

# Type A Aortic Dissection Calls for Experience

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SNOWMASS, COLO. — Widespread physician awareness that type A aortic dissection carries a steep mortality of roughly 1% per hour from the time of symptom onset has paradoxically hindered patient management, Dr. Andrew S. Wechsler said at a conference sponsored by the Society for Cardiovascular Angiography and Interventions.

“The sense of urgency associated with ascending aortic dissections frequently results in patients being treated by local surgeons at centers that are not experienced in the management of acute aortic dissections. I believe that the 1%-2% loss rate per hour is paid back manyfold by a 1- or 2-hour delay for emergent referral to experienced centers. Mortality will ultimately be much less for the patient years from the surgery,” argued Dr. Wechsler, professor and chair of cardiothoracic

surgery at Hahnemann University Hospital, Philadelphia.

That’s because optimal surgical management of type A aortic dissection often requires highly complex intraoperative decision-making that is too complex for surgeons lacking extensive experience in these situations. The average surgeon tends to focus on immediate patient survival without considering other issues having a big impact on the late complication rate.

“This is what every surgeon would love

to do in treating an ascending aortic dissection: They would treat a limited tear in the proximal ascending aorta above the aortic valve that ended above the brachiocephalic vessels. The operation involved is the simple insertion of a supraannular interposition graft, probably with cross-clamping of the aorta. The desire to do this operation—and its low mortality—is so great that it frequently overrides the need to do a more complex operation which would result in a much better long-term outcome for the patient,” he explained.

Among the key issues that ought to be addressed—but frequently aren’t—are how best to manage the distal aorta.

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Would a technically challenging hemiarch replacement or an even more daunting complete arch replacement yield better long-term results than a simple interposition graft? And what about the aortic valve—replace it, resuspend it, or replace the aortic root?

The most basic aspect of surgical treatment for aortic dissection is removal of the portion of the aorta containing the intimal tear. Beyond that, however, the other fundamental goals of these operations are as poorly understood by most surgeons as by nonsurgeons, according to Dr. Wechsler, editor of the *Journal of Thoracic and Cardiovascular Surgery*.

Type A aortic dissection should be thought of as more than an acute event. Late complications of surgery include re-dissection, formation and expansion of an aneurysm, aortic insufficiency, and organ ischemia. There is a high long-term complication rate at most cardiac-surgery centers, and the reoperative mortality rate is typically 20% or more. In contrast, the complication rate at highly experienced centers is far less, and reoperative mortalities in such centers are in the range of 4%, he continued.

The International Registry of Aortic Dissection (IRAD) has provided “incredibly valuable information” on both the natural history of aortic dissection and the surgical impact, he said. At IRAD centers—not all of which have vast experience—perioperative mortality in type A aortic dissections is 27%. In contrast, the surgical literature is replete with single-institution series reporting mortality rates of around 13%.

“Why do those results differ so much from those in the real-world experience as reflected in IRAD? The answer is that people who get lousy results with aortic dissection don’t report them. The numbers you see in the literature are the best that can be found. Real-world results for type A dissection are far worse than reported, and far worse than most people believe them to be,” Dr. Wechsler stressed.

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Fertility and reproductive performance were not affected in studies with male and female rats given oral doses of up to 300 mg/kg/day (83 times the maximum daily human dose of 32 mg on a body surface area basis).

### Pregnancy

*Pregnancy Categories C* (first trimester) and *D* (second and third trimesters)—See WARNINGS, Fetal/Neonatal Morbidity and Mortality.

### Nursing Mothers

It is not known whether candesartan is excreted in human milk, but candesartan has been shown to be present in rat milk. Because of the potential for adverse effects on the nursing infant, a decision should be made whether to discontinue nursing or discontinue the drug, taking into account the importance of the drug to the mother.

### Pediatric Use

Safety and effectiveness in pediatric patients have not been established.

### Geriatric Use

Hypertension  
Of the total number of subjects in clinical studies of ATACAND, 21% (683/3260) were 65 and over, while 3% (87/3260) were 75 and over. No overall differences in safety or effectiveness were observed between these subjects and younger subjects, and other reported clinical experience has not identified differences in responses between the elderly and younger patients, but greater sensitivity of some older individuals cannot be ruled out. In a placebo-controlled trial of about 200 elderly hypertensive patients (ages 65 to 87 years), administration of candesartan cilexetil was well tolerated and lowered blood pressure by about 12/6 mm Hg more than placebo.

### Heart Failure

Of the 7599 patients with heart failure in the CHARM program, 4343 (57%) were age 65 years or older and 1736 (23%) were 75 years or older. In patients ≥75 years of age, the incidence of drug discontinuations due to adverse events was higher for those treated with ATACAND or placebo compared with patients <75 years of age. In these patients, the most common adverse events leading to drug discontinuation at an incidence of at least 3%, and more frequent with ATACAND than placebo, were abnormal renal function (7.9% vs. 4.0%), hypotension (5.2% vs. 3.2%) and hyperkalemia (4.2% vs. 0.9%). In addition to monitoring of serum creatinine, potassium, and blood pressure during dose escalation and periodically thereafter, greater sensitivity of some older individuals with heart failure must be considered.

## ADVERSE REACTIONS

### Hypertension

ATACAND has been evaluated for safety in more than 3600 patients/subjects, including more than 3200 patients treated for hypertension. About 600 of these patients were studied for at least 6 months and about 200 for at least 1 year. In general, treatment with ATACAND was well tolerated. The overall incidence of adverse events reported with ATACAND was similar to placebo.

The rate of withdrawals due to adverse events in all trials in patients (7510 total) was 3.3% (ie, 108 of 3260) of patients treated with candesartan cilexetil as monotherapy and 3.5% (ie, 39 of 1106) of patients treated with placebo. In placebo-controlled trials, discontinuation of therapy due to clinical adverse events occurred in 2.4% (ie, 57 of 2350) of patients treated with ATACAND and 3.4% (ie, 35 of 1027) of patients treated with placebo.

The most common reasons for discontinuation of therapy with ATACAND were headache (0.6%) and dizziness (0.3%).

The adverse events that occurred in placebo-controlled clinical trials in at least 1% of patients treated with ATACAND and at a higher incidence in candesartan cilexetil (n=2350) than placebo (n=1027) patients included back pain (3% vs. 2%), dizziness (4% vs. 3%), upper respiratory tract infection (6% vs. 4%), pharyngitis (2% vs. 1%), and rhinitis (2% vs. 1%).

The following adverse events occurred in placebo-controlled clinical trials at a more than 1% rate but at about the same or greater incidence in patients receiving placebo compared to candesartan cilexetil: fatigue, peripheral

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edema, chest pain, headache, bronchitis, coughing, sinusitis, nausea, abdominal pain, diarrhea, vomiting, arthralgia, albuminuria.

Other potentially important adverse events that have been reported, whether or not attributed to treatment, with an incidence of 0.5% or greater from the 3260 patients worldwide treated in clinical trials with ATACAND are listed below. It cannot be determined whether these events were causally related to ATACAND. **Body as a Whole:** asthenia, fever; **Central and Peripheral Nervous System:** paresthesia, vertigo; **Gastrointestinal System Disorder:** dyspepsia, gastroenteritis; **Heart Rate and Rhythm Disorders:** tachycardia, palpitation; **Metabolic and Nutritional Disorders:** creatine phosphokinase increased, hyperglycemia, hypertriglyceridemia, hyperuricemia; **Musculoskeletal System Disorders:** myalgia; **Platelet/Bleeding-Clotting Disorders:** epistaxis; **Psychiatric Disorders:** anxiety, depression, somnolence; **Respiratory System Disorders:** dyspnea; **Skin and Appendages Disorders:** rash, sweating increased; **Urinary System Disorders:** hematuria.

Other reported events seen less frequently included angina pectoris, myocardial infarction, and angioedema.

Adverse events occurred at about the same rates in men and women, older and younger patients, and black and non-black patients.

### Heart Failure

The adverse event profile of ATACAND in heart failure patients was consistent with the pharmacology of the drug and the health status of the patients. In the CHARM program, comparing ATACAND in total daily doses up to 32 mg once daily (n=3803) with placebo (n=3796), 21.0% of patients discontinued ATACAND for adverse events vs. 16.1% of placebo patients.

### Post-Marketing Experience:

The following have been very rarely reported in post-marketing experience:

**Digestive:** Abnormal hepatic function and hepatitis.

**Hematologic:** Neutropenia, leukopenia, and agranulocytosis.

**Metabolic and Nutritional Disorders:** hyperkalemia, hyponatremia.

**Renal:** renal impairment, renal failure.

**Skin and Appendages Disorders:** Pruritis and urticaria.

Rare reports of rhabdomyolysis have been reported in patients receiving angiotensin II receptor blockers.

### Laboratory Test Findings

#### Hypertension

In controlled clinical trials, clinically important changes in standard laboratory parameters were rarely associated with the administration of ATACAND.

**Creatinine, Blood Urea Nitrogen**—Minor increases in blood urea nitrogen (BUN) and serum creatinine were observed infrequently.

**Hyperuricemia**—Hyperuricemia was rarely found (19 or 0.6% of 3260 patients treated with candesartan cilexetil and 5 or 0.5% of 1106 patients treated with placebo).

**Hemoglobin and Hematocrit**—Small decreases in hemoglobin and hematocrit (mean decreases of approximately 0.2 grams/dL and 0.5 volume percent, respectively) were observed in patients treated with ATACAND alone but were rarely of clinical importance. Anemia, leukopenia, and thrombocytopenia were associated with withdrawal of one patient each from clinical trials.

**Potassium**—A small increase (mean increase of 0.1 mEq/L) was observed in patients treated with ATACAND alone but was rarely of clinical importance. One patient from a congestive heart failure trial was withdrawn for hyperkalemia (serum potassium = 7.5 mEq/L). This patient was also receiving spironolactone.

**Liver Function Tests**—Elevations of liver enzymes and/or serum bilirubin were observed infrequently. Five patients assigned to candesartan cilexetil in clinical trials were withdrawn because of abnormal liver chemistries. All had elevated transaminases. Two had mildly elevated total bilirubin, but one of these patients was diagnosed with Hepatitis A.

#### Heart Failure

In the CHARM program, small increases in serum creatinine (mean increase 0.2 mg/dL in candesartan-treated

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patients and 0.1 mg/dL in placebo-treated patients) and serum potassium (mean increase 0.15 mEq/L in candesartan-treated patients and 0.02 mEq/L in placebo-treated patients), and small decreases in hemoglobin (mean decrease 0.5 gm/dL in candesartan-treated patients and 0.3 gm/dL in placebo-treated patients) and hematocrit (mean decrease 1.6% in candesartan-treated patients and 0.9% in placebo-treated patients) were observed.

### OVERDOSAGE

No lethality was observed in acute toxicity studies in mice, rats, and dogs given single oral doses of up to 2000 mg/kg of candesartan cilexetil. In mice given single oral doses of the primary metabolite, candesartan, the minimum lethal dose was greater than 1000 mg/kg but less than 2000 mg/kg.

The most likely manifestation of overdosage with ATACAND would be hypotension, dizziness, and tachycardia; bradycardia could occur from parasympathetic (vagal) stimulation. If symptomatic hypotension should occur, supportive treatment should be instituted.

Candesartan cannot be removed by hemodialysis.

**Treatment:** To obtain up-to-date information about the treatment of overdose, consult your Regional Poison Control Center. Telephone numbers of certified poison control centers are listed in the *Physicians' Desk Reference (PDR)*. In managing overdose, consider the possibilities of multiple-drug overdoses, drug-drug interactions, and altered pharmacokinetics in your patient.

## DOSAGE AND ADMINISTRATION

### Hypertension

Dosage must be individualized. Blood pressure response is dose related over the range of 2 to 32 mg. The usual recommended starting dose of ATACAND is 16 mg once daily when it is used as monotherapy in patients who are not volume depleted. ATACAND can be administered once or twice daily with total daily doses ranging from 8 mg to 32 mg. Larger doses do not appear to have a greater effect, and there is relatively little experience with such doses. Most of the antihypertensive effect is present within 2 weeks, and maximal blood pressure reduction is generally obtained within 4 to 6 weeks of treatment with ATACAND.

No initial dosage adjustment is necessary for elderly patients, for patients with mildly impaired renal function, or for patients with mildly impaired hepatic function (see CLINICAL PHARMACOLOGY, Special Populations). In patients with moderate hepatic impairment, consideration should be given to initiation of ATACAND at a lower dose (See CLINICAL PHARMACOLOGY, Special Populations). For patients with possible depletion of intravascular volume (eg, patients treated with diuretics, particularly those with impaired renal function), ATACAND should be initiated under close medical supervision and consideration should be given to administration of a lower dose (see WARNINGS, Hypotension in Volume- and Salt-Depleted Patients).

ATACAND may be administered with or without food.

If blood pressure is not controlled by ATACAND alone, a diuretic may be added. ATACAND may be administered with other antihypertensive agents.

### Heart Failure

The recommended initial dose for treating heart failure is 4 mg once daily. The target dose is 32 mg once daily, which is achieved by doubling the dose at approximately 2-week intervals, as tolerated by the patient.

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