****Thyroid Nodules' Effect on Survival and Cardiovascular Risks in HFrEF Patients with Anemia and Hyperuricemia: A Retrospective Study****

****Abstract****

****Objective** To explore the link between thyroid nodules and the risk, cardiac function, and prognosis in heart failure patients with reduced ejection fraction (HFrEF) who also have anemia and hyperuricemia.**

****Methods** 185 HFrEF patients with anemia and hyperuricemia were divided into a thyroid nodule group (94 patients) and a non-thyroid nodule group (91 patients). Logistic and Cox regression analyses assessed the impact of thyroid nodules on cardiovascular events.**

**Results: The thyroid nodule group showed higher body weight (P<0.01), lower pulse rate (P=0.008), and increased rates of coronary heart disease, hypertension, atrial fibrillation, and diabetes (P<0.05 or P<0.01). Differences were observed in mean corpuscular volume and prothrombin activity (P<0.05). Logistic regression identified coronary heart disease (OR=2.993), atrial fibrillation (OR=2.784), diabetes (OR=2.081), and carotid intima-media thickening with plaques (OR=2.752) as significant risk factors. Hypertension negatively impacted cardiac function classification (OR=0.296), while mean corpuscular volume (OR=1.030) and free thyroxine (OR=1.101) increased the risk of cardiac function decline. ROC analysis showed serum uric acid (SUA) better predicted lower extremity venous thrombosis in the non-thyroid nodule group (AUC=0.809) than in the thyroid nodule group (AUC=0.692). Cox regression indicated thyroid nodules independently predicted mortality (HR=1.58, 95% CI: 1.01–2.48, P=0.048), whereas atrial fibrillation was linked to reduced mortality risk (HR=0.523, P<0.001).**

****Conclusion** Thyroid nodules are closely associated with multiple cardiovascular risk factors in HFrEF patients with anemia and hyperuricemia and influence patient prognosis, suggesting the need for clinical attention to cardiovascular risk assessment and management in patients with thyroid nodules.**

****Keywords**  Chronic heart failure, Anemia, Serum uric acid, Thyroid nodule, Thyroid hormone; Venous thrombosis**

**Introduction**

Heart failure (HF) poses a major global health challenge, affecting over 64 million people and ranking as one of the leading causes of morbidity and mortality worldwide. Despite advances in pharmacological and device therapies, the prognosis for HF patients remains poor, with first-year mortality rates ranging from 4% to 45% and an average mortality rate of approximately 33%. 1-3 Anemia and hyperuricemia (HUA) are common comorbidities in patients with heart failure with reduced left ventricular ejection fraction (HFrEF), associated with more severe clinical symptoms and adverse outcomes. 4,5

Thyroid nodules are a prevalent thyroid disorder, and their detection rate has been increasing annually with the widespread use of ultrasound technology. Existing studies have demonstrated a close relationship between thyroid dysfunction and cardiovascular system function, influencing cardiac structure, function, and vascular endothelial function. 6 However, as a structural alteration of the thyroid gland, the association between thyroid nodules and cardiovascular diseases remains incompletely understood. Cardiovascular diseases are among the leading causes of death globally, and early identification of cardiovascular risk factors related to thyroid nodules is crucial for improving patient prognosis.

This study aims to explore the correlation between thyroid nodules and the risk of cardiovascular disease occurrence, cardiac function classification, and patient prognosis, providing a theoretical basis for clinical diagnosis and treatment.

**Methods**

Data source

A retrospective cohort study design was adopted, enrolling hospitalized patients with a primary discharge diagnosis of heart failure from the Department of Cardiovascular Medicine of our hospital between January 1, 2018, and September 1, 2022. A total of 185 patients with HFrEF complicated by anemia and hyperuricemia were included. This study was approved by the Institutional Review Board of our hospital and complied with the Declaration of Helsinki.

Study participants

setting and population Inclusion criteria: (1) Meeting the diagnostic criteria for HFrEF as defined by the European Society of Cardiology [7]; (2) Left ventricular ejection fraction (LVEF) <40% with elevated N-terminal pro-B-type natriuretic peptide (NT-proBNP) levels; (3) Age 18–85 years. Exclusion criteria: (1) Use of xanthine oxidase inhibitors, urate-lowering drugs, or colchicine; (2) History of thyroid treatment or abnormal thyroid function; (3) Comorbid severe hepatic or renal insufficiency; (4) Comorbid malignancy; (5) Active tuberculosis or other infectious diseases; (6) Severe mental illness; (7) History of major surgical procedures.

Anemia was diagnosed according to WHO criteria: hemoglobin <120 g/L for non-pregnant women and <130 g/L for men. Hyperuricemia was diagnosed based on the "Multidisciplinary Expert Consensus on Diagnosis and Treatment of Hyperuricemia-Related Diseases in China (2023 Edition)": fasting serum uric acid >420 μmol/L on two separate occasions. Eligible patients were divided into a thyroid nodule group (91 cases) and a non-thyroid nodule group (94 cases).

Research Methods

Ultrasonography: Philips EPIQ5 and Hitachi Ascendus color Doppler ultrasound diagnostic systems were used. Two experienced sonographers independently analyzed thyroid nodule characteristics (size, orientation, margin, structure, echogenicity, etc.) and cardiac structure/function parameters. Discrepancies were resolved by a third physician.

Laboratory Testing: Venous blood samples were collected from all subjects after an 8-hour fast following hospital admission. Chemiluminescent immunoassay was employed to measure complete blood count, thyroid hormone levels, and biochemical parameters using the Abbott ARCHITECT automated immunoassay analyzer (Abbott Laboratories, USA) with reagents provided by Abbott.

Data collection

Baseline data on demographics, clinical characteristics, laboratory tests, and medication treatments were retrieved from hospital records. The primary composite endpoints included all-cause mortality, heart failure rehospitalization, and cardiovascular events (acute coronary syndrome, stroke). Data were collected through electronic medical record reviews and telephone follow-ups, with the follow-up period ending on January 31, 2024.

Statistical Analysis

Statistical analyses were performed using SPSS (IBM SPSS, Inc., Armonk, New York, USA) and Prism (GraphPad Software, Inc., San Diego, California, USA) software. Continuous measurement data were first subjected to the Shapiro-Wilk test. If they conformed to a normal distribution, they were expressed as mean±standard deviation, and intergroup comparisons were conducted using Student's t-test. When comparing demographic characteristics between the two groups, continuous data were analyzed using the Wilcoxon-Mann-Whitney test, while categorical data were presented as percentages and analyzed using the**χ²**test or Fisher’s exact test to assess differences. ROC curve analysis was used to evaluate the diagnostic value of SUA for lower extremity venous thrombosis. Kaplan-Meier survival analysis was employed to assess long-term outcomes between the two groups, and the log-rank test was used for intergroup comparisons. To identify cardiovascular risk factors in HFrEF patients with anemia and hyperuricemia (HUA), relevant variables were subjected to univariate analysis (*P*≤0.1). Significant variables were then included in multivariate Cox regression analysis to determine independent predictors associated with adverse outcomes, with a two-sided *P* < 0.05 considered statistically significant.

**Results**

Comparison of Baseline Characteristics Between the Two Groups

A total of 185 patients met the inclusion and exclusion criteria, including 91 (49.2%) in the thyroid nodule group and 94 (50.8%) in the non-thyroid nodule group. Compared to the non-thyroid nodule group, patients in the thyroid nodule group had significantly higher body weight and slower pulse rates at admission (*P* < 0.01). The prevalence of coronary heart disease, hypertension, atrial fibrillation, and diabetes was significantly higher in the thyroid nodule group than in the

non-thyroid nodule group, with statistically significant differences (*P* < 0.05 or *P* < 0.01). (See Table 1)

Table 1 Comparison of baseline characteristics between the two groups of patients

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Variable | Thyroid nodule group (%) | Non-thyroid nodule group (%) | t/Z/χ² | p |
| Female | 30(16..2) | 27(14.6) | 0.462 | 0.497 |
| Male | 64(34.6) | 64(34.6) |  |  |
| Age（yeas） | 71.472±7.75 | 70.29±10.36 | 6.321 | 0.253 |
| Weight（Kg） | 59.48±10.96 | 55.13±8.09 | 9.123 | 0.000 |
| Pulse Rate (bpm） | 85.56±18.25 | 91.40±20.24 | 0.038 | 0.008 |
| Systolic blood pressure (mmHg) | 135.32±27.16 | 129.55±25.65 | 0.403 | 0.055 |
| Dystolic blood pressure (mmHg） | 80.84±13.38 | 80.98±17.33 | 4.829 | 0.939 |
| Heart Rate (bpm） | 90.42±20.79 | 94.19±23.39 | 0.579 | 0.133 |
| Somker | 47（0.01） | 44（49.2） | 0.180 | 0.671 |
| Co-morbidities |  |  |  |  |
| Coronary heart disease | 84（42.47） | 133（21.08） | 13.581 | 0.000 |
| Hypertension | 61（39.35） | 94（24.19） | 7.205 | 0.007 |
| Atrial fibrillation | 26（43.33%） | 65（29.68） | 3.994 | 0.046 |
| Valvular Heart Disease | 36（27.69） | 55（36.91） | 2.686 | 0.101 |
| Cardiomyopathy | 48（35.82） | 43（29.66） | 1.205 | 0.272 |
| Diabetes mellitus | 41（42.27） | 50（27.47） | 6.302 | 0.012 |
| Renal insufficiency | 57（35.41） | 34（28.81） | 1.346 | 0.246 |
| Thrombosis of the deep leg veins | 9（47.37） | 82（31.54） | 2.019 | 0.155 |
| NYHA class |  |  |  |  |
| III | 49（53.8） | 53（56.4） | 0.166 | 0.684 |
| IV | 42（46.2） | 41（43..6） |  |  |

Comparison of Laboratory Indicators Between the Two Groups of Patients at Admission

The comparison of routine laboratory and biochemical indicators between the two groups of patients upon admission revealed the following statistically significant differences (*P* < 0.05): The mean corpuscular volume (MCV), prothrombin activity, fibrinogen level, and the ratio of free triiodothyronine (FT3) to free thyroxine (FT4) were higher in the thyroid nodule group compared to the non-thyroid nodule group. In contrast, the mean values of total bilirubin, direct bilirubin, FT4, and aortic valve regurgitation area were lower in the thyroid nodule group (*P* < 0.05 or *P* < 0.01). No significant differences were observed in other laboratory indicators (*P* > 0.05) (see Table 2).

Table 2. Comparison of Relevant Laboratory Indicators in Patients with Thyroid Nodules

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Variable | Thyroid nodule group (%) | Non-thyroid nodule group (%) | *t/Z* | *p* |
| MCV(µm3) | 89.49±8.77 | 86.21±12.35 | 16.65 | 0.038 |
| Prothrombin activity (%） | 73.78±23.59 | 67.01±21.14 | 0.033. | 0.042 |
| Fibrinogen level(g/L ) | 3.78±1.04 | 3.41±1.09. | 0.00.1 | 0.023 |
| Total bilirubin(µmol/L) | 10.11±0.82 | 13.02±1.18 | 10.54 | 0.044 |
| Direct bilirubin (µmol/L) | 5.01±0.42 | 6.87±0.67 | 12.37 | 0.020 |
| FT4(pmol/L) | 17.13±3.29 | 18.44±3.15 | 0.971 | 0.006 |
| Aortic valve regurgitation area(cm2) | 2.59±0.31 | 3.95±0.55 | 6.827 | 0.015 |
| FT3/FT4 | 0.22±0.07 | 0.19±0.06 | 1.813 | 0.002 |

Logistic Regression Analysis of Influencing Factors for Thyroid Nodules in Two Groups of Patients

After gradually incorporating the statistically significant variables into the logistic regression analysis, the results showed that coronary heart disease, atrial fibrillation, diabetes, and bilateral carotid intima-media thickening with plaques significantly increased the risk in the thyroid nodule patient group. This suggests that thyroid nodules may be closely associated with various cardiovascular diseases and risk factors (see Table 3).

Table 3 Logistic Regression Analysis of Influencing Factors for Thyroid Nodules in Two Groups of Patients

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Variable | B | SE | Wald | *df* | *p* | Exp(B) | 95% EXP (B) CI |
| Atrial fibrillation | 1.024 | 0.394 | 6.763 | 1 | 0.009 | 2.784 | 1.278-6.117 |
| Coronary heart disease | 1.096 | 0.318 | 11.865 | 1 | 0.001 | 2.993 | 1.142-4.319 |
| Diabetes mellitus | 0.733 | 0.336 | 4.748 | 1 | 0.029 | 2.081 | 1.033-3.895 |
| Bilateral carotid intima - media thickening with plaques | 1.012 | 0.500 | 4.101 | 1 | 0.043 | 2.752 | 1.033-7.331 |

Logistic regression analysis of influencing factors on cardiac function classification in the two patient groups

After gradually incorporating the statistically significant variables into the logistic regression analysis, the results showed that hypertension had a significant negative impact on cardiac function classification, with hypertensive patients exhibiting lower cardiac function grades. Both mean corpuscular volume and free thyroxine significantly increased the risk of cardiac function deterioration, indicating that these two factors may play important roles in worsening cardiac function (see Table 4).

Table 4. Logistic regression analysis of influencing factors on cardiac function classification in the two patient groups

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Variable | B | SE | Wald | *df* | *p* | Exp(B) | 95% EXP (B) CI |
| Hypertension | -1.219 | 0.272 | 20.14 | 1 | 0.000 | 0.296 | 0.174-0.504 |
| MCV(µm3) | 0.029 | 0.012 | 6.386 | 1 | 0.012 | 1.030 | 1.007-1.053 |
| FT4(pmol/L) | 0.096 | 0.041 | 5.516 | 1 | 0.019 | 1.101 | 1.016-1.193 |

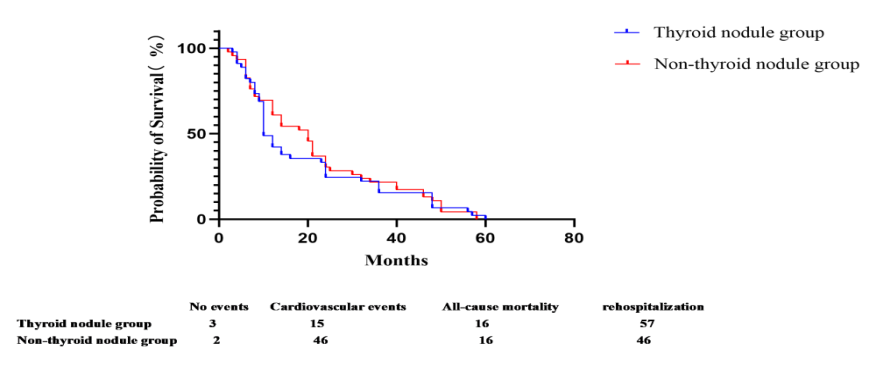
The predictive value of serum uric acid (SUA) for lower extremity venous thrombosis.

ROC curve analysis results from the two groups showed: In terms of the area under the ROC curve, the area under the ROC curve for uric acid in patients with thyroid nodules was 0.692 (95% CI = 0.489–0.895), with a sensitivity of 88.9%, specificity of 25.6%, optimal cutoff value of 484 µmol/L, and P = 0.059. For patients without thyroid nodules, the area under the ROC curve was 0.809 (95% CI = 0.721–0.897), with a sensitivity of 80%, specificity of 74.2%, optimal cutoff value of 602.5 µmol/L, and P = 0.045. Although neither group achieved extremely high diagnostic accuracy, the serum uric acid in patients without thyroid nodules demonstrated better diagnostic value in predicting lower extremity venous thrombosis compared to those with thyroid nodules.

3.6 Cox regression analysis of factors influencing survival time in the two patient groups

During a median follow-up period of 21.78 months (interquartile range: 19.42–24.14), a total of 181 patients (99.5%) experienced at least one confirmed adverse outcome. Among these, 118 patients (63.8%) were hospitalized due to progression of heart failure, 24 patients (13%) died, and 38 patients (20.5%) experienced cardiovascular events. The median survival time was 10.0 months (95% CI: 8.0–12.0) in the thyroid nodule group and 13.5 months (95% CI: 11.0–16.0) in the non-thyroid nodule group, indicating a 3.5-month reduction in survival time for patients with thyroid nodules. The log-rank test confirmed a statistically significant difference (χ²=7.906, P=0.048), demonstrating a notable disparity in survival outcomes between patients with thyroid nodules and those without (Figure 1). This suggests that thyroid nodules are associated with poor prognosis.

Figure 1 Kaplan-Meier survival curve analysis of patients with thyroid nodules



Multivariate Cox regression analysis

The independent prognostic value of comorbidities was evaluated using a stepwise Cox proportional hazards model. After adjusting for atrial fibrillation, thyroid nodules remained a significant predictor of mortality (HR=1.58, 95% CI: 1.01-2.48, *P*=0.046). Among cardiovascular comorbidities, atrial fibrillation (HR=0.523, 95% CI: 0.426-0.641, *P*<0.001) was associated with a reduced risk of death.

**Discussion**

This study is the first to systematically investigate the relationship between thyroid nodules and cardiovascular risk and prognosis in patients with HFrEF complicated by anemia and hyperuricemia. The main findings include: (1) Patients with thyroid nodules bear a heavier burden of cardiovascular comorbidities; (2) Thyroid nodules are independently associated with adverse prognosis; (3) SUA demonstrates superior predictive value for lower extremity venous thrombosis in the non-nodule group; (4) Hypertension exhibits a negative correlation with cardiac function classification, while MCV and FT4 increase the risk of cardiac function deterioration.

The results of this study indicate that patients with thyroid nodules tend to have higher body weight and a higher incidence of coronary heart disease, hypertension, atrial fibrillation, and diabetes, suggesting a significantly increased risk of cardiovascular disease in these patients. This may be related to potential subclinical thyroid dysfunction, inflammatory responses, and metabolic disorders associated with thyroid nodules. These factors can promote the occurrence and progression of cardiovascular diseases by affecting food intake, blood, lipid, glucose metabolism, and vascular endothelial function, thereby influencing the prognosis of cardiovascular disease patients. 8-15

Thyroid dysfunction is associated with an increased risk of venous thrombosis through its effects on von Willebrand factor (VWF) and coagulation factor VIII (FVIII). 16 This study found that SUA has higher predictive value for lower extremity venous thrombosis in the non-thyroid nodule group, possibly because elevated SUA in this group is accompanied by increased free thyroxine (FT4), which regulates serum uric acid concentration by influencing purine nucleotide metabolism and promoting uric acid excretion. 17 This leads to a more significant interaction between coagulation factors (such as FVIII, FIX, FX) and VWF with uric acid metabolism, resulting in an increased risk of lower extremity venous thrombosis. 18-23 This finding has important implications for clinical risk stratification. In clinical practice, cardiovascular risk assessment should be strengthened, and comorbidity management should be optimized for these patients.

Notably, this study found that in patients with HFrEF complicated by anemia and hyperuricemia, blood pressure has a significant negative impact on cardiac function classification, which differs from traditional understanding. This may be related to the overall severity of heart failure in this HFrEF population with anemia and hyperuricemia, the specificity of strict blood pressure control therapy in patients with higher admission blood pressure, and potential confounding factors. This suggests that heart failure involves different underlying pathophysiological mechanisms, requiring further validation through larger sample sizes and multicenter studies.

Within the normal range of thyroid function, higher concentrations of FT4 are associated with an increased risk of atrial fibrillation and heart failure, while lower concentrations of FT4 are associated with a reduced risk of multiple adverse events, including mortality, in the elderly. A positive correlation exists between T4 levels and increased cardiovascular mortality and morbidity. 24-30 Elevated MCV indicates morphological changes in red blood cells, resulting in macrocytes that persist longer in circulation without remodeling, exacerbating microcirculatory flow obstruction and leading to impaired extracellular antioxidant capacity, redox imbalance, and altered homeostasis. 31,32 High MCV reflects numerous underlying conditions (bone marrow dysfunction, malnutrition, organ dysfunction, endothelial dysfunction), and these underlying issues ultimately contribute to adverse prognosis. 33-36

In patients with HFrEF complicated by anemia and hyperuricemia, these conditions interact and exacerbate each other, leading to significantly worsened prognosis and reduced survival rates. For these categories of heart failure patients with comorbidities, potential subclinical thyroid dysfunction associated with thyroid nodules involves different underlying pathophysiological mechanisms, and thyroid nodules may influence patient prognosis through multiple pathways. Our findings suggest that atrial fibrillation may have a protective effect on cardiovascular outcomes in patients with thyroid nodules, prolonging survival time. This may be related to long-term anticoagulation therapy (e.g., warfarin, rivaroxaban) or heart rate management medications (e.g., beta-blockers) in atrial fibrillation patients, indirectly reducing the risk of other cardiovascular events (e.g., thrombosis, myocardial ischemia). Whether the complex interaction between thyroid hormones and the heart plays a biphasic role requires further research.

This study has several limitations: First, thyroid nodules and thyroid function were only assessed at admission, without testing for thyroid autoantibodies, and no evaluation of thyroid nodules or thyroid function was conducted during follow-up. Second, this was a single-center, retrospective, observational study with a relatively small sample size, potentially introducing selection bias. Third, the study was cross-sectional and retrospective, making it difficult to establish causality. Finally, some potential influencing factors were not included in the analysis, which may have affected the results. Future multicenter, large-sample, prospective studies are needed to further explore the relationship between thyroid nodules and cardiovascular diseases.

**Conclusion**

In conclusion, in patients with HFrEF complicated by anemia and hyperuricemia, thyroid nodules are independently associated with a heavier burden of cardiovascular comorbidities and adverse prognosis. Clinicians should prioritize cardiovascular risk assessment in these patients and optimize comprehensive management strategies to improve prognosis.

**Acknowledgments**

Not applicable

**Authors’ contributions:**

PX carried out the studies and participated in data collection. RH and YZ participated in the design of the study and performed the statistical analysis. ZL and BYconceived of the study, and participated in its design and coordination and helped to draft the manuscript. All authors read and approved the final manuscript.

**Data availability statement:** Data available upon reasonable request to the corresponding author.

The authors declared no potential conflicts of interest with respect to the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

**Ethics approval and consent to participate:**Data available upon reasonable request to the corresponding author. Due to the retrospective nature of the study, it did not affect participants' rights. Therefore, all subjects were exempted from providing informed consent. All medical data were fully protected, with personal data deleted and coded as arbitrary numbers.

**Funding:** This study was supported by Batch of High-level Talent Scientific Research Projects of the Affiliated Hospital of Youjiang Medical University for Nationalities in 2022. Key Laboratory of Research on Clinical Molecular Diagnosis for High Incidence Diseases in Western Guangxi of Guangxi Higher Education Institutions.

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