



dialysis patients have a higher prevalence of cardiovascular risk factors compared to general population, but the relative contribution of traditional versus non-traditional risk factors for the development of pre-existing cardiovascular disease, and their influence on hemodialysis treatment outcome, remains unclear (4). We postulated that the presence of pre-existing cardiovascular risk factors and diseases at the beginning of the hemodialysis treatment predicted its outcome.

The aim of the study was to identify independent predictors of hemodialysis treatment outcome among major cardiovascular risk factors and the pre-existing cardiovascular diseases in patients with end-stage renal disease who were on maintenance hemodialysis.

### Patients and Methods

This prospective study was designed to identify different variables as independent predictors of hemodialysis treatment outcome. For that purpose, we evaluated the cardiovascular morbidity and mortality and prevalence of the cardiovascular risk factors in the patients on maintenance hemodialysis. The study was conducted at the Department of Nephrology and Dialysis, Rijeka University Hospital, Rijeka, Croatia.

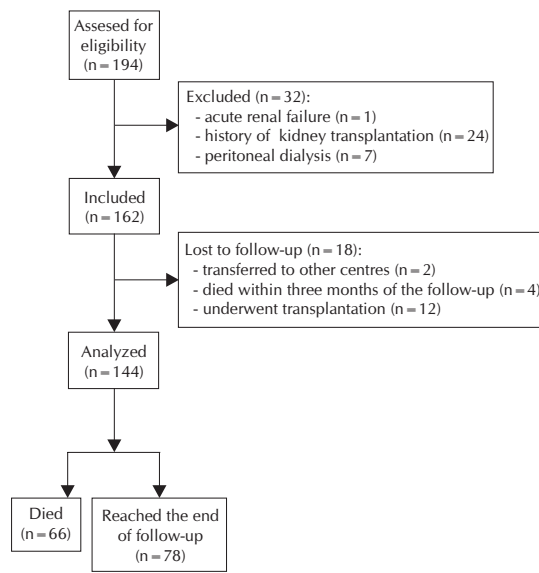
#### Patients

From January 1998 to December 2001, 194 prevalent hemodialysis patients on the maintenance hemodialysis at the Department of Nephrology and Dialysis were assessed for eligibility (Fig. 1). Only patients with end-stage renal disease who were on maintenance hemodialysis as a renal replacement therapy were included in the study. We excluded patients undergoing hemodialysis because of acute renal failure or kidney transplantation and patients undergoing peritoneal dialysis as a replacement therapy of end-stage renal disease at any time. There were 162 patients included in the study, and 144 were analyzed at the end of the follow-up (Fig. 1, Table 1). The patients were followed-up to December 2003.

#### Methods

The underlying renal disease in patients enrolled in the study was identified on the basis of the anamnestic and clinical data and previous medical records. The end-stage renal disease was defined as a permanent and irreversible loss of renal function requiring renal replacement therapy.

Hemodialysis was performed three times a week for 4 hours each session. Conventional bicarbonate-buffered dialysate and either semi-synthetic (cellulose diacetate) or synthetic (polysulfone) di-



**Figure 1.** Flow of the patients through the study.

**Table 1.** Demographic characteristics, vascular access data, underlying renal diseases, and pre-existent cardiovascular diseases in patients with end-stage renal disease

Characteristic	No. (%) of patients
Sex:	
men	71 (49.3)
women	73 (50.7)
Age at the beginning of the study (years):	
≤19	1 (0.7)
20-49	16 (11.1)
50-69	61 (42.4)
≥70	66 (45.8)
Age at the beginning of hemodialysis (years):	
≤19	4 (2.8)
20-49	23 (16)
50-69	79 (54.9)
≥70	38 (26.4)
Vascular access type:	
arteriovenous fistula	114 (79.1)
arteriovenous synthetic graft	4 (2.8)
central venous catheter (permanent type)	26 (18.1)
Underlying renal disease:	
diabetic nephropathy	44 (30.6)
glomerulonephritis	30 (20.8)
vascular disease	25 (17.4)
pyelonephritis	14 (9.6)
polycystic disease	11 (7.6)
interstitial nephritis	5 (3.5)
other	15 (10.5)
Pre-existent cardiovascular diseases:	
hypertensive heart disease	90 (62.5)
ischemic heart disease	48 (33.3)
peripheral vascular disease	44 (30.6)
cerebrovascular disease	20 (13.9)
valvular disease	19 (13.2)
dilated cardiomyopathy	9 (6.3)

alysis membrane were used in all patients. The standard method of blood sampling and calculating urea reduction according to the present clinical guidelines was used to measure the delivered dialysis dose. The following procedure was used: at the end of hemodialysis session, we set ultrafiltration rate to zero, decreased the blood flow to 100 mL/min for 15 s, and then drew the blood sample from the arterial sampling port nearest to the patient. The result was calculated according to the following formula:  $eKt/V = spKt/V - (0.47 \times spKt/V/T) + 0.02$ . The target  $eKt/V$  value was  $\geq 1.2$ . A standard procedure was used to calculate urea removal once a week (middle session), as it has been standard procedure at our Department (5,6).

The stratification of cardiovascular risk factors included identification of the traditional risk factors according to the Framingham study (7-9). High blood pressure was defined as systolic blood pressure  $> 140$  mm Hg and diastolic  $> 90$  mm Hg for three consecutive measurements starting at each hemodialysis session. Hyperglycemia was defined as fasting plasma glucose concentration  $> 6.1$  mmol/L. Hypercholesterolemia was defined as a total serum cholesterol concentration  $> 5.0$  mmol/L (10). The habit of current smoking was determined from anamnestic data. Non-traditional (uremia-related) risk factors were also determined. Anemia was defined as hemoglobin concentration  $< 110$  g/L in the presence of sufficient iron supplementation (serum ferritin concentration  $> 100$  mg/L), regardless of erythropoietin therapy. Malnutrition was defined as progressive weight loss of  $> 5\%$  during the three months before hemodialysis treatment, low body mass index, and serum albumin concentration  $< 35$  g/L. Hyperphosphatemia was defined as serum phosphorus concentration  $> 1.6$  mmol/L. The chronic overhydration was defined as interdialytic weight gain over three liters and inadequate "dry weight" achievement three months after beginning of hemodialysis treatment.

The pre-existent cardiovascular disease was defined according to clinical criteria and electrocardiographic (ECG), radiologic, and echocardiographic findings. The standard clinical procedure was used. Hypertensive heart disease, ischemic heart disease, dilated cardiomyopathy, valvular disease, cerebrovascular disease, and peripheral vascular disease were defined according to present clinical criteria (11).

Primary outcome measure was the patient's death as a treatment outcome and related causes of death. Secondary outcome measure was the hemodialysis treatment outcome for the patients who reached the end of the follow-up defined as a period of time from the beginning of hemodialysis treatment to the end of the study or patient's death.

A panel of three physicians reviewed and assigned an underlying cause to each patient's death. As a part of the review process, all available medical information on each death was collected. This information always included study and hospitalization records. In the case of an out-of-hospital death, family members were interviewed by telephone to ascertain the circumstances of death. For the patients who reached the end of follow-up, the data of hemodialysis treatment outcome were recorded.

#### Statistical Analysis

All data are presented either as median and range or frequencies. Logistic regression was used to predict the hemodialysis treatment outcome based on cardiovascular risk factors and pre-existent cardiovascular diseases. Independent associations of hemodialysis treatment outcome with different variables were evaluated by stepwise multiple linear regression analysis. *P* values of  $< 0.05$  were considered significant. Statistical analysis was performed with MedCalc, release 7.5 (MedCalc, Mariakerke, Belgium).

#### Results

During the follow-up, 66 (45.8%) patients died, with median hemodialysis treatment duration of 25 months (range, 3-144 months). The major cause of death was cardiovascular disease in 40 (60.6%) patients. Acute myocardial infarction in 15 (22.7%) patients was the major single cause of death (Table 2). Seventy-eight (54.2%) patients reached the end of follow-up, with median duration of hemodialysis treatment of 54 months

**Table 2.** Major causes of death in patients with end-stage renal disease

Cause of death	No. (%) of patients
Myocardial infarction	15 (22.7)
Heart failure	13 (19.7)
Cerebrovascular disease	12 (18.2)
Sepsis	12 (18.2)
Malignant tumors	7 (10.6)
Hyperkalemia	4 (6.1)
Pneumonia	3 (4.5)

(range, 30-178 months). The overall median duration of hemodialysis treatment in this study was 41 months (range, 3-178 months). Several variables strongly influenced the hemodialysis treatment outcome.

Cardiovascular risk factors were common in patients included in the study. There was a high prevalence of both traditional and non-traditional cardiovascular risk factors. To analyze the influence of these risk factors, we performed a stepwise multiple linear regression in a model constructed with four traditional (high blood pressure, hyperglycemia, hypercholesterolemia, and current smoking), and six non-traditional (anemia, malnutrition, chronic overhydration, delivered dialysis dose, hyperphosphatemia, and use of semi-synthetic membrane) risk factors potentially related to hemodialysis treatment outcome. Four cardiovascular risk factors were independently associated with the hemodialysis treatment outcome in decreasing order of significance: hyperglycemia, semi-synthetic membrane, delivered dialysis dose, and anemia (Table 3). Other variables had no significant independent correlation with the hemodialysis treatment outcome, and were removed from the model.

**Table 3.** Stepwise multiple linear regression analysis of hemodialysis duration as a dependent variable on related cardiovascular risk factors\*

Independent variable	$\beta$	P
Hyperglycemia	-2.165	<0.001
Semi-synthetic membrane	2.499	<0.001
Delivered dialysis dose	-2.912	<0.001
Anemia	-1.197	0.041

\*Included variables were high blood pressure, hyperglycemia, hypercholesterolemia, current smoking, anemia, malnutrition, chronic overhydration, delivered dialysis dose, hyperphosphatemia, and use of semi-synthetic membrane. The variables were presented as categorical data, coded as 1 for present or 0 for absent. Adjusted  $R^2=0.309$ .

Cardiovascular diseases were common in the patients developing end-stage renal disease. At the beginning of hemodialysis treatment, there was a high prevalence of pre-existent cardiovascular diseases (Table 1). To analyze the influence of pre-existent cardiovascular diseases on the hemodialysis treatment outcome, we performed a stepwise multiple linear regressions, using the model constructed with six major pre-existent cardiovascular diseases observed in the hemodialysis population: hypertensive heart disease, valvular disease, ischemic heart disease, dilated cardiomyopathy, cerebrovascular disease, and peripheral

vascular disease. Analysis revealed that three pre-existent cardiovascular diseases were independently associated with the hemodialysis treatment outcome in decreasing order of significance: hypertensive heart disease, ischemic heart disease, and dilated cardiomyopathy (Table 4). Other pre-existent cardiovascular diseases had no significant independent correlation with the hemodialysis treatment outcome, and were removed from the model.

**Table 4.** Stepwise multiple linear regression analysis of hemodialysis duration as a dependent variable on related cardiovascular diseases\*

Independent variable	$\beta$	P
Hypertensive heart disease	-1.947	<0.001
Ischemic heart disease	-1.836	<0.001
Dilated cardiomyopathy	-2.443	0.016

\*Included variables were hypertensive heart disease, ischemic heart disease, dilated cardiomyopathy, valvular disease, cerebrovascular disease, and peripheral vascular disease. The variables were presented as categorical data, coded as 1 for present or 0 for absent. Adjusted  $R^2=0.209$ .

## Discussion

The main finding of our study was a significant influence of the cardiovascular risk factors and pre-existent cardiovascular diseases on the treatment outcome of the maintenance hemodialysis patients. We found that presence of hyperglycemia, anemia, low delivered dialysis dose, and use of semi-synthetic membrane strongly predict the hemodialysis treatment outcome. In addition, pre-existent cardiovascular diseases, particularly hypertensive heart disease, ischemic heart disease, and dilated cardiomyopathy, were responsible for premature patient's death.

Patients with end-stage renal disease, particularly those on hemodialysis, have a high cardiovascular mortality (12). The burden of pre-existent cardiovascular diseases and its impact on the survival of maintenance hemodialysis patients has recently received increased attention (1,13). The HEMO Study (14) also identified cardiovascular disease, particularly ischemic heart disease, to be a major cause of cardiac hospitalizations and cardiac deaths. There are many predictive factors of the hemodialysis treatment outcome. Beside the traditional cardiovascular risk factors, such as high blood pressure, hyperglycemia, and hypercholesterolemia, the progressive cardiovascular risk associated with end-stage renal disease may be explained by other factors that become increasingly important in renal decline (15-17). The most im-

portant non-traditional cardiovascular risk factors are uremia related, and include inflammation, malnutrition, progressive atherosclerosis, endothelial dysfunction, oxidative stress, anemia, hyperphosphatemia, chronic overhydration, low delivered dialysis dose, and use of semi-synthetic dialysis membranes (18-22).

An interesting finding was that low delivered dialysis dose independently predicted the hemodialysis treatment outcome. The data from large HEMO Study showed no benefits of high-targeted dialysis dose (14). As opposed to HEMO Study, Held et al (23) obtained the same results as we did.

Another interesting finding was that hypertensive heart disease, rather than high blood pressure, affected the hemodialysis treatment outcome. Obviously, hypertensive heart disease developed because of high blood pressure history and became more important than blood pressure levels in the maintenance hemodialysis patients. Also, hypercholesterolemia did not affect the hemodialysis treatment outcome. Similar findings have been recently published by Kalantar-Zadeh et al (24).

Our study had several limitations. First, we did not analyze all established cardiovascular risk factors because of missing relevant data. Second, in our nutritional evaluation, we did not use Subjective Global Assessment (SGA), as it is proposed by Dialysis Outcome Quality Initiative (DOQI) guidelines, also because of missing relevant data (25). Third, the anemia therapy with erythropoietin was not taken into account because of inconsistent drug dose. Fourth, cardiovascular diseases that developed during the follow-up were not addressed. Finally, concomitant medication was not assessed.

In conclusion, the burden of cardiovascular diseases in end-stage renal disease patients on the maintenance hemodialysis has to be prevented by early detection of cardiovascular risk factors when renal function declines. The future research has to be conducted identifying the cardiovascular risk factors, particularly uremia related, and possible treatment strategies to influence the hemodialysis treatment outcome, because the hemodialysis population carries a high risk for the cardiovascular disease, and death rates. Modern bioadequate hemodialysis could have cardioprotective effects.

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Received: July 7, 2005

Accepted: October 7, 2005

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