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Exploring the Impact of Nonsteroidal Immunosuppressive Drugs and Steroids on the Development of Comorbidities in Patients With Myasthenia Gravis in the National Veterans Affairs Health Network

Cynthia Z. Qi [1], Yilu Lin[2*], Yuebing Li[3], Tuan Vu[4], Deborah Gelinas[1], Femke De Ruyck[1], Lizheng Shi[2]

[1]argenx US Inc., Boston, MA; [2]Department of Health Policy and Management, School of Public Health and Tropical Medicine, Tulane University, New Orleans, LA; [3]Neuromuscular Center, Cleveland Clinic, Cleveland, OH; [4]University of South Florida Morsani College of Medicine, Tampa, FL; [*]Southeast Louisiana Veterans Health Care System, New Orleans, LA

INTRODUCTION AND OBJECTIVES

Introduction

- Myasthenia gravis (MG) is an autoimmune neuromuscular disorder characterized by muscle weakness and fatigue that significantly impact the quality of life for those affected.[1]
- Patients with MG often face the challenge of developing comorbidities such as cardiovascular disease, hyperlipidemia, hypertension, diabetes mellitus, respiratory disorders, and autoimmune diseases.[2-5]
- These challenges are exacerbated by the adverse events associated with the medications utilized for the treatment of MG, including steroids and nonsteroidal immunosuppressants (NSISTs). In particular, prolonged corticosteroid use can induce conditions like osteoporosis, weight gain, cardiac issues, gastrointestinal malfunction, hypertension, and glucose intolerance.[5]
- Understanding the relationship between treatment strategies and the prevalence of comorbidities can inform treatment decisions for patients.

Study Objective

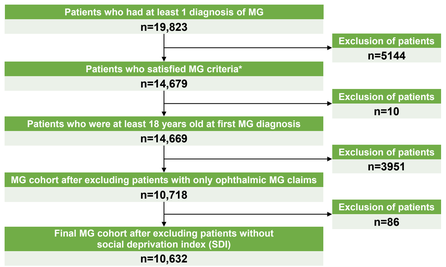
- The purpose of this study was to explore the link between the prevalence of comorbidities in MG and the use of steroids and NSISTs in its treatment.

METHODS

Study Design and Data Source

- This was a retrospective cohort study using de-identified data extracted from the National Veterans Affairs (VA) Health Care Network database from January 1999 to March 2022.
- The database contains electronic medical record (EMR) data from over 1700 sites of care serving ≈8.76 million veterans each year.
- The study cohort comprised adult patients with ≥2 diagnostic claims related to MG **(Figure 1)**.
- Patients were followed from index date (defined as the first recorded diagnosis for MG) until enrollment end date, end of the study (03/15/2022), or death.

Figure 1. Study population



*Study population diagnosis criteria referenced the best performing algorithm based on Lee et al. Muscle Nerve 2021.[6]
Abbreviations: MG, myasthenia gravis.

Study Endpoints

- 14 categories of comorbidities were evaluated: anxiety, autoimmune conditions, cardiovascular disease, depression, diabetes, gastroesophageal reflux disease (GERD), glaucoma, hyperlipidemia/ hypercholesterolemia, hypertension, infections, malignancy, osteoporosis, sleeping disorders, and thyroid disorders.
- These comorbidities were selected as either common comorbidities seen with MG or common side effects associated with steroids and NSISTs.

Statistical Analysis

- For each comorbidity of interest, a multivariate dynamic time-dependent Cox model was developed to evaluate key drivers of new comorbidity development among those without the comorbidity before index date.
- The key independent variables of interest were adjusted in the model: steroid (yes/no) and NSIST (yes/no) treatment use.
- Demographic characteristics, SDI score, Charlson Comorbidity Index (CCI), body mass index (BMI), comorbidity history, and advanced therapy use were adjusted in the model with comorbidity history, CCI, and treatment used as an annual time-dependent variable.

LIMITATIONS
The study's main limitation is that the homogeneity of the VA population reduces the external validity and limits the application of findings to a larger, more diverse population.

FINANCIAL SUPPORT
This study was funded by argenx US, Inc. (Boston, MA, USA).

RESULTS

Patient Characteristics

- A total of 10,632 patients with MG were identified and were followed for a median of 7 years (Table 1).
- Most of the patients were elderly with a mean age at diagnosis of 70.5 years.

Drug Utilization in MG Cohort (Table 1)

- Of the cohort, 51% of patients were on steroids and 14% were on NSISTs.
- Approximately 80% of patients with MG had one or more treatments, with 16% of patients receiving more than 3 treatments

Table 1. Key baseline and treatment characteristics

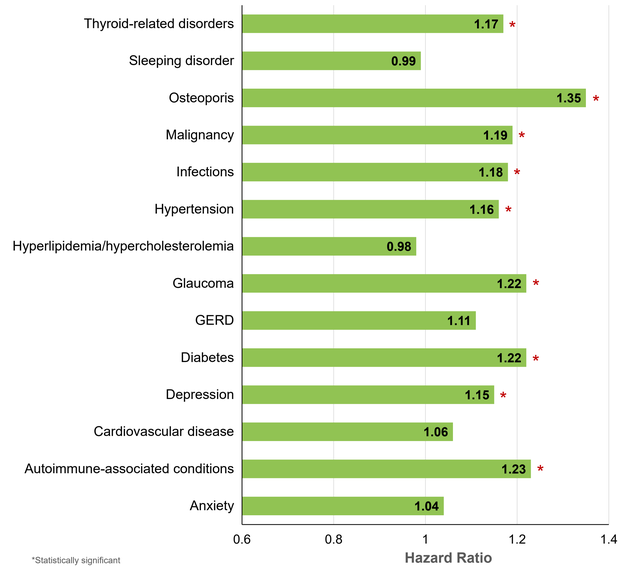
Characteristics	MG (N=10,632)	
Time to index date by year, (mean, SD)	8.43	5.27
Median (IQR) follow-up in time to index date	7	4-12
Follow-up year (mean, SD)	7.77	4.91
Age at diagnosis		
Age at index date (mean, SD)	70.47	11.53
Median, IQR	71.92	64.35-78.63
Gender		
Male (N, %)	10,178	95.73%
Race/ethnicity (N, %)		
Caucasian	7890	74.21%
African American	817	7.68%
Hispanic	447	4.20%
Other (Asian, Native American, unknown)	1478	13.9%
SDI (mean, SD)	46.98	26.40
BMI (mean, SD)	30.18	5.87
CCI (mean, SD)	0.68	1.23
Treatment during follow-up (n, %)		
Acetylcholinesterase inhibitors	8051	75.72%
Eculizumab	25	0.24%
IVIG/SCIG	1024	9.63%
NSISTs	1485	13.97%
PLEX	88	0.83%
Rituximab	119	1.12%
Steroids	5417	50.95%
Baseline comorbidities (n, %)		
Hypertension	7580	71.29%
Hyperlipidemia/hypercholesterolemia	6971	65.57%
Cardiovascular disease	5578	52.46%
Infections	5836	54.89%
Diabetes	3906	36.74%
GERD	3721	35.00%
Depression	2562	24.10%
Malignancy	1864	17.53%
Glaucoma	1809	17.01%
Thyroid-related disorders	1657	15.59%
Autoimmune-associated conditions*	1035	9.73%
Sleeping disorder	862	8.11%
Osteoporosis	530	4.98%
Anxiety	386	3.63%

Abbreviations: BMI, body mass index; CCI, Charlson comorbidity index; IQR, interquartile range; IVIg, intravenous immunoglobulin; NSIST, nonsteroidal immunosuppressive therapy; PLEX, plasma exchange; SCIg, subcutaneous immunoglobulin; SD, standard deviation; SDI, social deprivation index.

Treatment Impact on Comorbidity Development

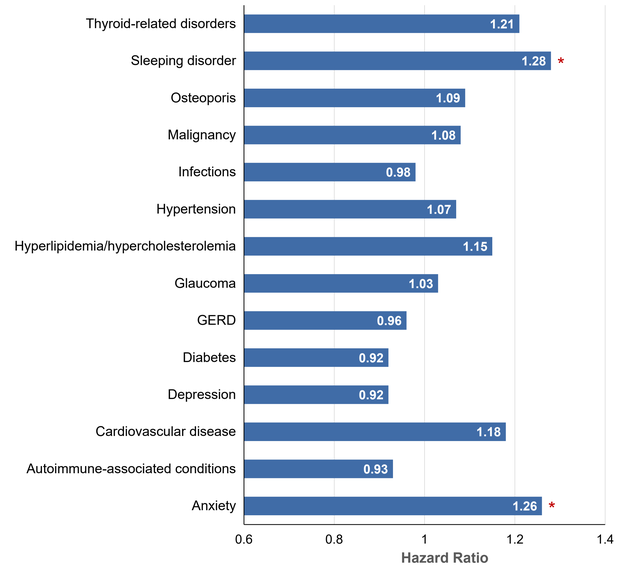
- After adjusting for key patient demographic, disease-related characteristics, and treatments, steroid administration was associated with a significantly higher risk of developing osteoporosis (hazard ratio [HR]: 1.35), autoimmune conditions (HR: 1.23), glaucoma (HR: 1.22), diabetes (HR: 1.22), malignancy (HR: 1.19), infection (HR: 1.18), thyroid disorders (HR: 1.17), and depression (HR: 1.15) (all P <.05) **(Figure 2)**.
- Use of NSISTs was associated with a significantly elevated risk of anxiety (HR:1.26) and sleep disorders (HR:1.28) (all P <.05) **(Figure 3)**.

Figure 2. Risk of developing new comorbidities (steroid use vs no steroid use)



*Statistically significant

Figure 3. Risk of developing new comorbidities (NSIST use vs no NSIST use)



Other Factors Associated With New Comorbidity Development

- Older age at MG diagnosis significantly increased the risk of developing comorbidities (P <.001).
- An increase in the CCI significantly heightened the risk of overall comorbidity development (p<0.001), while the SDI did not play a significant role in comorbidity development.

CONCLUSION

- Conventional immunosuppressive therapies like steroids and NSISTs substantially increased the risk of developing several comorbidities in patients with MG, including diabetes, infections, malignancy, glaucoma, and osteoporosis.
- This result suggests the importance of considering the potential impact of comorbidities on treatment choice for patients with MG.

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Presented at Myasthenia Gravis Foundation of America (MGFA) Scientific Session at the American Association of Neuromuscular and Electrodiagnostic Medicine (AANEM) Annual Meeting; October 15-18, 2024; Savannah, GA