



# Patient-centered digital biomarkers for allergic respiratory diseases and asthma: The ARIA-EAACI approach – ARIA-EAACI Task Force Report

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**Abbreviations:** ACQ, Asthma Control Questionnaire; ACT, Asthma Control Test; AIT, Allergen immunotherapy; ARIA, Allergic Rhinitis and its Impact on Asthma; BEST, Biomarkers, Endpoints and other Tools; CARAT, Control of Allergic Rhinitis and Asthma Test; CDSS, Clinical Decision Support System; COSMIN, COnsensus-based Standards for the selection of health status Measurement INstruments; CSMS, ARIA-EAACI allergy Combined Symptom-Medication Score; EAACI, European Academy of Allergy and Clinical Immunology; e-DASTHMA, Electronic daily asthma control score; EQ-5D, European Quality of Life Five Dimension; FDA, Food and Drug Administration; Hb1ac, Glycated haemoglobin; MASK-air®, Mobile Airways Sentinel Network for airway diseases; PRO, Patient-reported outcome; PROM, Patient-reported outcome measure; RAPP, RhinAsthma Patient Perspective; SMS, Symptom-medication score; TF, Task Force; VAS, Visual analogue scale; WHO, World Health Organization; WPAI: AS, Work Productivity and Activity Impairment: Allergy Specific.

Jean Bousquet and Mohamed H Shamji participated equally in the Task Force.

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#### Abstract

Biomarkers for the diagnosis, treatment and follow-up of patients with rhinitis and/or asthma are urgently needed. Although some biologic biomarkers exist in specialist care for asthma, they cannot be largely used in primary care. There are no validated biomarkers in rhinitis or allergen immunotherapy (AIT) that can be used in clinical practice. The digital transformation of health and health care (including mHealth) places the patient at the center of the health system and is likely to optimize the practice of allergy. Allergic Rhinitis and its Impact on Asthma (ARIA) and EAACI (European Academy of Allergy and Clinical Immunology) developed a Task Force aimed at proposing patient-reported outcome measures (PROMs) as digital biomarkers that can be easily used for different purposes in rhinitis and asthma. It first defined control digital biomarkers that should make a bridge between clinical practice, randomized controlled trials, observational real-life studies and allergen challenges. Using the MASK-air app as a model, a daily electronic combined symptom-medication score for allergic diseases (CSMS) or for asthma (e-DASTHMA), combined with a monthly control questionnaire, was embedded in a strategy similar to the diabetes approach for disease control. To mimic real-life, it secondly proposed quality-of-life digital biomarkers including daily EQ-5D visual analogue scales and the bi-weekly RhinAsthma Patient Perspective (RAAP). The potential implications for the management of allergic respiratory diseases were proposed.

#### KEYWORDS

apps, ARIA, digital health, EAACI, rhinitis

## 1 | INTRODUCTION

Asthma and allergy phenotyping and endotyping are constantly evolving.<sup>1</sup> The introduction of biologicals increases the need for biomarkers in patient selection, prediction of outcomes and monitoring. An adequate cost-effective choice of these costly and long-lasting therapies is thus available.<sup>2,3</sup> Biomarkers for patients with asthma are urgently needed.<sup>4,5</sup> Some exist in specialist care (e.g., FeNO<sup>6</sup> or sputum eosinophils<sup>7</sup>), but, to date, there are no biologic or omics biomarkers that can be largely used in primary care.<sup>8,9</sup> Blood eosinophils and serum total IgE are related to the treatment with anti-IL-5 or anti-IgE biologics. There are no validated biomarkers in rhinitis<sup>10</sup> or allergen immunotherapy (AIT).<sup>11</sup>

Digital health is an umbrella term which encompasses eHealth and benefits from areas such as advanced computer sciences (e.g., “big data” and artificial intelligence). eHealth, as defined by the World Health Organization (WHO),<sup>12</sup> comprises several components including electronic health records, telehealth and mobile health (mHealth). The latter has been defined as a “medical and public health practice supported by mobile devices, such as mobile phones.”<sup>13</sup> It includes (i) equipment/connected medical devices, (ii) mHealth services, and (iii) mHealth apps.<sup>14</sup>

The digital transformation of health and health care (including mHealth) places the patient at the center of the health system and is likely to optimize the practice of medicine.<sup>15,16</sup> Biomarkers associated with mHealth and clinical decision support systems (CDSSs)

**BOX 1 Aims of the Task Force.**

Since biologic or genetic biomarkers are not readily available for rhinitis and asthma, the TF aimed at proposing digital biomarkers that can be easily used for different purposes in rhinitis and asthma.

The first step was to define mHealth biomarkers that should make a bridge between:

- Clinical practice
- Randomized controlled trials
- Observational real-life studies
- Epidemiologic studies
- Challenges. More specifically, two sets of digital biomarkers have been proposed to mimic the diabetes approach<sup>33,106</sup>
- Equivalent to glycemia: daily electronic combined symptom-medication score for rhinitis (combined symptom-medication score, ARIA-EAACI 2021 TF: Combined symptom-medication scores (CSMSs)<sup>42,107</sup>) and asthma (Electronic daily asthma control score: e-DASTHMA)
- Equivalent to Hb1ac: monthly evaluation of rhinitis and asthma control (CARAT)<sup>108</sup>
- Quality-of-life biomarkers include daily EQ-5D visual analogue scale (VAS) and bi-weekly RAPP

CARAT, Control of asthma and rhinitis test; CSMS, Combined symptom medication score; EAACI, European Academy of Allergy and Clinical Immunology; e-DASTHMA, Electronic daily symptom medication score in asthma; Hb1ac, glycated hemoglobin; RAPP, RhinAsthma Patient Perspective; TF, Task Force; VAS, visual analogue scale.

may change the scope of the practice of asthma and allergic diseases. They help to monitor disease control<sup>16</sup> and enable: (i) shared decision-making, (ii) patient stratification, (iii) clinical trials and real-world evidence, (iv) monitoring of the efficacy and safety of targeted therapies (a critical process for identifying appropriate reimbursement), (v) implementation of stopping rules, and (vi) exchange of information between physicians and healthcare professionals.<sup>17</sup>

An ARIA-EAACI Task Force (TF) was set up to provide a state-of-the-art review to find out the applicability of mHealth biomarkers in allergic diseases and asthma (Box 1).

**2 | BACKGROUND****2.1 | Digital biomarkers**

As defined in the Biomarkers, EndpointS and other Tools (BEST) glossary, developed by the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) and the National Institutes of Health Biomarker Working

Group, a biomarker is "a defined characteristic that is measured as an indicator of normal biological processes, pathogenic processes, or biological responses to an exposure or intervention, including therapeutic interventions"<sup>18</sup> (e.g., blood pressure). Biomarkers include clinical signs identified by physical examination, biological assays, digital outcomes, genomic indices, and others that can be objectively measured and used as indicators of pathophysiological processes.<sup>19</sup> Biomarkers can be used individually or in combination. However, to be used in clinical practice, biomarkers need to be validated.<sup>20</sup> Biomarker measurements have become an essential component in some fields of medicine such as oncology, particularly in this era of targeted therapies and precision medicine.<sup>21</sup>

"In line with the BEST definition and in a guidance document,<sup>22</sup> the FDA defines a digital biomarker as a characteristic or set of characteristics, collected from digital health technologies, that is measured as an indicator of normal biological processes, pathogenic processes, or responses to an exposure or intervention, including therapeutic interventions." «Monitoring biomarker: A biomarker measured repeatedly for assessing the status of a disease or medical condition or for evidence of exposure to (or effect of) a medical product or an environmental agent».<sup>22</sup> The use of "characteristic or set of characteristics" in the definition of digital biomarkers stems from the ability to derive one or more biomarkers from one or more digital health technologies simultaneously.<sup>23</sup> With advancements in digitalization across health care, the ability to detect non-biological external factors (e.g., environmental features like pollen count or pollution) enables the identification of predictors and influences on health.<sup>23</sup>

Digital biomarkers have the potential to improve diagnosis and to continually monitor patient health, accurately predict outcomes and rapidly assess exacerbations.<sup>24</sup> These huge technical advances have evolved regarding evidence, analysis and sharing data to optimally respond to patients' requirements as well as to physicians (shared decision-making), regulators and payers.<sup>25</sup> Moreover, physiological data may now be collected via portable, wearable, and implantable digital devices. However, there are limitations and risks with these advances that require the development of a structured and validated approach (Figure 1).<sup>26</sup>

**2.2 | Biomarkers in precision medicine of allergic diseases**

Precision medicine aims to customize health care with medical decisions, practices and/or products tailored to the individual patient. While frequently associated with genomics, precision medicine goes well beyond that field, also referring to the tailoring of medical treatment to the clinical and social characteristics of each patient.<sup>27</sup> The stratification of patients into subpopulations is the basis of clinical decision-making for increased diagnostic and treatment efficacy in all disease areas including allergic diseases. It should optimally be patient centered.

In allergic diseases, the role of precision medicine in selecting an AIT regimen was proposed by an expert meeting<sup>28</sup> and expanded

**FIGURE 1** Benefits, limitations, and risks of digital biomarkers (from<sup>26</sup>).

### Strengths

- Patient empowerment
- Automation of data
- Standardised data collection
- Close monitoring
- Validation of tools
- Culturally acceptable
- Low cost
- Can be used globally

### Weaknesses

- No long-term data
- Attrition
- Potential measurement bias
- Selection of patients prone to using mHealth
- Precise patient characterisation
- Information bias
- Unsupervised input of data

### Threats

- Negative impact on the patient psychology
- Overinterpretation of the role of the patient
- Possible use of non-validated mHealth tools

### Opportunities

- Reduction of work load
- Early detection of exacerbations
- Prevention of complications
- Optimal shared decision making
- mHealth tools for clinical trials and drug development

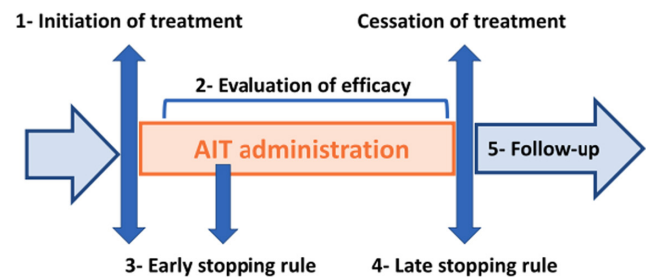
in the ARIA care pathways for AIT.<sup>11,29</sup> Biologic biomarkers do not yet exist in routine clinical practice, and digital/mHealth biomarkers may be of great value, given the large volumes of data available from mobile app users in different countries.

In severe asthma, precision medicine is also of great importance since there are different biologics that are available and have different properties.<sup>30–32</sup> Genetic or biologic biomarkers are not yet able to be used in routine clinical practice globally. Digital biomarkers may therefore be of interest for optimal shared decision-making in the stratification and follow-up of patients.

In diabetes, two types of biomarkers are defined to monitor the control of the disease.<sup>33,34</sup>

- Daily control monitoring is assessed using glycemia measurement, and longer-term monitoring using glycosylated haemoglobin (Hb1ac) measurement. It is recommended that both tests are required to optimize diabetes treatment. By analogy with the diabetes approach, two types of patient-centered digital biomarkers can be defined in rhinitis or asthma
- Long-term monitoring using control scores (analogous to Hb1AC measurement): CARAT (Control of Allergic Rhinitis and Asthma Test)<sup>35–37</sup> is proposed as it combines rhinitis and asthma control and there is a recall period of 4 weeks, whereas many other rhinitis (e.g., Allergic Rhinitis Control Test<sup>38</sup> and Rhinitis Control Assessment Test<sup>39</sup>) or asthma (e.g., Asthma Control Questionnaire—ACQ<sup>40</sup>) control questionnaires are based on a one-week recall period. The Asthma Control Test (ACT) was based on a 4-week recall.<sup>41</sup>

Validated questionnaires assess asthma or rhinitis control over the previous 1–4 weeks, but do not fully capture the control in patients with fluctuating symptoms, in particular those with severe asthma. Daily monitoring of the control (analogous to glycemia measurement) can be measured using the ARIA-EAACI allergy Combined



**FIGURE 2** Care pathway for allergen immunotherapy (AIT) (from<sup>29</sup>).

Symptom-Medication Score (CSMS)<sup>42</sup> or the electronic daily asthma control score (e-DASTHMA, submitted).

## 3 | METHODS USED TO DEVELOP THE TASK FORCE

### 3.1 | Steps for the development of the Task Force

The TF was initiated following the concept proposed in ARIA care pathways on AIT (Figure 2).<sup>29</sup> It was then developed, revised, and submitted to the ARIA TF (Online supplement).

### 3.2 | Selection of the app

In rhinitis, an automatic market research was carried out.<sup>43</sup> Among the apps available on iOS and Android (>2000), less than 20 include clinical data. The only fully validated app is MASK-air.® However, in English and multi-languages, the Pollen Austria app<sup>44,45</sup> (mainly focusing on pollen and unable to develop a CSMS) and AllergyMonitor®<sup>46,47</sup> have features that can be used.

AllergyMonitor® studies are mainly carried out on children but a CSMS can be proposed in adults if the amount of data is sufficient.<sup>48</sup>

In asthma, there are less than 10 apps (English and multi-languages) that include symptoms and also have over 10,000 users (in preparation). The Propeller Health app is the largest one studied and includes a monthly ACT as well as a connected inhaler system (cost around 80\$). However, it does not include daily symptoms.<sup>49–51</sup> The other apps do not appear to be sufficiently validated, and/or data have not been published in peer-reviewed journals.<sup>48</sup>

Thus, there is no broad spectrum of apps, and MASK-air appears to be the only current one to have been tested for CSMS, e-DASTHMA, and CARAT.<sup>52</sup> The results of this TF can, however, be used by other apps to develop the ARIA-EAACI approach.

## 4 | THE ARIA-EAACI APPROACH USING THE MASK-AIR® APP IN ALLERGIC RHINITIS

### 4.1 | Limitations and strengths of MASK-air® (online ANNEX 1)

#### 4.1.1 | Limitations

The limitations of MASK-air® studies are those of mobile technology real-world studies. They include potential measurement biases, selected users, lack of precise characterization of patients, unconfirmed diagnosis of rhinitis or asthma, and unsupervised input of data. Moreover, real-world studies can only be hypothesis-generating and findings should be confirmed by using appropriate study designs.

In MASK-air, we often use a cross-sectional approach, taking days as the unit of analysis instead of patients (although patients were used to cluster reporting days). This approach has been applied in many studies<sup>53–57</sup> and has provided novel information. Cross-sectional studies cannot provide definite information about temporal relationships, let alone cause-and-effect relationships (causal inference). By contrast, longitudinal studies can establish sequences of events and allow the establishment of links or associations between variables. Longitudinal studies with MASK-air data have shown that results are consistent with previous cross-sectional data.<sup>58</sup>

Although carried out in over 25,000 users in 29 countries, replication studies are not available.

#### 4.1.2 | Strengths

Overall, MASK-air® has several strengths: (i) low cost, (ii) quickly available data, (iii) 50,000 users from 29 countries (20 languages) and (iv) inter-operable with a web-based physician's questionnaire<sup>59</sup> and an e-CDSS for AR.<sup>60</sup> (Figure 3).

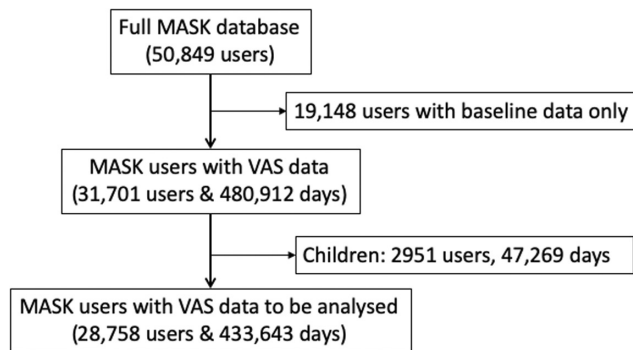


FIGURE 3 Repartition of MASK-air® users (December 2021).

The app is an MDR Class IIa. It is fully validated and includes pollen data and pollution (daily and predictive) based on the patients' geolocation.<sup>57,61</sup> The database does not have any missing values due to the structure of the app.

It is a Best Practice of DG Santé for digitally-enabled, patient-centered care and a candidate Good Practice of OECD (Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development).

The rhinitis assessment is nearing completion in over 20,000 users (current paper), and the asthma assessment has been initiated in over 8000. In asthma, all categories of patients are included, and the database can be used to compare asthmatics of different severity grade.

#### 4.1.3 | Economic evaluation

The economic evaluation is currently being assessed and several MASK-air® tools can be compared. These tools include cost of medications effectively used, cost of absenteeism and presenteeism (VAS Work, WPAI:AS), cost of health resource utilization (EQ-5D dimensions), and potential benefits of expensive treatments such as AIT and biologics. Combining the results of these tools, a monetary value will be ascribed to the allergy-CSMS and to e-DASTHMA.

## 4.2 | Development of patient-reported outcome measures (PROMs)

### 4.2.1 | Definitions of PROMs

There is an increased focus on placing patients at the center of health care and research to improve their experience and to ensure that research is robust and of maximum value for treatment or health services. A patient-reported outcome (PRO) is directly reported by the patient without interpretation of the patient's response by a clinician or anyone else. It pertains to the patient's health, quality of life, or functional status.<sup>62</sup> Patient-reported outcome measures (PROMs) are tools and/or instruments used to report PROs. They may measure functional status, health-related quality of life, symptom and symptom burden, personal experience of care as well as

health-related behaviors such as anxiety and depression.<sup>62</sup> PROMs provide important indicators of treatment efficacy not captured by objective markers or clinical assessments.<sup>63</sup> They may be used as indicators of acute symptoms and help to monitor response to treatment, especially if collected in real time. However, there are limitations of using PROMs in open trials.<sup>63</sup>

#### 4.2.2 | e-PROMs in MASK-air

A series of validated e-PROMs are available in MASK-air for rhinitis, global respiratory allergic diseases, and asthma (Table 1).

TABLE 1 e-PROMs in MASK-air.

1- Control digital biomarkers	
• Daily: validated CSMS (Allergy), e-DASTHMA, VAS nose, eye, asthma	
• Monthly: CARAT (A + R), ACT (A)	
2- QoL digital biomarkers	
• Daily: EQ-5D VAS	
• Bi-weekly: Rhinasthma (A + R)	
3- Impact digital biomarkers	
• VAS work	
• VAS school	
• VAS sleep	

Abbreviations: ACT, Asthma Control Test; CARAT, Control of Allergic Rhinitis and Asthma Test; CSMS, ARIA-EAACI allergy Combined Symptom-Medication Score; e-DASTHMA, Electronic daily asthma control score; EQ-5D, European Quality of Life Five Dimension; VAS, Visual analogue scale.

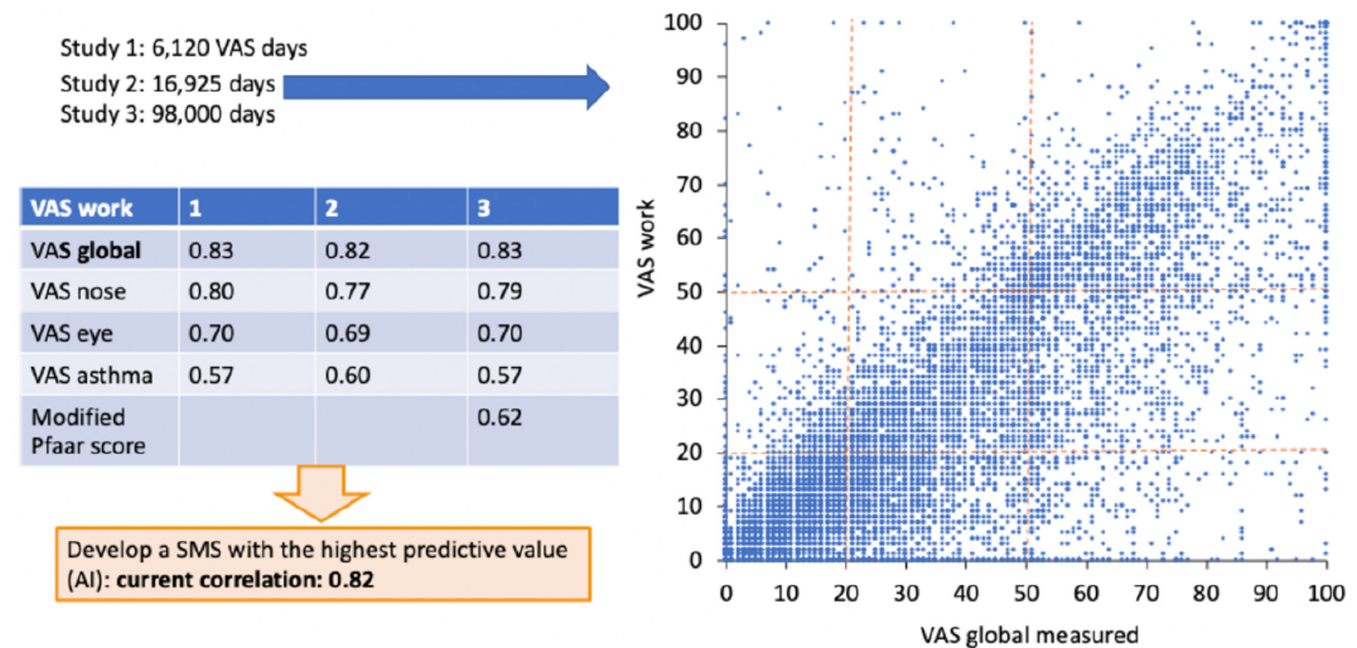


FIGURE 4 Correlation using the Spearman rank test between some of the MASK-air PROMs (from<sup>42,55,66,82</sup>).

#### 4.2.3 | Visual analogue scale for global allergy symptoms, nose, eye, and asthma

PROMs in MASK-air® include visual analogue scales (VASs) assessing daily global allergy symptoms, nose, eye or<sup>64</sup> asthma symptoms,<sup>65</sup> dyspnea as well as impact of allergy on work<sup>55,66</sup> and sleep.

All PROMs are highly correlated (Figure 4),<sup>54,56,66-69</sup> and these correlations are unlikely to be explained by a low quality of data arising from repeated VAS measures.<sup>55</sup> PROMs can be used in different aspects of allergic diseases including clinical trials, observational studies, and clinical practice.

In three different studies, VAS global, nose, eye, and asthma were correlated (Spearman rank test) with VAS work.

#### 4.2.4 | Validation of the VAS scales

The methodologic validation of PROMs in MASK-air® has been achieved (Table 2).

#### 4.2.5 | PROM cutoff values (online ANNEX 2)

In clinical and epidemiological studies, PROM cutoffs can be used to classify patients into groups of statistical and clinical relevance. The MASK-air® cutoffs for the different VASs have been arbitrarily defined according to the International Classification of Functioning, Disability and Health ICF grading.<sup>70</sup> Four cutoffs have been defined for all five VASs: 0/100 (full control), 1-19/100 (good control), 20-49/100 (partial control), and  $\geq 50/100$  (poor control).

Study name	Ref.	Type of study	N users	N days	N countries
COSMIN guidelines	[101]	Obs, CS-L	2497	14,612	15
Test-retest, intra-class coefficient	[102]	Obs, CS-L	17,780	317,176	25
Quality of data (intra-individual response variability)	[103]	Obs, CS	14,189	205,904	23
Independence of data	[102]	Obs, CS	1136	5889	18
EQ-5D	[82,104]	Obs, CS	1288	NA	18
WPAI:AS	[82,104]	Obs, CS	1288	NA	18
CARAT	[52]	Obs, CS	1086	2042	22

Abbreviations: CARAT, Control of Allergic Rhinitis and Asthma Test; COSMIN, COnsensus-based Standards for the selection of health status Measurement Instruments guidelines; CS, cross sectional; EQ-5D, European Quality of Life Five Dimension; L, longitudinal; NA, not applicable; Obs, observational; WPAI:AS, Work Productivity and Activity Impairment:Allergy Specific.

TABLE 3 Allergy-CSMS tested in the study.<sup>42</sup>

- 1- A hypothesis-driven score (m-CSMS), built without knowing real-life data, moderately correlated with the 4 outcomes (Spearman rank correlation with VAS work:  $Rho=0.61$ ,  $N=120,959$ )
- 2- A mixed data- and hypothesis-driven score (MIXED score), built based on real-life data obtained in MASK, highly correlated with the 4 outcomes (Spearman rank correlation with VAS work:  $Rho=0.81$ ,  $N=118,275$ )
- 3- Six data-driven cluster-based CSMSs, built from clusters based on VAS work and EQ-5D (3 CSMS) and CARAT and WPAI:AS (3 CSMS), highly correlated with the 4 outcomes (Spearman rank correlation with VAS work:  $Rho=0.73-0.83$ ,  $N=57,527-123,123$ )
- 4- One regression-based MIXED-CSMS, built from MASK-air data, correlated with the 4 outcomes (Spearman rank correlation with VAS work:  $Rho=0.81$ ,  $N=94,399-128,123$ )
- 5- A factorial analysis method (1 score) had a poor correlation with the 4 outcomes (Spearman rank correlation with VAS work:  $Rho=0.42$ ,  $N=59,378$ )

Abbreviations: CARAT, Control of asthma and rhinitis test; CSMS, ARIA-EAACI allergy Combined Symptom-Medication Score; EQ-5D, European Quality of Life Five Dimension; VAS, visual analogue scale; WPAI:AS, Work Productivity and Activity Impairment:Allergy Specific.

There are two statistical approaches for determining a cutoff value: percentile-oriented (i.e., "PROM distribution-oriented") and outcome-oriented.<sup>71</sup> In a cross-sectional study design of 395,223 days from 23,201 MASK-air® participants, cutoffs for VAS global, nasal, ocular, and asthma symptoms were assessed using outcome-oriented approaches. The proposed cutoff differentiating "controlled" and "partly-controlled" patients was similar to the arbitrary cutoff value (20/100).<sup>64</sup> However, a lower cutoff was obtained to differentiate between "partly-controlled" and "uncontrolled" patients (35/100 versus the arbitrarily value of 50/100) for VAS global, nose, eye, and asthma.

#### 4.2.6 | Quality-of-life biomarkers

In MASK-air, the EQ-5D VAS is answered daily. The EQ-5D full questionnaire is optional.

TABLE 2 Methodologic validation of PROMs.

**RhinAsthma Patient Perspective (RAPP)** is a simple eight-question questionnaire with good measurement properties and sensitivity to health changes. It provides a valid, reliable, and standardized HRQoL measurement in patients with asthma and comorbid allergic rhinitis in the clinical practice.<sup>72-80</sup> RAPP discriminates between patients with different disease severity levels. It is also sensitive to individual changes and reliable in stable patients. Moreover, it is simple to complete and to score, and its interpretation is immediate, both for the physician and for the patient. A validated adult version of RAPP is available in Italian, Spanish, Portuguese, English (Philippines), and Polish. A validated children's version of RAPP is available in Italian.

#### 4.3 | ARIA-EAACI-allergy-CSMS (Combined Symptom-Medication Score) (Online ANNEX 3)

Validated combined symptom-medication scores (CSMSs) are needed to investigate the effects of allergic rhinitis treatments.<sup>42,81</sup>

MASK-air® data assessed the concurrent validity, test-retest reliability, and responsiveness of several hypotheses and/or data-driven CSMSs. These allergy-CSMSs were compared with scales measuring (i) the impact of rhinitis on work productivity (VAS work of MASK-air®,<sup>55,66</sup> Work Productivity and Activity Impairment: Allergy Specific [WPAI:AS]),<sup>82</sup> (ii) quality-of-life (EQ-5D VAS),<sup>83,84</sup> and (iii) control of allergic diseases (CARAT).<sup>42</sup>

317,176 days of MASK-air® use were assessed from 17,780 users in 25 countries.<sup>42</sup> (Table 3 and Figure 5). Among data-driven CSMSs, a better performance was observed for cluster analyses-based CSMSs.

There was a consistent pattern of allergy-CSMS in different countries, indicating that this biomarker can be used globally in different languages and cultures (Figure 6).

Three observational cross-sectional studies have assessed the allergy-CSMS and confirmed that this tool can be used in allergy and AIT.<sup>85,86</sup> The allergy-CSMS provided a better discrimination between treatments than VAS global or VAS nose.

FIGURE 5 Allergy-CSMS.

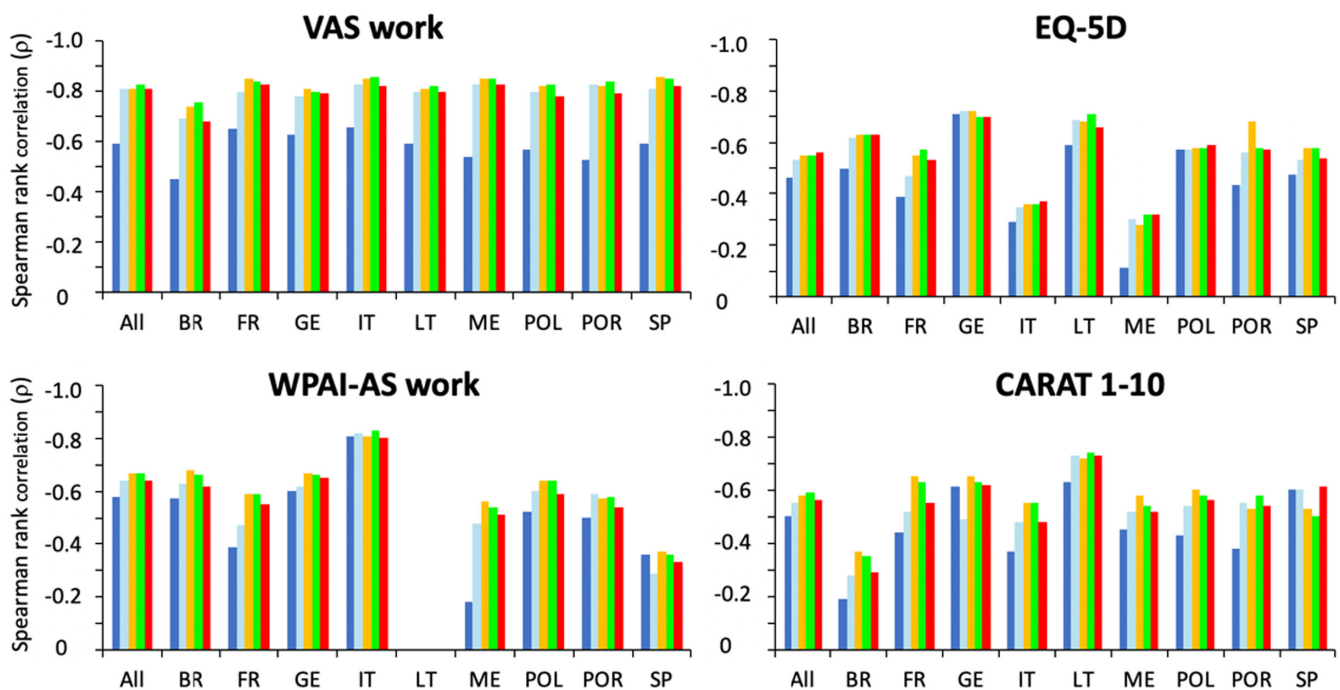
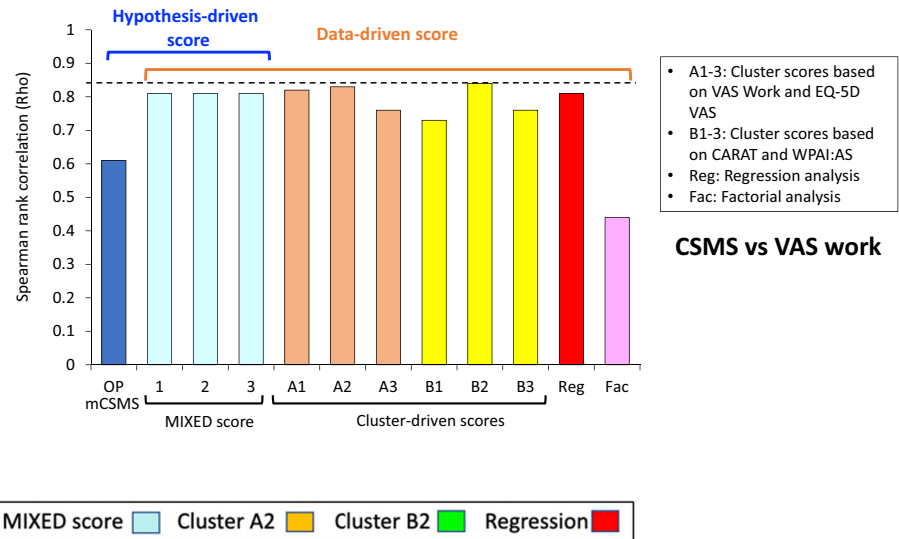


FIGURE 6 Allergy-CSMS validation in different countries.

#### 4.4 | Potential impact of the ARIA-EAACI allergy-CSMS in allergic diseases

##### 4.4.1 | Overall impact

The allergy-CSMS is a **daily, validated, real-life, digitally-enabled, patient-centered biomarker for any allergic treatment including AIT**. The allergy-CSMS bridges clinical practice, randomized controlled trials (RCTs), observational studies, chamber studies, and real-world data (RWD) (Table 4):

Importantly, the allergy-CSMS is centered around the patient (with its inputs including VAS on respiratory allergic symptoms). It includes quality-of-life measures (VAS EQ-5D, now included daily in

MASK-air®) and the assessment of the impact of work (VAS work was found to be a reliable end point<sup>55,66,82</sup>).

##### 4.4.2 | Implication in allergen immunotherapy (AIT)

In AIT, the allergy-CSMS can be used to (i) stratify patients (uncontrolled days during the allergen exposure, for example, pollen season, despite guideline-based treatment in patients adherent to treatment), (ii) propose an early stopping rule, (iii) follow the patient during the treatment, and (iv) follow the patient during the after-cessation follow-up (Figure 7). However, a dual approach can be proposed combining the daily allergy-CSMS with



a control test for allergic diseases assessing at least 1 month of survey.

## 5 | THE ARIA-EAACI APPROACH USING THE MASK-AIR® APP IN ASTHMA

### 5.1 | PROMs

#### 5.1.1 | Visual analogue scales for asthma

PROMs for asthma have also been evaluated.<sup>52,65</sup> Correlations between VAS asthma and other MASK-air® daily reported PROMs were studied in severe asthmatic patients (reporting long-acting muscarinic agonists and/or omalizumab) with nasal symptoms. Strong correlations were found between VAS asthma and other measures (Table 5).

TABLE 4 Potential implications of the allergy-CSMS.

#### 1. Clinical practice

- Indication of a treatment in stratified patients
- Follow-up of a treatment and early stopping rule
- Follow-up of a treatment and regular review of efficacy
- Follow-up of the patient when the treatment is stopped
- Re-introduction and follow-up of the treatment in patients who relapsed

2. RCTs: mHealth biomarkers are currently exploratory end points but may become primary end points mimicking real life after validation

3. Observational studies can triangulate RCTs and make a link with clinical practice

4. Real-world data are the data relating to patient health status and/or to the delivery of health care. They are routinely collected from a variety of sources including apps. They enable large simple trials and pragmatic clinical trials to be performed

5. Epidemiologic studies will use the same approach to better relate RCTs and clinical practice

6. Allergen challenge can triangulate RCTs and make a link with clinical practice

Abbreviations: CSMS, ARIA-EAACI allergy Combined Symptom-Medication Score; RCT, Randomized Controlled Trials.

The cutoff values for VAS asthma are 0/100 (fully-controlled asthma), 1–19/100 (partly-controlled asthma), 20–35/100 (partly-uncontrolled asthma), and  $\geq 36/100$  (uncontrolled asthma).

#### 5.1.2 | Correlation between VAS asthma and Asthma Control Test (ACT)

A random observational trial evaluated the usefulness of the MASK-air® app in improving rhinitis control in 262 patients with AR.<sup>87</sup> There was a significant correlation between VAS asthma and the ACT score (Pearson  $-0.79132$ ,  $p < 0.0001$ ).

#### 5.1.3 | CARAT

CARAT, a PROM developed for assessing the control of asthma and AR at a 4-week interval, has been evaluated in several studies. A systematic review has aimed to evaluate the measurement properties of CARAT.<sup>35–37,52,88–92</sup> A total of 16 studies were included. CARAT was found to have sufficient content validity and to have a bifactorial structure with good consistency (meta-analytical Cronbach alpha=0.83; 95% CI=0.80–0.86;  $I^2=62.6\%$ ). The CARAT meta-analytical intra-class correlation coefficient was 0.91; 95% CI=0.64–0.98;  $I^2=93.7\%$ . It presented good construct validity—especially for correlations with PROMs assessing asthma (range of absolute Spearman correlation coefficients: 0.68 to 0.73; moderate quality of evidence)—as well as good responsiveness. Its minimal important difference was 3.5 (out of 30). CARAT can be used to assess the control of asthma and AR.

### 5.2 | Development and validation of the daily electronic asthma control score (e-DASTHMA) (online ANNEX 4)

#### 5.2.1 | Selection of the digital tool

An automatic market research investigated the asthma apps that can be used to develop an e-DASTHMA. MASK-air® appears to be the

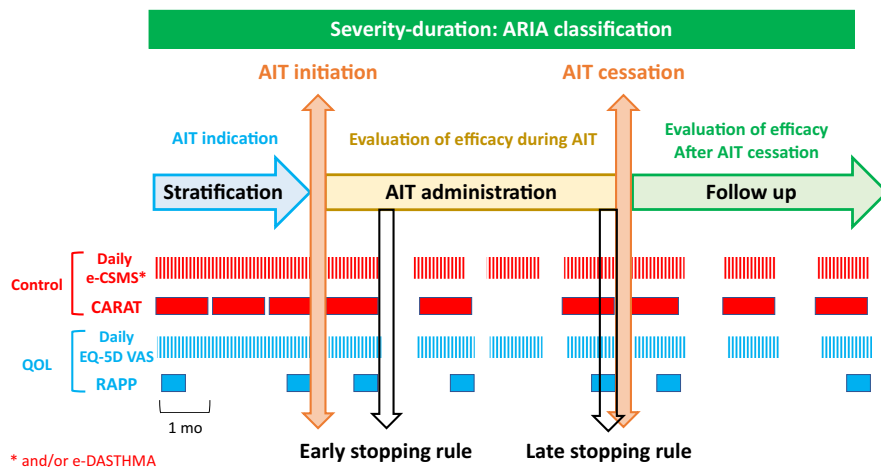


FIGURE 7 Applicability of digital biomarkers in AIT for allergic rhinitis.

TABLE 5 Correlation coefficients between different PROMs in severe asthma (from<sup>65</sup>).

	N observations	Spearman correlation coefficient (95% CI)	Repeated measures correlation coefficient (95% CI) <sup>105</sup>
VAS asthma vs. VAS dyspnea	1862	0.898 (0.879; 0.915)	0.713 (0.690; 0.735)
VAS asthma vs. VAS global	4822	0.767 (0.750; 0.784)	0.544 (0.524; 0.564)
VAS asthma vs. VAS nose	4822	0.755 (0.738; 0.771)	0.465 (0.443; 0.487)
VAS asthma vs. VAS eyes	4822	0.640 (0.620; 0.661)	0.378 (0.354; 0.402)
VAS asthma vs. VAS work	1840	0.768 (0.739; 0.793)	0.658 (0.631; 0.683)
VAS asthma vs. VAS sleep	4168	0.637 (0.613; 0.658)	0.339 (0.312; 0.366)
VAS asthma vs. CSMS	4822	0.875 (0.865; 0.884)	0.747 (0.734; 0.759)

Abbreviations: CSMS, ARIA-EAACI allergy Combined Symptom-Medication Score; VAS, Visual analogue scale.

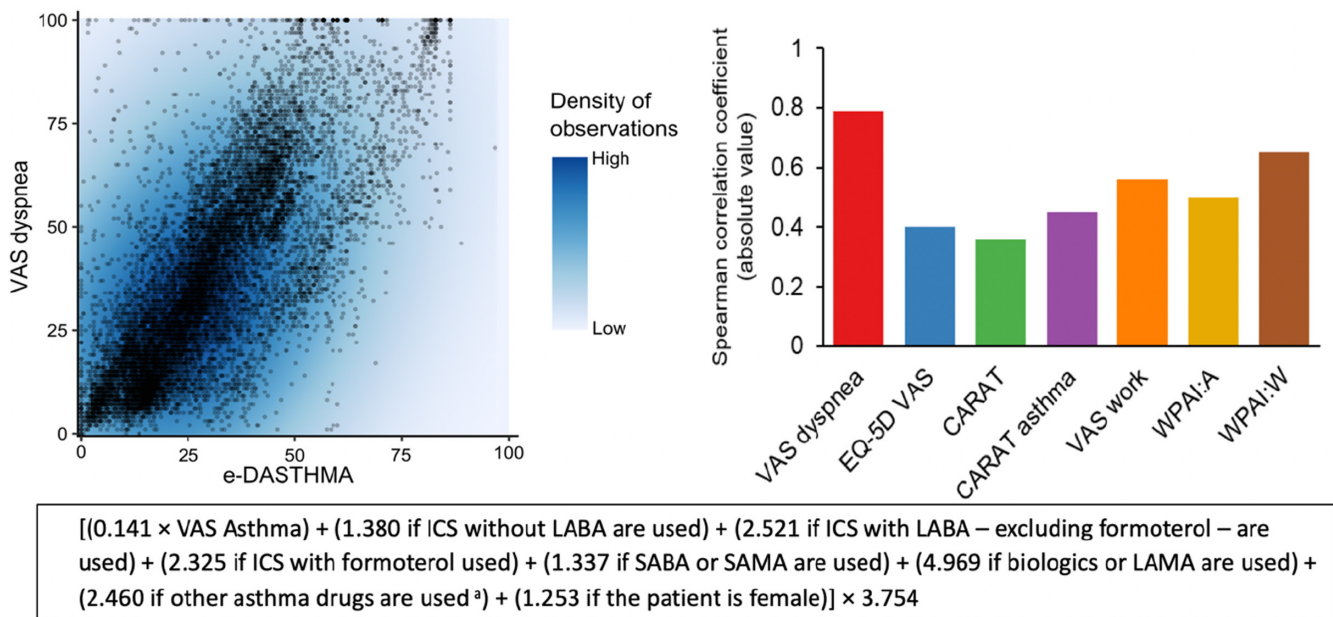


FIGURE 8 Correlations between e-DASTHMA and comparators.

only one that can be used, and the database of MASK-air included more patients than other apps.

## 5.2.2 | Development of e-DASTHMA

Data-driven control scores were developed based on (i) asthma symptoms reported by a VAS and (ii) reported asthma medication use. For each score, construct validity, test-retest reliability, and responsiveness were assessed. VASs on dyspnea and work, EQ-5D VAS, CARAT, CARAT-asthma and WPAI:AS were used as comparators.

A total of 135,635 days of MASK-air® data were studied from 1662 users. Cluster- and linear regression-based scales were strongly correlated with VAS dyspnea (Spearman correlation Rho range=0.57 to 0.99) and moderately correlated with work- and quality-of-life-related

comparators (Rho range=0.33–0.68). They displayed high test-retest reliability and moderate-to-high responsiveness (Figure 8).

## 5.2.3 | Validation of the asthma-CSMS in an external cohort (INSPIRERS)

An external validation of eDASTHMA was performed—using a cohort of patients with physician-diagnosed asthma (INSPIRERS)—in 69 patients and 425 days.<sup>93</sup> The daily activity scores of INSPIRERS were correlated with e-DASTHMA scores (Rho=0.70; 95% CI=0.61;0.78). In addition, the areas under ROC curves (AUC-ROC) compared the performance of e-DASTHMA scores to the GINA classification of patients (assessed at medical evaluation) with uncontrolled/partly-controlled versus controlled asthma. The best-performing score displayed good accuracy for the identification

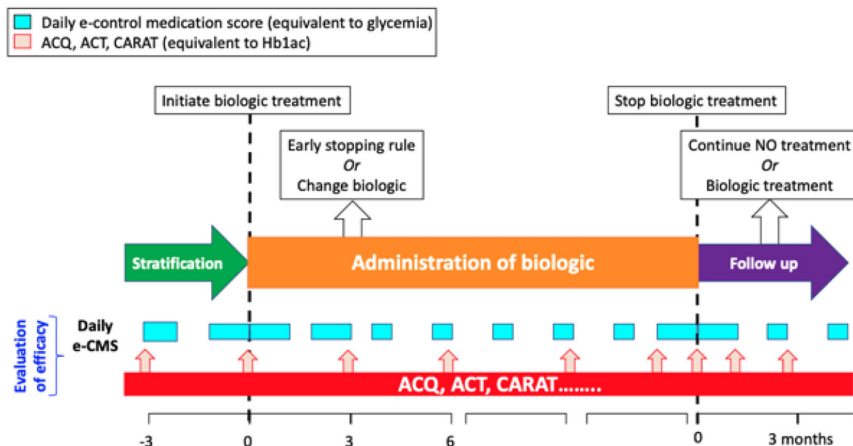


FIGURE 9 Applicability of digital biomarkers in severe asthma using the diabetes approach.

of patients with uncontrolled/partially-controlled asthma (AUC-ROC=0.74; 95% CI=0.68;0.78).

### 5.3 | Application to the biologic treatment of severe asthma

Currently, a major criterion to initiate or stop a biologic in asthma is the frequency of exacerbations. In MASK-air®, exacerbations can be defined by the occurrence of uncontrolled VAS using the cutoffs calculated ( $VAS \geq 36/100$ ) and/or the use of oral corticosteroids. With the available data on file, MASK-air® researchers are assessing whether the change in e-DASTHMA could be associated with an exacerbation. Moreover, in future studies, with the new development of MASK-air® (MDR Class IIa), e-DASTHMA values will be refined (Figure 9).

### 5.4 | Application to the treatment of mild/moderate asthma

Among other possible studies, one is of particular importance. In mild to moderate asthma, PRN (Pro re nata, as needed) treatment with formoterol/ICS (inhaled corticosteroids) combination is favored to short-acting  $\beta$ -agonists (LABAs).<sup>94</sup> However, this recommendation is not accepted widely as the costs incurred by Formoterol/ICS are higher than those of generic SABAs, and Formoterol/ICS is not available globally. One of the studies in MASK-air® (unpublished) suggests that combination therapy is more effective than SABAs and might also be cost-effective.

The MASK-air® diabetes approach may be applied (i) to confirm the importance of the new strategy for payers, (ii) to improve the global use of this strategy by optimizing the WHO essential list of drugs,<sup>95</sup> (iii) to follow-up patients in clinical practice, (iv) to propose novel algorithms based on RWD, and (v) to develop next-generation guidelines based on RWD and evidence-based medicine.<sup>96</sup>

## 6 | DIGITAL BIOMARKERS IN OCCUPATIONAL ALLERGY AND ASTHMA

The diagnosis and management of occupational allergic diseases and asthma are often difficult. The relative role of nasal, ocular, and bronchial symptoms may be complicated,<sup>97</sup> and they often overlap.<sup>67</sup> MASK-air® can assess days with exposure to work. It can also easily compare the different symptoms during and outside exposure as well as the control of allergy and asthma. When validated, digital biomarkers may prove to be an easy and simple tool for the diagnosis of occupational asthma.

Moreover, severe occupational asthma<sup>98</sup> may be assessed combining e-DASTHMA and CARAT.

## 7 | EMBEDDING MACHINE LEARNING IN DIGITAL BIOMARKERS

Individuals with allergic respiratory diseases often suffer from a combination of asthma, conjunctivitis, and rhinitis. Because of its complexity, this allergic multimorbidity is not well understood from a research perspective. Furthermore, it is difficult to manage from a clinical viewpoint. Data analytics offer a promising way of addressing these challenges. For instance, by enabling (i) the rigorous identification of disease phenotypes<sup>99</sup> and (ii) improved estimates of the likelihood that an individual responds to a treatment.

Response to treatment has been studied using machine learning. A clinical review found that, in the past 5 years, 22 studies have successfully applied machine learning to asthma mHealth data. However, most have been developed on small datasets with internal validation. Small sample sizes and lack of external validation limit the generalizability of these studies.<sup>100</sup> Future research should collect data that are more representative of the wider asthma population and focus on validating the derived algorithms and technologies in a real-world setting.

These approaches will enable us to fully benefit from the wealth of data made available by MASK-air. The ultimate goal will be that of raising novel hypotheses concerning the response to the treatment of patients with allergic multimorbidity (asthma, conjunctivitis, rhinitis). Other studies will assess treatment algorithms and the prediction of exacerbations.

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OP, LK, and JB proposed the study. JB wrote the paper. MHS, JMA, JAF, BS-P, and WC proposed the asthma flow chart for biomarkers. HJS and TZ are working on how to integrate the results of the TF in care pathways. GWC and FB added the quality-of-life proposal. The text was then submitted to AB, RA, IJA, SB-A, CCL, BG, TH, MK, PK, MK, MO, FSR, BS, MS, ST-S, and AV. After their helpful comments, the text was sent to ARIA and EAACI members.

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## CONFLICT OF INTEREST STATEMENT

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## SUPPORTING INFORMATION

Additional supporting information can be found online in the Supporting Information section at the end of this article.

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