Increased maternal cardiovascular mortality associated with pregnancy in women with Turner syndrome

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In women with Turner syndrome, the risk of death from aortic dissection or rupture during pregnancy may be 2%, and this risk persists during the postpartum period owing to pregnancy-related aortic changes. Turner syndrome is a relative contraindication for pregnancy; however, it is an absolute contraindication for pregnancy in a patient with a documented cardiac anomaly. This document replaces the 2008 document of the same name. (Fertil Steril® 2012;97:282–4. ©2012 by American Society for Reproductive Medicine.)

REVIEW METHODS

To evaluate the impact of Turner syndrome on pregnancy outcomes after oocyte donation, a search of Medline from 1950 to January 2011 was performed. We used combinations of medical subject headings “Turner syndrome,” “oocyte donation,” “pregnancy,” “complications,” “cardiovascular,” and “screening.” The reference lists of relevant articles were reviewed for further reports. Only English-language articles were selected, and the search was restricted to published articles. Review articles were included. The relevance of included articles was assessed by one committee member, with subsequent consultation by the committee as a whole. Because the majority of the studies were case series and reviews, methods of aggregation and analysis were limited to tabulation and summarization. The document was revised by the Practice Committee on several occasions.

DISCUSSION

Turner syndrome results from the partial or complete loss of an X chromosome, with or without cell-line mosaicism, and is defined phenotypically as patients with short stature, primary amenorrhea, and other characteristics of variable penetrance, including cardiac, skeletal, and renal malformations. The prevalence is 1 in 2,000 live-born girls (1), with 5%–50% exhibiting cardiovascular malformations and 1 in 40 dying of aortic dissection by the age of 85 years (2–4).

Oocyte donation offers women with Turner syndrome the opportunity to achieve pregnancy. However, the increased cardiovascular demands of pregnancy may pose unique and serious risks for these women (5–7). Whereas the risk of maternal death in the general population is approximately 1/10,000, the risk of death during the perinatal period from aortic dissection or rupture in women with Turner syndrome is approximately 2% (8–10). When evaluating pregnancy outcomes in patients with Turner syndrome, distinction is not made between a “pure” 45,X karyotype and a mosaic pattern, and therefore all Turner syndrome patients should be considered to be at risk (9, 11, 12).

We do not have sufficient information to determine whether people with gonadal digenesis without Turner phenotype are at increased risk. Women with Turner syndrome at greatest risk of aortic dissection and rupture include those exhibiting baseline or progressive aortic root dilation, bicuspid aortic valve, coarctation of the aorta with or without prior surgical repair, and hypertension (6, 7). However, aortic dissection may also occur in the absence of known risk factors and at an aortic diameter of <4 cm (13). Prompt recognition of dissection may provide the opportunity for successful surgical intervention in some, though not all, women. Some institutions use transesophageal echocardiography instead of magnetic resonance imaging (MRI).

Women with Turner syndrome expressing interest in oocyte donation should be carefully evaluated with both echocardiography and MRI, preferably by a cardiologist with expertise in adult congenital heart disease. Aortic diameter may not be an appropriate predictor of risk in women with Turner syndrome, because of their small stature and body surface area. Therefore aortic size measured by MRI should be adjusted for body surface area and reported as the aortic size index (ASI). An ASI >2.0 cm/m² identifies those patients at a particularly increased risk for dissection (13). In a group of 166 women with Turner syndrome with a mean age of 36 years and followed...
for a mean of 3 years, 33% of the women with ASI > 2.5 cm/

m² experienced aortic dissection (13). Any risk factor or sig-
nificant abnormality found on imaging is best regarded as a
contraindication to pregnancy. Even those having a normal
evaluation should be thoroughly counseled regarding the risk
of cardiac complications and death during pregnancy, be-
cause aortic dissection may still occur. Indeed, approximately
one-half of aortic dissections occur in the third trimester or
postpartum (8). Patients should be counseled that pregnancy
carries not only a risk of maternal death, but also a potentially
increased risk of premature death in the months and years af-
after delivery because of pregnancy-related aortic dilation or
not yet identified changes of the vessel wall (14, 15). All
patients should be offered surrogacy and adoption as alter-
atives for having a family.

Those with normal evaluations who choose to proceed
with donor oocyte require careful observation and frequent
reevaluation during pregnancy (9, 16, 17). Specific recom-
mendations for surveillance in women with Turner syndrome
during pregnancy include: 1) treatment of hypertension; 2) periodic echocardiography or MRI and consultation with
a cardiologist; 3) women in stable condition having an
ascending ASI < 2 cm/m² may attempt vaginal delivery
under epidural anesthesia; and 4) women exhibiting baseline
or progressive aortic root dilation should have an elective
cesarean delivery under epidural anesthesia before the onset
of labor. In those patients who choose to proceed with ART,
elective single-embryo transfer should be preferred, because
multiple gestation increases the risks of perinatal complica-
tions (9). In addition, the obstetrician should be aware that
complications such as preeclampsia and gestational diabetes
also occur with increased frequency in pregnant patients
with Turner syndrome.

For Turner syndrome patients who achieved pregnancy
with donor oocytes, one study found reported that approxi-
mately 40% had no complications, 40% had pregnancy-
associated hypertension, and the remainder had a range of
significant morbidities including aortic rupture, gestational
diabetes mellitus, eclampsia, and acute liver failure (9). It is
worth noting that in this study only 37.6% of the patients
were prescreened with echocardiography or thoracic MRI.
Four-fifths of these women had a cesarean section, and one
in twelve had postpartum hemorrhage. Approximately 40%

of the infants were born prematurely and had a mean birth
weight of 2,599 g (9).

SUMMARY

The risk of death during pregnancy from aortic dissection
and rupture may be 2% or higher for women with Turner syn-

drome. In addition, pregnancy-related changes to the aorta
may increase the risk of aortic dissection, aortic rupture,
and premature death in subsequent years.

CONCLUSIONS

- Turner syndrome is a relative contraindication for preg-
nancy, and patients should be encouraged to consider al-
ternatives, such as gestational surrogacy or adoption.
- Cardiology and maternal-fetal medicine consultation for
evaluation and careful screening are required before con-
sidering pregnancy by oocyte donation.
- Cardiac MRI revealing any significant abnormality and/or
ASI > 2 cm/m² represents an absolute contraindication for
attempting pregnancy in a woman with Turner syndrome.
- Women with Turner syndrome having a normal cardiac
MRI and evaluation who decide to attempt pregnancy after
thorough counseling are still at much higher risk for
associated morbidity and mortality and require careful ob-
servation and frequent formal reevaluation throughout
gestation and postpartum.

Acknowledgments: This report was developed under the
direction of the Practice Committee of the American Soci-
ety for Reproductive Medicine as a service to its members
and other practicing clinicians. Although this document
reflects appropriate management of a problem encoun-
tered in the practice of reproductive medicine, it is not
intended to be the only approved standard of practice or
to dictate an exclusive course of treatment. Other plans
of management may be appropriate, taking into account
the needs of the individual patient, available resources,
and institutional or clinical practice limitations. The Prac-
tice Committee and the Board of Directors of the American
Society for Reproductive Medicine have approved this
report.

The following members of the ASRM Practice Commit-
tee participated in the development of this document. All
committee members disclosed commercial and financial re-
lationships with manufacturers or distributors of goods or
services used to treat patients. Members of the committee
who were found to have conflicts of interest based on the
disclosed relationships did not participate in the discussion
or development of this document.

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M.D.; Owen Davis, M.D.; Jeffery Goldberg, M.D.; Michael
Thomas, M.D.; Catherine Racowsky, Ph.D.; Eric Widra,
M.D.; Mark Licht, M.D.; Clarisa Gracia, M.D.; Robert Rebar,
M.D.; Andrew La Barbera, Ph.D.

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