comprehensive assessment when included with scoring tools, imaging, and clinical judgement (Pickering et al., 2020). But problems still exist, such as non-cardiac elevations, assay variability, and inaccessible low-resource settings. The multi-marker and AI-based methods have potential, but they demand solid infrastructure and training. In the absence of global standardisation, there are inconsistencies in diagnosis. Finally, successful application of biomarkers requires equal access, correct interpretation and reinforced laboratory systems.

IX. Recommendations

A. Testing Systems Improvement

The health systems ought to increase the laboratory capacity, harmonize assays calibration, and implement point-of-care troponin testing in underserved regions (Sandoval et al., 2022). Enhanced diagnostic networks minimize delays and enhance fair early-detecting of the nation.

B. Troponin Diagnosis Improvement

Clinicians need to interpret dynamic troponin changes in a symptomatic, ECG, and imaging to avoid overdiagnosis (Semeraro et al., 2021). Multi-marker approaches also increase the accuracy, as acute myocardial infarction can be differentiated by chronic or non-ischemic myocardial injury.

C. Enhancing the International Policy

Standardisation of assays, training of clinicians, and investment in available diagnostic technology should be encouraged at the global level (Sim et al., 2022). The key to

the achievement of the uniformity of high-quality cardiac diagnosis in the varied healthcare environments is in capacity-building and routine quality audits.

X. Conclusion

Biomarkers (especially troponin) and high-sensitivity tests are essential to identify heart disease early enough and in the micro-injury case, injuries can be identified at the micro-level within the least time possible (Thupakula et al., 2022). Clinical assessment and accurate interpretation are required to avoid cases of misdiagnosis in non-ischemic conditions. The unavailability of equal access to diagnosis underlines the need to have more potent laboratory systems. Accuracy is also enhanced by multi-marker strategies, imaging, and AI. Efficient cardiac care is vital in biomarkers and comprehensive clinical evaluation and standardised practices worldwide.

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