








# Evaluation and management of cancer patients presenting with acute cardiovascular disease: a Clinical Consensus Statement of the Acute Cardiovascular Care Association (ACVC) and the ESC council of Cardio-Oncology—part 2: acute heart failure, acute myocardial diseases, acute venous thromboembolic diseases, and acute arrhythmias

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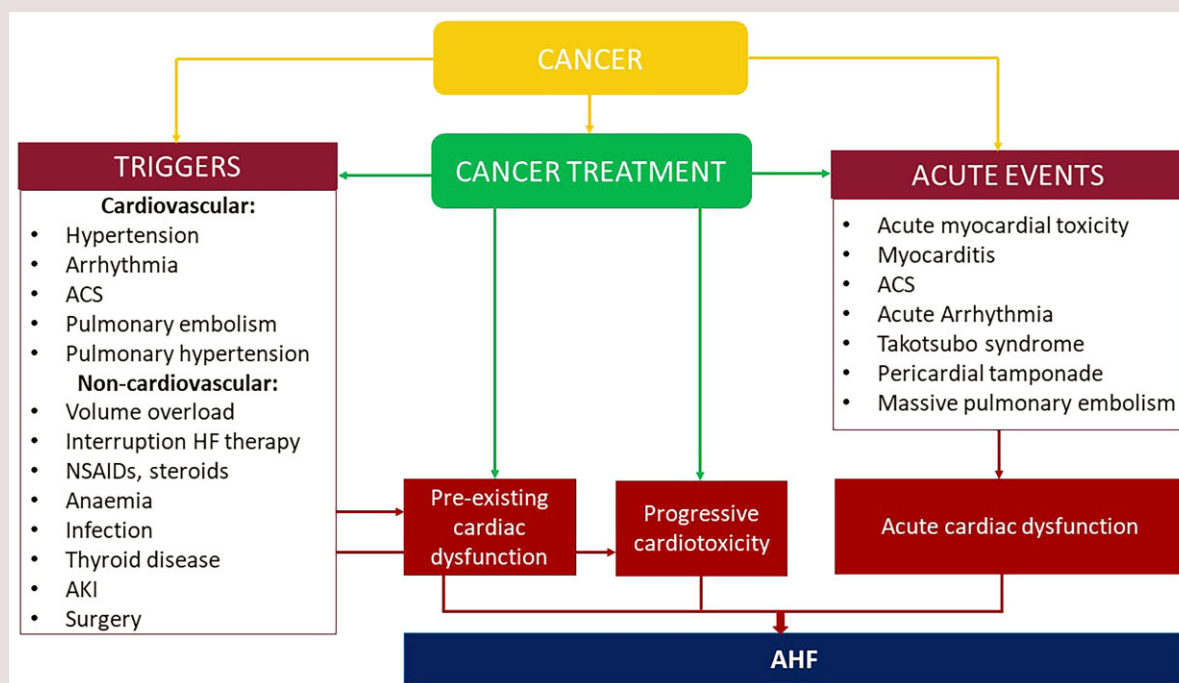
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Advances in treatment, common cardiovascular (CV) risk factors and the ageing of the population have led to an increasing number of cancer patients presenting with acute CV diseases. These events may be related to cancer itself or cancer treatment. Acute cardiac care specialists must be aware of these acute CV complications and be able to manage them. This may require an individualized and multidisciplinary approach. The management of acute coronary syndromes and acute pericardial diseases in cancer patients was covered in part 1 of a clinical consensus document. This second part focusses on acute heart failure, acute myocardial diseases, venous thromboembolic diseases and acute arrhythmias.

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## Graphical Abstract



Pathophysiology of acute heart failure in cancer patients. ACS, acute coronary syndrome; NSAIDs, nonsteroidal anti-inflammatory drugs, AKI, acute kidney injury; AHF, acute heart failure.

### Keywords

Cancer • Cardiotoxicity • Acute heart failure • Myocarditis • Acute toxicity • Takotsubo syndrome • Pulmonary embolism • Venous thromboembolic disease • Arrhythmia • Cardiac implanted electronic devices (CIED)

## Introduction

The Task Force representing the Association of Acute Cardiovascular Care and the Council of Cardio-Oncology (CO-council) of the European Society of Cardiology (ESC) recently published the first part of the consensus document on acute cardiovascular (CV) conditions in cancer patients.<sup>1</sup> This is the second part focusing on additional important acute CV events: acute heart failure (AHF), acute myocardial diseases, acute venous thromboembolic events (VTE), and acute arrhythmias.

The consensus statements presented here are based primarily on observational data in addition to existing guidelines and consensus documents, acknowledging that large-scale and evidence-based data are often lacking in this specific patient population.

## Methods

The authors, experts in acute cardiology, cardio-oncology, oncology, and haematology were asked to do a detailed review of the relevant literature on the diagnostic and therapeutic management of the aforementioned acute CV diseases in patients with cancer, including patient series, observational studies, randomized controlled trials, guidelines, and consensus documents until September 2021. Following search terms were used: cancer, cardio-oncology, CV toxicity, cardiotoxicity, AHF, myocarditis, acute

toxicity, Takotsubo syndrome (TTS), pulmonary embolism (PE), VTE, acute arrhythmia, ventricular arrhythmia (VA), atrial fibrillation (AF), bradycardia, heart block, cardiac implanted electronic devices (CIED). Selection involved screening of titles and abstracts followed by full-text evaluation if found relevant.

## Acute heart failure

### Pathophysiology

Acute heart failure is caused by an acute or chronic (previously/newly diagnosed) cardiac dysfunction and is often provoked by one or more triggers. Acute cardiac dysfunction may be related to cancer (e.g. direct invasion of the CV system), cancer treatment (Table 1), or both (e.g. ACS, pericardial tamponade, massive PE).<sup>1</sup> Several CV and non-CV factors can trigger AHF in cancer patients with chronic cardiac dysfunction. Certain cancer treatments are typically associated with some of these triggers such as VEGF-inhibitors (uncontrolled hypertension), Bruton's kinase inhibitors and rituximab (AF), and dasatinib (pulmonary hypertension). Cancer treatment can further aggravate a pre-existing cardiac dysfunction and provoke AHF.<sup>2</sup> Also, cardiotoxicity may present late as AHF after a long asymptomatic period of progressively declining cardiac function with acute decompensation, especially in patients without surveillance.<sup>2,3</sup> Finally, AHF can be the first presentation of a pheochromocytoma with catecholamine-induced myocardial dysfunction or a carcinoid syndrome in a neuroendocrine

**Table 1** Cancer treatments associated with acute cardiac dysfunction

Acute toxicity	Anthracyclines, HER-2 targeted therapies, VEGF-inhibitors, RAF + MEK inhibitors, osimertinib, BCR-ABL inhibitors, proteasome inhibitors
Toxic myocarditis	Anthracyclines, cyclophosphamide, antimetabolites (5-FU, cytarabine), radiotherapy
Immune-mediated myocarditis	IL-2, ICI, CAR-T-cell therapy
Takotsubo syndrome	5-FU, capecitabine, rituximab, trastuzumab, taxanes, VEGF-I, ICIs

5-FU, 5-fluoro-uracil; IL-2, interleukin 2; ICIs, immune checkpoint inhibitors; CAR, chimere antigen receptor.

tumour with most often right-sided HF due to right-sided valvular involvement (*Graphical Abstract*).

## Clinical presentation and diagnosis

The clinical presentation of AHF is comparable to that in non-cancer patients with mostly symptoms and signs related to congestion. Usually, the onset is gradual, but it can be rapid as with acute anthracycline toxicity and a minority of patients present with cardiogenic shock, for instance in fulminant immune checkpoint inhibitor (ICI)-associated myocarditis or TTS.<sup>4,5</sup>

Diagnosis is based on the same principles as in patients without cancer.<sup>6</sup> Relevant differential diagnoses related to cancer treatment and/or cancer progression like ACS, PE, pulmonary toxicity, and metastasis must be ruled out. Symptoms related to catecholamine excess (profuse sweating, headache, tachycardia) should raise suspicion of a pheochromocytoma and warrant measurement of plasma free metanephrines or urinary fractionated metanephrines. Evaluation for carcinoid syndrome (5-HIAA measurement in urine and plasma, abdominal ultrasound, and CT) is advised in patients with AHF due to newly diagnosed right-sided valvular disease.

## Management and implications for cancer treatment

The management of AHF in cancer patients follows the general guideline recommendations with quick recognition and treatment of potential reversible causes and triggers.<sup>6</sup>

In patients under active cancer treatment, it should be defined whether the cardiac dysfunction and/or the precipitating factors could be related to cancer treatment.<sup>2</sup>

Cancer treatment should generally be withheld until the patient stabilizes, and a multidisciplinary team should decide the subsequent steps along with shared decision-making with the patient. In case of AHF provoked by a pheochromocytoma, it is strongly advised to avoid inotropes and to combine betablockers with alpha blocking agents to avoid a hypertensive crisis.<sup>7</sup>

Long-term CV treatment should take into consideration potential drug interactions with cancer therapies, cardiotoxicity,<sup>1</sup> and cancer prognosis, especially in case of advanced HF when durable mechanical therapies are considered.

## Acute myocardial diseases

### Acute myocardial toxicity

#### Pathophysiology

Several cancer therapies cause direct myocardial toxicity<sup>1</sup> (*Table 1*). The pathophysiology of the toxicity is distinct for each drug, and interaction with pre-existing cardiac disease will determine the magnitude and degree of myocyte damage and loss.

It is relatively rare for patients receiving anthracyclines to present with AHF during treatment unless they have developed acute, severe cardiotoxicity (<1% of patients after infusion)<sup>8</sup> due to a higher sensitivity, e.g. in patients with pre-existing LV impairment or gene mutations associated with cardiomyopathy.<sup>9</sup>

Because breast cancer patients treated with HER-2 targeted therapies undergo echocardiography surveillance, presentation with AHF is rare. Surveillance with other targeted molecular therapies is variable, and although CV monitoring and imaging is increasing in high-risk patients,<sup>9</sup> patients still present with AHF.

#### Management and implications for cancer treatment

Upon presentation with acute toxicity related AHF, the culprit treatment should be interrupted. Usually, permanent cessation is advisable but in selected cases after complete recovery of left ventricular function and resolution of symptoms, some targeted therapies can be restarted after multidisciplinary discussion (MD), with continuation of HF therapy and close cardiac surveillance.<sup>2</sup>

### Acute myocarditis caused by cancer treatment

#### Pathophysiology

Myocarditis, is most often related to direct toxicity or immune-mediated inflammation associated with various cancer therapies.<sup>10</sup> Toxic myocarditis has been observed with several cancer treatments while immune-mediated myocarditis is associated with therapies involving the immune system, especially ICIs.<sup>1,11</sup> (*Table 1*). Immune checkpoint inhibitors are increasingly used in advanced cancer treatment and activate the patients' immune system against cancer cells. This immune response can additionally cause myocardial cell death; however, the exact mechanisms remain unclear.<sup>12</sup> To date, there are nine approved ICIs: the CTLA-4 inhibitor ipilimumab; the PD-1 inhibitors nivolumab, pembrolizumab, cemiplimab, and dostarlimab; the PD-L1 inhibitors atezolizumab, avelumab, and durvalumab; and the LAG-3 pathway inhibitor relatlimab. A systematic review including 48 randomized controlled trials with ICIs found a four-fold increase in the risk of myocarditis with an incidence of 3,2/1000 patients.<sup>13</sup> However, based on case series, the incidence of myocarditis may be as high as 1.8% or even higher in real life registries.<sup>5,14,15</sup>

#### Clinical presentation and diagnosis

The heterogeneity of the clinical syndrome, ranging from mild symptoms to fatal events makes the diagnosis of ICI-associated myocarditis challenging (*Table 2*). Based on case reports and series, dyspnoea, fatigue, and chest pain are the most reported symptoms.<sup>12</sup> Also, ICI-associated myocarditis can frequently co-exist with other ICI-associated CV complications<sup>1</sup> or auto-immune phenomena including other rare complications like myositis and myasthenia gravis.<sup>11</sup> It is most often diagnosed during the first few cycles of treatment with a median time of onset of 16–75 days<sup>5,15–17</sup> but has been shown to present as late as 454 days after initiation.<sup>17</sup> Timely diagnosis is crucial because of the high associated mortality up to 51% in severe cases.<sup>16,18,19</sup> Therefore, clinical suspicion for myocarditis is advised in ICI-treated patients when symptoms, an increase in cardiac troponins,

**Table 2** Diagnosis of immune checkpoint inhibitor-associated myocarditis, based on IC-OS consensus definition

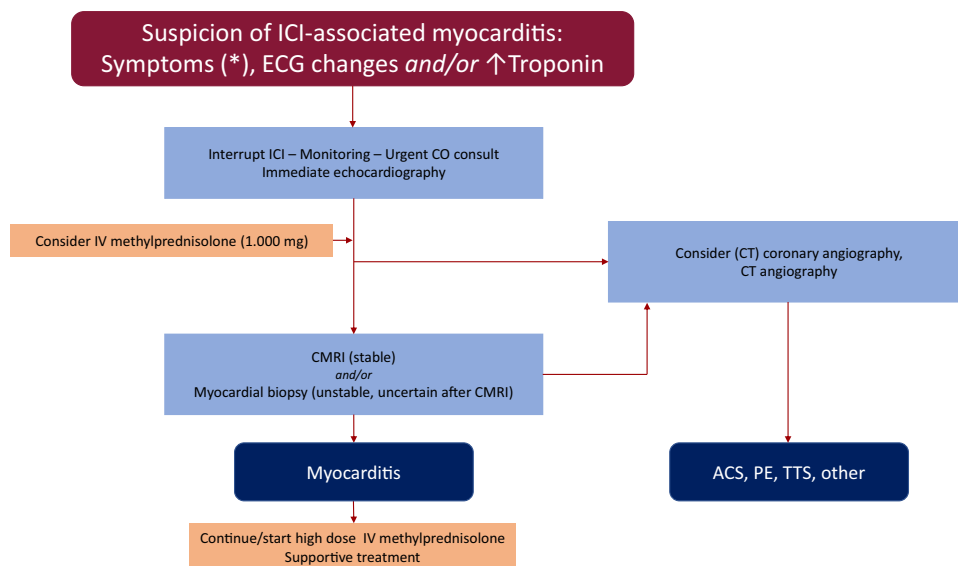
Diagnosis of ICI-associated myocarditis	
Clinical	Troponin elevation (*) with one major criterion or Troponin elevation (*) with two minor criteria after exclusion of ACS and acute infectious myocarditis based on clinical suspicion
	<i>Major criterion</i>
	• Diagnostic CMRI (Lake Louise criteria)
	<i>Minor criteria</i>
	• Clinical syndrome with any of the following: fatigue, muscle weakness, myalgia, chest pain, diplopia, ptosis, dyspnoea, orthopnoea, peripheral oedema, palpitations, light-headedness/dizziness, syncope, cardiogenic shock
	• Ventricular arrhythmia and/or new conduction disease
	• Decline in systolic function (non-Takotsubo pattern)
	• Other immune-related adverse events: myositis, myasthenia gravis, myopathy
	• Suggestive CMRI (some but not all of Lake Louise criteria)
Pathohistological	Multifocal inflammatory cell infiltrates with overt cardiomyocyte loss of cardiac tissue samples

(\*), new or significant change from baseline; CMRI, cardiac magnetic resonance imaging; ACS, acute coronary syndrome.

and/or electrocardiogram (ECG) abnormalities are observed (Figure 1). Of note, troponin T, but not I, may be falsely elevated in the case of myositis probably due to cross-reactivity of the hs troponin T assay with proteins in the skeletal muscle.<sup>11</sup> Troponin I is therefore a more specific marker for the detection of myocardial injury in this setting. Upon suspicion, urgent CV imaging is advised, including echocardiography and cardiac magnetic resonance imaging (CMRI). A normal left ventricular function on echocardiography has been observed in up to 51% of cases of ICI-myocarditis and does not exclude myocarditis.<sup>5</sup> Typical changes on cardiac MRI-like late gadolinium enhancement (LGE) and elevated T2-weighted short-tau inversion recovery were seen in, respectively, 48 and 28% of cases, hence a negative CMRI does also not exclude myocarditis.<sup>20</sup> In case of suspected myocarditis with a negative early (within 4 days of admission) CMRI, a repeat CMRI from Day 4 onwards can be useful because of increased diagnostic performance. Diagnosis of ICI-associated myocarditis can be made either on a clinical or a pathohistological basis as reflected by the recent consensus definition from the International Cardio-Oncology Society. Based on clinical suspicion, other causes of myocardial injury like acute infectious myocarditis and ACS must be excluded<sup>1,11,14</sup> (Table 2). Because of its invasive nature and potential complications, endomyocardial biopsy is reserved for cases with uncertain results or patients in unstable condition (Figure 1).

### Management and implications for cancer treatment

When ICI-associated myocarditis is suspected, the patient should immediately be admitted with continuous ECG monitoring and the ICI treatment should be interrupted while further investigations are undertaken. Treatment of AHF, arrhythmia, and other CV complications according to the ESC guidelines is advised.<sup>6</sup> Betablockers are to be used with caution, especially in the presence of new conduction disease. It is advised to treat suspected or confirmed myocarditis immediately with high-dose corticosteroids (intravenous methylprednisolone 1.000 mg daily for 3–5 days), followed by oral prednisone 1–2 mg/kg/day for 2 weeks, with further tapering over the next



**Figure 1** Diagnosis and therapeutic management of immune checkpoint inhibitor-associated myocarditis. ICI, immune checkpoint inhibitor; (\*), symptoms of clinical syndrome: see Table 2; CO, cardio-oncology; IV, intravenous; mg, milligram; CT, computed tomography; ACS, acute coronary syndrome; PE, pulmonary embolism; TTS, Takotsubo syndrome; CMRI, cardiac magnetic resonance imaging.

4–6 weeks.<sup>2,19,21–23</sup> In case of insufficient response to corticosteroids, second line immunosuppressive agents (anti-thymocyte globulin, mycophenolate mofetil, immunoglobulins, tocilizumab, abatacept, or plasmapheresis), can be attempted but robust data to support one above the other are currently lacking.<sup>2,16,23</sup>

In case of confirmed ICI-related myocarditis, ICIs are usually permanently discontinued because the risk of potentially fatal recurrent myocarditis outweighing any potential benefit of immunotherapy. Myocarditis may also be identified incidentally in patients presenting with other immunotherapy-related toxicities. Here, the relative risk-benefit ratio is less certain, especially when other treatment options may be limited. Currently, there is no evidence to withhold ICI treatment when small elevations of troponin occur without symptoms, signs, ECG, or echocardiographic findings suggestive of myocarditis. For these cases, we advise a case-by-case evaluation with a low threshold for CMRI and close CV follow-up.

## Takotsubo syndrome

Cancer patients are especially vulnerable to TTS, a transient, often stress-induced dysfunction of the left ventricle. Observational data indicate that about one in six TTS patients have cancer.<sup>24,25</sup> Up to 12% of hospitalized patients with cancer develop TTS, especially patients with breast and lung cancer.<sup>26</sup> Takotsubo syndrome has rarely been observed as a complication of a pheochromocytoma or paraganglioma.<sup>27</sup>

### Pathophysiology

The relation between cancer and TTS is complex and multifactorial and relates to comorbidities, cancer-related metabolic or neurohumoral changes, inflammation, physical and emotional stress, diagnostic and therapeutic procedures (e.g. biopsy, surgery), and cancer treatment. Physical triggers are more likely than emotional triggers in cancer patients.<sup>25</sup> Several cancer treatments have been found to be associated with TTS<sup>28–30</sup> (Table 1).

### Clinical presentation and diagnosis

Takotsubo syndrome usually presents with chest pain and dyspnoea,<sup>31</sup> but a high proportion may present with cardiogenic shock.<sup>4</sup> In contrast to the non-cancer population, TTS equally affects men and women.<sup>29</sup> Diagnostic criteria for TTS<sup>32</sup> in cancer patients might sometimes be difficult to distinguish from chemotherapy-related cardiomyopathy, but the classic transient apical dysfunction as well as typical ECG changes over time support the diagnosis.<sup>33</sup> Sometimes a coronary angiography, CMRI, and/or myocardial biopsy are needed to differentiate TTS from an ACS- or ICI-associated myocarditis.<sup>34,35</sup>

### Management and implications for cancer treatment

Cancer therapy should be at least temporarily interrupted when a TTS develops. Meanwhile supportive therapy is advised.<sup>35</sup> Left ventricular function usually recovers within 4 weeks.<sup>29</sup> Rechallenge can be attempted after MD as observational data have shown that this is usually not associated with recurrence.<sup>31</sup> Systematic screening for a new malignancy in all TTS patients does not appear to be necessary, although physicians need to be aware of the association, especially in patients without a clear trigger. In general, short-term mortality is comparable to patients without cancer.<sup>25</sup> Post-discharge mortality is lower with either betablockers or angiotensin converting enzyme inhibitors/angiotensin receptor blockers,<sup>36</sup> suggesting that cardioprotective therapies should not be withheld from TTS patients with cancer.

## Consensus statements for AHF and acute myocardial diseases in cancer patients

### Diagnosis

The same algorithms for diagnosis and monitoring of AHF as in non-cancer patients apply.

Early echocardiography is advised.

Symptoms, increase in cardiac troponin, and/or ECG abnormalities prompt diagnostic workup for myocarditis in ICI-treated patients.

Cardiac magnetic resonance imaging is advised in patients with suspected ICI-associated myocarditis.

Endomyocardial biopsy is advised in suspected ICI-associated myocarditis in unstable patients or in whom the diagnosis cannot be confirmed non-invasively.

### Management

Temporary interruption of cancer therapy is advised after MD if a causal role of cancer therapy is suspected.

Suspicion of cancer treatment-related acute toxicity or myocarditis prompts immediate interruption together with continuous ECG monitoring.

Treatment with high-dose intravenous methylprednisolone is strongly advised for suspected or confirmed ICI-associated myocarditis.

In case of confirmed ICI-associated myocarditis, ICIs are usually permanently discontinued.

If left ventricular function recovers after cancer treatment-related AHF, some targeted therapies may be restarted after MD, with continuation of HF therapy and close cardiac surveillance.

After TTS, rechallenge with the same cancer treatment can be attempted after MD.

In patients with suspected or confirmed pheochromocytoma, it is advised to avoid inotropes and to combine betablockers with alpha blocking agents.

AHF, acute heart failure; ICI, immune checkpoint inhibitor; CMRI, cardiac magnetic resonance imaging; MD, multidisciplinary discussion; HF, heart failure; TTS, Takotsubo syndrome.

## Acute venous thromboembolic diseases

Venous thromboembolic events in patients with active cancer is common and associated with high recurrence and mortality rates.<sup>37–40</sup>

### Pathophysiology

The pathophysiology of VTE in cancer patients is complex and involves patient, cancer, and cancer treatment-related factors. Age, comorbidities, immobilization, a history of VTE, and genetic predisposition are the most important patient related risk factors. Several cancers (especially brain, pancreatic, stomach, ovarian, lung, haematological malignancies, and advanced cancers)<sup>39,40</sup> and anticancer treatments (hormonal, systemic chemotherapy, immunomodulatory drugs, cyclin inhibitors, anti-angiogenic agents)<sup>1</sup> are associated with an increased risk of VTE through extrinsic venous compression, activation of the haemostatic system, and/or vessel wall damage.

Cancer surgery, supportive treatments (transfusions, erythropoietin), presence of central venous catheters, and interruption of anticoagulants further increase the risk of VTE. Pulmonary micro- and macro-tumour embolism can occur in patients with sarcoma, hepatocellular, breast, and renal cell carcinomas through direct invasion of the vena cava.

## Clinical presentation and diagnosis

Signs and symptoms can be non-specific or absent. A high index of suspicion for VTE is advised in patients with risk factors. Among patients with deep vein thrombosis, the most common symptoms and signs associated with this pathology are extremity oedema and pain. Pulmonary embolism patients especially report dyspnoea and less often chest pain. Venous thromboembolic event in cancer patients may be found incidentally and in unusual regions on scans evaluating response to cancer treatment.

The diagnosis of VTE in cancer patients is based on the same principles as in patients without cancer.<sup>41</sup> D-dimer levels are more frequently elevated in patients with malignancies, which make them less useful for exclusion of VTE.<sup>41</sup> A VTE may also be the first manifestation of cancer, especially when unprovoked.<sup>42</sup> A tumour thrombus can mimic a thrombotic PE and the difference between both is often difficult: the absence of reduction of the pulmonary VTE despite adequate anticoagulation or thrombolysis should raise suspicion for a tumour thrombus.<sup>43</sup>

## Management and implications for cancer treatment

Low molecular weight heparins (LMWHs) are more effective than vitamin K-antagonists (VKAs) for patients with VTE and cancer.<sup>44</sup> Four recent trials<sup>45–48</sup> and two meta-analyses<sup>49,50</sup> demonstrated that non-VKA oral anticoagulants (NOACs) are non-inferior to dalteparin in preventing VTE recurrence in cancer patients without a significantly increased risk of major bleeding. However, in patients with

gastrointestinal malignancies, the factor Xa inhibitors edoxaban and rivaroxaban were associated with a higher risk of bleeding vs. LMWH, whereas apixaban was associated with a lower bleeding risk<sup>47–50</sup> (Table 3). Edoxaban has fewer drug–drug interactions than rivaroxaban and apixaban but requires a 5-day lead-in with LMWH.<sup>47</sup> It is advised to tailor the optimal anticoagulant to cancer type, bleeding risk, drug–drug interactions, and patient preferences.<sup>49,51,52</sup> In patients with limited absorption in the upper gastrointestinal tract, a recent bleeding event, or thrombocytopenia, LMWHs remain the preferred anticoagulant. Vitamin K-antagonists may be used if LMWH or NOACs are unavailable or contraindicated. When PE presents with haemodynamic instability, the treatment is the same as in patients without cancer. In patients with active cancer, the risk of recurrent episodes is high and indefinite anticoagulation is advised.<sup>39,41,49,51,52</sup> However, major bleeding complications are more common with VTE or PE in cancer patients and can complicate management. The withdrawal of cancer treatment vs. continuation with ongoing anticoagulation is determined by the severity of thrombosis, cancer prognosis, and discussion with the patient.

## Acute arrhythmias

### Pathophysiology

Arrhythmias in cancer patients may be related to direct (toxicity) and indirect (e.g. ICI-induced myocarditis, ACS, pericarditis) effects of cancer treatment, cardiac involvement (invasion, cardiac amyloidosis), paraneoplastic manifestations (thyroid illness), shared risk factors (alcohol, obesity), and underlying heart disease.<sup>53</sup> Cancer-related stress with increased sympathetic drive, surgery, inflammation, metabolic and electrolyte disturbances due to cancer treatment, malnutrition or gastrointestinal loss may trigger or aggravate arrhythmic events.<sup>54</sup> Cancer is an independent risk factor for AF.<sup>55</sup> Atrial fibrillation has also been observed with several cytotoxic drugs,<sup>1</sup> IL-2, CAR-T cell therapy, ICI's, the monoclonal antibody rituximab, and several tyrosine kinase inhibitors (TKIs), especially ibrutinib. Ventricular

**Table 3** Trials on anticoagulation treatment in cancer patients with acute venous thromboembolic events

Trial	Design	N	Intervention	Control	Results
Posch, meta-analysis <sup>44</sup>	Network meta-analysis	2.080	LMWH	VKA	LMWH: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Superior for prevention of recurrent VTE</li> <li>• Comparable risk of bleeding</li> </ul>
Hokusai VTE cancer <sup>47</sup>	RCT, non-inferiority	1.046	Edoxaban LMWH for 5d followed by Edoxaban 60 mg OD	Dalteparin	Edoxaban: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Non-inferior for prevention of recurrent VTE</li> <li>• No increase of major bleeding</li> </ul>
SELECT-D pilot <sup>48</sup>	RCT, pilot	406	Rivaroxaban 15 mg BID for 3w followed by 20 mg OD	Dalteparin	Rivaroxaban: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Nonsignificant difference in recurrent VTE</li> </ul>
ADAM-VTE <sup>46</sup>	RCT, superiority	300	Apixaban 10 mg BID for 7d followed by 5 mg BID	Dalteparin	Apixaban: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Low VTE recurrence</li> <li>• Low bleeding risk</li> </ul>
CARAVAGGIO <sup>45</sup>	RCT, non-inferiority	1.155	Apixaban 10 mg BID for 7d followed by 5 mg BID	Dalteparin	Apixaban: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Non-inferior for prevention of recurrent VTE</li> <li>• Lower risk of bleeding</li> </ul>

### Consensus statement for acute venous thromboembolic diseases in cancer patients

#### Diagnosis

The same algorithms for diagnosis and monitoring of VTE as in non-cancer patients apply.

An unprovoked VTE may be the first presentation of cancer.

#### Management

A MD with the oncologist or haematologist is advised.

LMWHs, edoxaban, rivaroxaban, or apixaban are advised for the treatment of VTE in cancer patients without contraindications.

In patients with active cancer, it may be appropriate to start with LMWHs and shift to NOACs at a later stage.

A minimum duration of 6 months of anticoagulation is advised after cancer-associated VTE. Extended treatment may be appropriate in patients with active malignancy, advanced cancer, or ongoing cancer treatment.

For patients with platelet counts  $<50\,000/\mu\text{L}$ , a MD with the option of reduced dose LMWH is advised.

VTE, venous thromboembolic events; MD, multidisciplinary discussion; LMWHs, low molecular weight heparins; NOACs, novel oral anticoagulating agents; MD, multidisciplinary discussion.

arrhythmia is often induced by QTc prolongation, which may be related to cancer treatment (TKIs, arsenic compounds, anthracyclines, and histone deacetylase inhibitors) often in combination with electrolyte imbalance or other drugs frequently used in cancer patients like anti-emetics, antidepressants, and certain antimicrobials (antifungals, macrolide antibiotics).<sup>53,54,56</sup> Ventricular arrhythmia is observed more in patients with CV comorbidities but can also be observed in the setting of cancer treatment-related ischaemia (e.g. coronary vasospasm) or myocarditis.<sup>53,54</sup> Bradycardia has especially been observed with thalidomide, IL-2, paclitaxel, and several TKI's and can be secondary to ICI-associated myocarditis.<sup>14</sup> Conduction disturbances are a well-known complication of RT.<sup>53,54,56</sup>

## Acute atrial fibrillation

### Clinical presentation

Acute AF may manifest in the course of systemic anticancer therapy or postoperatively (especially lung cancer)<sup>57</sup> as palpitations or with an acute presentation such as AHF or haemodynamic instability.<sup>58</sup> However, AF is often undiagnosed because symptoms (breathlessness and fatigue in particular) may be attributed to cancer. In these cases, stroke may be the first manifestation of AF.

### Management

Immediate management of acute AF in cancer patients follows the general ESC guideline recommendations.<sup>58</sup> In case of rate control with digoxin or non-dihydropyridine calcium-channel blockers or in case of a rhythm control strategy with antiarrhythmic drugs, possible drug–drug interactions with the risk of QTc prolongation are to be taken into consideration. The decision for anticoagulation may be challenging, particularly in patients with active cancer,<sup>59</sup> and is based on an individualized approach including patient's thrombotic and haemorrhagic risk, and patient's informed preferences. Based on observational data and *post hoc* analyses of NOAC trials, NOACs are the drugs of choice for long-term anticoagulation,<sup>60</sup> but drug–drug interactions with ongoing or scheduled anticancer drugs need to be evaluated. Low molecular weight

heparins can be used in the active phase of cancer. It is advised to review anticoagulation strategy periodically and adjust when needed. As AF may represent a manifestation of cardiotoxicity, it is advised to discuss interruption or discontinuation within the MD team in case of difficult to manage cases.<sup>61</sup> Decisions for rhythm control strategies (e.g. AF ablation) should also take cancer prognosis into account.

## Acute ventricular arrhythmia

### Clinical presentation

The occurrence of acute VA is not common during cancer treatment. The clinical presentation of a sustained ventricular tachycardia may include syncope, low cardiac output, or AHF, depending on the rate and underlying cardiac conditions. Moreover, ventricular tachycardia, especially if polymorphic, or Torsades de pointes may degenerate into ventricular fibrillation, with cardiac arrest.

### Management

Prevention of VA through appropriate identification of a long QTc interval and concurrent arrhythmogenic conditions is crucial.<sup>2</sup> Although there is no absolute threshold of QTc (Fridericia formula<sup>2</sup>) prolongation at which Torsades de pointes may occur, a QTc interval  $\geq 500$  ms is associated with a two- to three-fold higher risk while the same arrhythmia rarely occurs if the QTc interval is  $< 500$  ms.<sup>62</sup>

Acute management of VA depends on the degree of haemodynamic impairment; either intravenous drugs or electrical cardioversion may be used but in the case of haemodynamic compromise, immediate DC shock is warranted.

## Acute conduction abnormalities and brady-arrhythmias

### Clinical presentation

The clinical presentation of cancer drug-induced brady-arrhythmias is variable and rarely significant.<sup>53</sup> In contrast, atrio-ventricular blocks including third degree atrio-ventricular block can be the first manifestation of ICI-myocarditis.

### Management

Most brady-arrhythmias are asymptomatic and resolve after withdrawal of the offending treatment, in some cases pacemaker implantation may be necessary. In emergency cases, if very slow ventricular rates ( $< 30$ – $40$  b.p.m.) or symptomatic pauses  $> 3$  s develop, the patient can be stabilized with heart rate increasing drugs [intravenous boluses of atropine 500 mcg (up to 3 mg), intravenous drip of isoprenaline or adrenaline] or temporary pacing, to monitor the transient nature of the brady-arrhythmia after drug withdrawal. Brady-arrhythmias presenting with (pre)-syncope, or reduced exercise capacity due to chronotropic incompetence that persist despite discontinuation of cancer treatment, or in the absence of anticancer alternatives constitute reasonable indications for permanent pacemaker implantation.<sup>63</sup>

## Prevention and management of cardiac implantable electronic device malfunction

### Radiotherapy

The management of patients with a CIED (pacemakers and implantable cardioverter defibrillators) receiving RT is challenging and requires a multidisciplinary approach.<sup>64</sup> In the presence of high radiation doses, both software and hardware errors may occur. Direct CIED radiation should be avoided, as this can increase the probability of fatal errors. In the case of scatter radiation, the risk of CIED malfunctions





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