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THE EFFECT OF FERRIC CARBOXYMALTOSE TREATMENT ON THE TP-E INTERVAL AND THE TP-E/QT AND TP-E/QTc RATIOS IN HEART FAILURE PATIENTS WITH IRON DEFICIENCY

<i>Aim</i>	In heart failure (HF) patients with iron deficiency, cardiac electrical irregularity is a cause of arrhythmias. The aim of our study was to evaluate the effect of ferric carboxymaltose (FCM) treatment on T wave peak to end (Tp-e) interval and the Tp-e/QT and Tp-e/corrected QT (QTc) ratios that reflect the transmural dispersion of repolarization in HF patients with iron deficiency.
<i>Material and methods</i>	Forty HF patients with iron deficiency that were treated with FCM were included in our single center, observational study. Repolarization parameters on electrocardiograms recorded before and 12 wks after FCM treatment were compared. Additionally, these parameters were compared with ventricular repolarization parameters of 40 healthy age and gender matched individuals and with another group of 40 HF patients without iron deficiency.
<i>Results</i>	In the HF patients with iron deficiency, the Tp-e interval and the Tp-e/QT and Tp-e/QTc ratios before FCM treatment were 103.7±19.1 ms, 0.25±0.04, 0.23±0.04, respectively. These values were higher compared to the healthy the group and HF group without iron deficiency (p<0.001). In the HF patients with iron deficiency, the Tp-e interval and the Tp-e/QT and Tp-e/QTc ratios after FCM treatment were lower compared to pre-treatment and similar to the HF patients without iron deficiency (89.4±18.6 ms, 0.22±0.04, 0.20±0.04, respectively; p<0.001).
<i>Conclusion</i>	FCM treatment of HF patients with iron deficiency corrects prolonged Tp-e interval and high Tp-e/QT and Tp-e/QTc ratios, which are risk factors for ventricular arrhythmias.
<i>Keywords</i>	Ferric carboxymaltose; iron deficiency; Tp-e interval; Tp-e/QT ratio; Tp-e/QTc ratio
<i>For citations</i>	Emrah Yesil, Hakan Uyar, Ozcan Orscelik, Bugra Ozkan, Mustafa Demir, Cuma Yesildas et al. The effect of ferric carboxymaltose treatment on the Tp-e interval and the Tp-e/QT and Tp-e/QTc ratios in heart failure patients with iron deficiency. <i>Kardiologiia</i> . 2022;62(10):42–48. [Russian: Эмрах Есил, Хакан Уяр, Озджан Оршеллик, Бугра Озкан, Мустафа Демир, Джума Есилдаш и др. Влияние лечения карбоксимальтозатом железа на интервал Тр-е и соотношения Тр-е/QT и Тр-е/QTc у пациентов с сердечной недостаточностью и дефицитом железа. <i>Кардиология</i> . 2022;62(10):42–48].
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Introduction

Heart failure (HF) is a clinical syndrome that is manifested as some typical symptoms and signs. HF is usually accompanied by various comorbid conditions including hypertension, coronary artery disease, diabetes, chronic renal failure, and anemia.

While iron deficiency is present in 50% of all HF cases, this rate is 61% in patients with anemia and 46% in those without anemia [1]. Iron deficiency is associated with decreased exercise capacity, recurrent hospitalization due to HF, high cardiovascular and all-cause mortality, independent of anemia [2]. Regardless of the presence of anemia, mortality is 400% greater in HF patients with iron deficiency compared to those with normal iron [3].

In clinical studies of HF patients receiving intravenous (IV) ferric carboxymaltose (FCM) treatment, there were improvements in clinical outcomes except for mortality

[4, 5]. This demonstrated the importance of iron deficiency treatment in HF [3]. The European Society of Cardiology Heart Failure Guidelines 2021 recommends IV iron supplementation with FCM in recently hospitalized, symptomatic HF patients with left ventricle ejection fraction (LVEF) <50% and iron deficiency [6]. The corrected QT (QTc) interval, Tp-e interval, and Tp-e/QT ratio are risk predictors for ventricular arrhythmia (VA) or sudden cardiac death (SCD) in patients with HF and various other cardiac diseases [7]. In superficial electrocardiography (ECG), the repolarization of the epicardial layer ends at the T wave peak. However, the repolarization of mid-myocardial M cells continues until the end of the T wave, i.e., the duration between the peak and the end of the T wave. This duration is defined as the Tp-e interval, and it reflects the transmural dispersion of repolarization (TDR) [8]. TDR facilitates VA and SCD through the re-entry mechanism [9]. Limited data

literature are available about the effect of iron deficiency on ECG parameters in HF patients. The present study aimed to investigate the effect of FCM treatment on the Tp-e interval and on the Tp-e/QT and Tp-e/QTc ratios in HF patients with iron deficiency by evaluating the ECGs taken before and after FCM treatment.

Material and methods

Study population and design

This study was a single center, prospective, observational study, and it was conducted in accordance with the Declaration of Helsinki and with other relevant guidelines and regulations. Written informed consent was obtained from all participants, and approval was obtained from the local ethics committee (# 2022/140).

The study population was comprised of 80 chronic HF patients who admitted to the cardiology clinic between January 2022 and March 2022, and who met inclusion and exclusion criteria. These patients had been diagnosed at least 3 mos earlier and had received medical treatment. In addition the study included an age and gender matched control group of 40 healthy subjects. The HF patients with iron deficiency were electrocardiographically and clinically evaluated before and 12 wks after FCM treatments.

The study inclusion criteria were: normal sinus rhythm on ECG, easily evaluable QT segment, T wave height or depth >1.5 mm, and giving informed consent. The exclusion criteria were: age <18 yrs, chronic liver failure, active infection, electrolyte imbalance, atrial fibrillation, wide QRS, branch block or cardiac pacemaker rhythm, hospitalization within the preceding 3 mos, treatment with oral or IV iron treatments within the preceding 6 mos, use of drugs that affect the QT duration, i.e., chlorpromazine, quinolone, haloperidol, and class 3 antiarrhythmic drugs.

Definitions

Cases with signs and symptoms of heart failure with LVEF <50% on echocardiography or those with LVEF ≥50% and N-terminal B-type natriuretic peptide (NT-pro BNP) ≥125 pg/ml were considered HF patients. Based on the World Health Organization definition, hemoglobin values below 12 g/dl for women and below 13 g/dl for men were accepted as anemia. Iron deficiency was defined as serum ferritin concentration <100 ng/ml or 100–299 ng/ml and transferrin saturation (TSAT) <20% [3, 10]. TSAT was calculated according to the following formula:

$$\text{TSAT} = (\text{serum iron} / \text{total iron binding capacity}) \times 100.$$

In accordance with the protocol proposed by the CONFIRM-HF trial, a routine FCM treatment was applied to

the HF patients with iron deficiency. FCM was diluted with 250 ml of 0.9% saline solution and applied as a 15-min IV infusion. Target values for iron were ferritin >100 µg/l and TSAT >20%.

Electrocardiography

Standard 12-derivation ECG recordings were obtained with a Nihon Kohden Cardiofax M device (Nihon Kohden, Tokyo, Japan) at 25 mm/sec and 10 mV/mm with the patients in the supine position. The heart rate and QRS interval were calculated from the automated data analysis and recorded. For ventricular repolarization, specific ECG parameters, namely the QT interval, QTc interval, QT dispersion (QTd), Tp-e interval, and the Tp-e/QT and Tp-e/QTc ratios, were determined. The ECGs were evaluated manually by a cardiologist, who was blinded to the study design and had no conflict of interest, after zooming in ×300 using a computer program. The QT interval was calculated as the time from the beginning of the QRS complex to the end of the T wave and corrected for heart rate according to the Bazett formula, $QTc = QT / \sqrt{RR}$. The QTd was defined as the difference between the maximum and minimum QT duration, $QT_{max} - QT_{min}$, from the calculated QT duration of at least eight of the 12 leads. The Tp-e interval was calculated as the time from the peak of the T wave to the end of the T wave. The end of the T wave was determined as the intersection point of the isoelectric line and the tangent line at the maximum downward slope of the T wave. The Tp-e interval was measured manually from precordial lead V5 [11].

Laboratory analyses

All biochemical parameters, complete blood count parameters, NT-pro BNP concentrations and iron parameters (ferritin, serum iron, serum total iron binding capacity) were recorded at the time of admission. In addition, the laboratory parameters of the participants who received FCM treatment were determined again 12 wks after the treatment. For the calculation of the estimated glomerular filtration rate, the «Modification of Diet in Renal Disease (MDRD)» formula was used.

Echocardiography

Transthoracic echocardiography was performed with a Vivid E9 echocardiography device (Vivid E9, GE Vingmed, Horten, Norway). Left ventricular end-diastolic diameter (LVEDD) was calculated by M-mode echocardiography in the parasternal long-axis view, and LVEF was calculated using the modified Simpson's method.

Statistical analysis

Med Calc statistical software (MedCalc Software bvba, Ostend, Belgium) was used for all statistical analy-

ses. The normally distributed, continuous data are expressed as mean \pm standard deviation (SD); the non-normally distributed, continuous data are expressed as median (minimum–maximum). Parametric variables were compared between two groups with independent samples t-tests, and non-parametric values were compared with Mann–Whitney U tests.

The chi-square test was utilized to compare categorical variables. Group means were compared with a one-way ANOVA. If the p-value obtained from the ANOVA analysis was statistically significant, a post-hoc Tukey test was used to identify specific differences among the groups. The Wilcoxon test was employed to assess the difference between the dependent groups. Relationships of relevant variables were examined by computing Pearson correlation coefficients. A p value of <0.05 was accepted as statistically significant.

Results

The clinical data, laboratory parameters, ECG parameters, and echocardiography parameters are presented in Table 1. In the HF patients, there were no significant differences between those with and those without iron deficiency, either before and at 12 wks after FCM treatments in terms of age, gender, heart rate, QT interval and QTc interval ($p=0.34$, $p=0.87$, $p=0.49$, $p=0.73$, $p=0.77$, respectively).

There was no significant difference between the patients with and those without iron deficiency before

FCM treatment in terms of NT-pro BNP, creatinine, and eGFR ($p=0.58$, $p=0.13$, $p=0.21$, respectively). Before FCM treatment, the Tp-e interval and the Tp-e/QT and Tp-e/QTc ratios were higher in the HF patients with iron deficiency than in the HF patients without iron deficiency ($p=0.001$, $p=0.001$, $p=0.001$, respectively).

In the HF patients with iron deficiency, there were significant decreases in the Tp-e interval, the Tp-e/QT and Tp-e/QTc ratios, QT dispersion, and NT-pro BNP values after FCM treatment compared to pre-treatment values ($p<0.001$ for all) (Table 2). In these patients, LVEF and LVEDD before and after FCM treatment were not significantly different ($p=0.68$, $p=0.41$, respectively).

Among the iron deficient HF patients, at the 12th wk follow-up after FCM treatment, there was no significant difference between the patients with and those without iron deficiency in terms of the Tp-e interval and the Tp-e/QT and Tp-e/QTc ratios ($p=0.42$, $p=0.36$, $p=0.38$, respectively). However, the difference between the HF patient group with iron deficiency who received FCM treatment and the healthy control group in terms of the Tp-e interval and the Tp-e/QT and Tp-e/QTc ratios at the 12th wk follow-up after the treatment was significant ($p=0.02$, $p=0.01$, $p=0.009$ respectively) (Table 3). In the HF patients, there was a negative correlation between the ferritin concentration and Tp-e interval and the Tp-e/QT and Tp-e/QTc ratios [$r=-0.285$ ($p=0.002$), $r=-0.280$ ($p=0.002$), $r=-0.304$ ($p=0.001$), respectively] (Figure 1).

Table 1. Clinical characteristics, electrocardiographic, echocardiographic, and laboratory findings of the groups

Variables	Healthy control group (n=40)	HF patients without iron deficiency (n=40)	HF patients with iron deficiency before ferric carboxymaltose treatment (n=40)	HF patients with iron deficiency at 12 wks after ferric carboxymaltose treatment (n=40)	p, before vs after treatment
Age, yrs	60 \pm 7.0	61.1 \pm 13.0	64.4 \pm 16.4	64.4 \pm 16.4	0.34
Sex, female	17 (42.5)	14 (35)	17 (42.5)	17 (42.5)	0.87
LVEF, %	59.1 \pm 3.6	33.9 \pm 12.4	42.7 \pm 15.3	42.9 \pm 15.1	<0.001
LVEDD, mm	43.3 \pm 2.6	58.1 \pm 9.7	53.1 \pm 8.1	52.9 \pm 8.1	<0.001
Heart rate, beat/min	74.9 \pm 13.3	73.8 \pm 10.3	79.6 \pm 19.7	76.3 \pm 16.7	0.49
QT interval, ms	405.2 \pm 38.4	404.1 \pm 40.3	395.6 \pm 47.3	398.4 \pm 50.4	0.73
QTc interval, ms	431.7 \pm 30.7	429.5 \pm 31.8	427.2 \pm 34.2	424.2 \pm 35.9	0.77
QT dispersion, ms	25.9 \pm 5.1	28.5 \pm 7.7	33.8 \pm 10.3	29.2 \pm 8.3	<0.001
Tp-e interval, ms	78.7 \pm 16.5	85.8 \pm 21.9	103.7 \pm 19.1	89.4 \pm 18.6	<0.001
Tp-e/QT ratio	0.19 \pm 0.04	0.21 \pm 0.05	0.25 \pm 0.04	0.22 \pm 0.04	<0.001
Tp-e/QTc ratio	0.17 \pm 0.04	0.19 \pm 0.05	0.23 \pm 0.04	0.20 \pm 0.04	<0.001
Hemoglobin, g/dl	13.9 \pm 0.5	13.5 \pm 1.7	10.9 \pm 2.3	12.6 \pm 1.6	<0.001
Ferritin, ng/ml	227.2 [115.2–691]	221.7 [102.1–394]	17.8 [2–132]	242.6 [105–1087]	<0.001
NT-pro BNP, pg/ml	56 [50–75]	1025 [72–10000]	1034 [75–10000]	634 [50–10000]	<0.001
Creatinine, mg/dl	0.73 [0.52–1.1]	0.94 [0.46–6.21]	0.88 [0.43–2.67]	0.91 [0.35–2.57]	0.007
eGFR, ml/min/1.73 m ²	107.3 \pm 36.3	78.4 \pm 31.9	89.5 \pm 41.1	78.7 \pm 34.3	0.001
Transferrin saturation, %	25.3 \pm 3.2	24.4 \pm 3.5	11.9 \pm 3.8	24.4 \pm 2.8	<0.001

Data are mean \pm SD, median (minimum–maximum), n (%). eGFR, estimated glomerular filtration rate according to the MDRD formula; LVEDD, left ventricular end-diastolic diameter; LVEF, left ventricular ejection fraction; NT-pro BNP, N-terminal pro-B-type natriuretic peptide; QTc, corrected QT interval; Tp-e, T wave peak to end interval.

Table 2. Comparison of the baseline data of the HF patients with iron deficiency and at 12 wks after ferric carboxymaltose treatment

Variables	Patients with iron deficiency before ferric carboxymaltose treatment (n=40)	Patients with iron deficiency at 12 wks after ferric carboxymaltose treatment (n=40)	p
Tp-e interval, ms	103.7±19.1	89.4±18.6	<0.001
Tp-e/QT ratio	0.25±0.04	0.22±0.04	<0.001
Tp-e/QTc ratio	0.23±0.04	0.20±0.04	<0.001
QT dispersion, ms	33.8±10.3	29.2±8.3	<0.001
LVEF, %	42.7±15.3	42.9±15.1	0.68
LVEDD, mm	53.1±8.1	52.9±8.1	0.41
NT-pro BNP, pg/ml	1034 [75–10000]	634 [50–10000]	0.001

Data are mean±SD or median (minimum-maximum).

LVEDD, left ventricular end-diastolic diameter; LVEF, left ventricular ejection fraction; NT-pro BNP, N-terminal pro-B-type natriuretic peptide; QTc, Corrected QT interval; Tp-e, T wave peak to end interval.

Table 3. Comparison of parameters of the HF patients with iron deficiency at 12 wks after ferric carboxymaltose treatment with those of the healthy control group and the HF patients without iron deficiency

Variables	Healthy control group (n=40)	Heart failure patients without iron deficiency (n=40)	Heart failure patients with iron deficiency at 12 wks after ferric carboxymaltose treatment (n=40)	p
Tp-e interval, ms	78.7±16.5	85.8±21.9	89.4±18.6	0.02 β 0.42 γ
Tp-e/QT ratio	0.19±0.04	0.21±0.05	0.22±0.04	0.01 β 0.36 γ
Tp-e/QTc ratio	0.17±0.04	0.19±0.05	0.20±0.04	0.009 β 0.38 γ
QT dispersion, ms	25.9±5.1	28.5±7.7	29.2±8.3	0.08 β 0.73 γ

Data are mean±SD. QTc, corrected QT interval; Tp-e, T wave peak to end interval, pβ = comparison between healthy control group and heart failure patients with iron deficiency at 12 wks after ferric carboxymaltose treatment. pγ = comparison between heart failure patients without iron deficiency and heart failure patients with iron deficiency at 12 wks after ferric carboxymaltose treatment.

Discussion

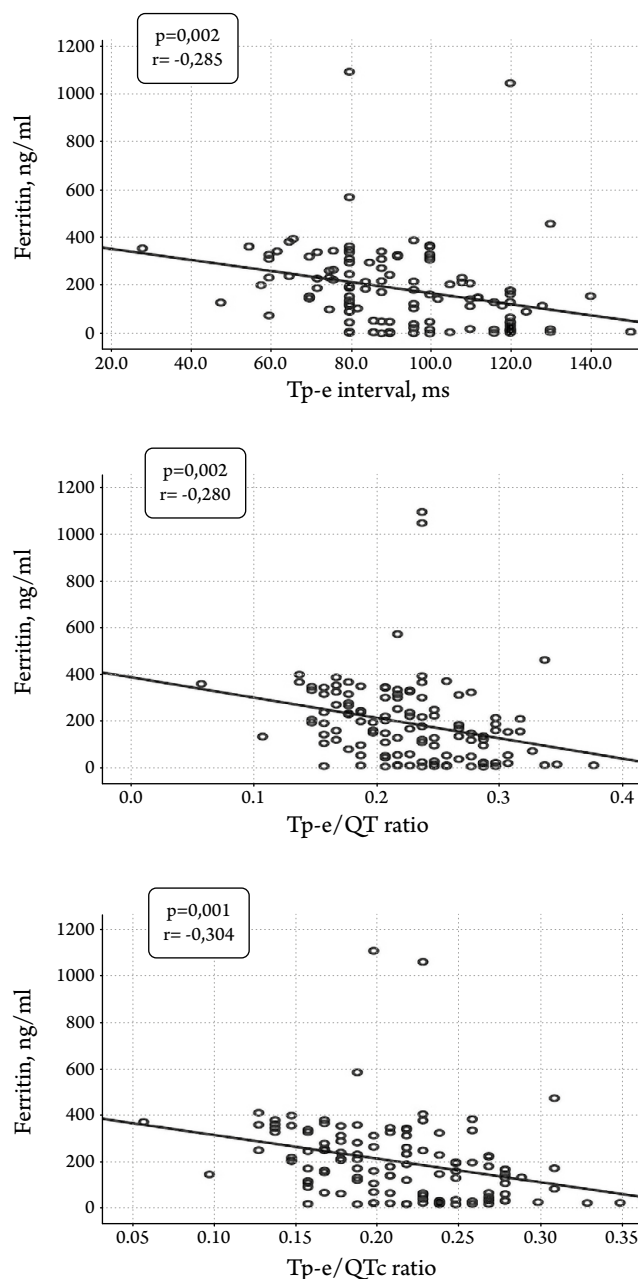
In the HF group with iron deficiency, the Tp-e interval and the Tp-e/QT and Tp-e/QTc ratios were higher than in the HF patient group without iron deficiency and in the healthy control group. In the HF patients with iron deficiency, the Tp-e interval and the Tp-e/QT and Tp-e/QTc ratios after FCM treatment were significantly lower than before treatment. Among the HF patients receiving FCM treatment,

there were no significant differences between those with and those without iron deficiency in terms of the Tp-e interval, and the Tp-e/QT and Tp-e/QTc ratios at the 1st week follow-up after treatment.

The presence of iron deficiency is associated with a poor prognosis in HF regardless of the presence of anemia [12]. In the FERRIC-HF, FAIR-HF, CONFIRM-HF trials supporting this finding, regardless of anemia, IV iron therapy was shown to increase exercise capacity, improve symptoms and the quality of life. These effects begin in as little as one month and contribute to a reduction in the number of hospital admissions and improvement in HF within a year.

There are different opinions regarding the effect of correcting iron deficiency on mortality in HF patients.

Figure 1. Correlation of the Tp-e interval, Tp-e/QT ratio and Tp-e/QTc ratio with ferritin concentration



Jankowska et al. found that iron deficiency was a strong predictor of many poor outcomes, including hospitalization and death in HF. In addition, they found that the three-year survival rate was 59% in patients with iron deficiency and 71% in patients without iron deficiency ($p=0.0006$) [13]. In the FAIR-HF trial, no statistical difference was found between the group receiving IV iron therapy and the group receiving placebo with regard to cardiovascular death and all-cause mortality in HF patients with iron deficiency. Only the first hospitalization due to any cardiovascular reason was found to be significantly lower in the group receiving IV iron therapy [4]. Similar to the FAIR-HF trial, in the CONFIRM-HF trial, while there was no difference between the groups in terms of mortality due to cardiovascular causes, hospitalizations due to worsening HF were significantly lower in the group receiving IV iron therapy [5]. These findings demonstrated the importance of iron deficiency treatment in HF.

Iron deficiency increases the arrhythmogenic tendency and repolarization distribution by triggering the inflammatory activation in myocytes, particularly by prolonging the activation potential duration through K^+ and Ca^{++} channels [14]. The main factors responsible for arrhythmia in the structural disorders of the left ventricle are slow conduction, changes in the refractory period, and non-homogenous repolarization [15]. Clinical trials indicate that the heterogeneity in ventricular repolarization may trigger ventricular arrhythmias, which is important for HF prognosis [16].

Atrial and ventricular extra beats, supraventricular tachycardia and repolarization disorders were evident in HF patients with iron deficiency [17]. Heterogeneity of repolarization is a well-known predictor for malignant ventricular arrhythmias and SCD [18]. The clinical value of Tp-e for risk assessment of ventricular arrhythmia has been investigated in various studies [18, 19] conducted with patients with known cardiac diseases. In most of these studies, prolonged Tp-e has been associated with an increased arrhythmia risk [20]. Topilski et al. found that the QT, QTc, and Tp-e intervals were potent predictors of Torsades de pointes, and prolonged Tp-e duration was the best predictor among these ECG parameters [21].

The Tp-e/QT ratio has been reported to be more reliable than Tp-e interval for evaluation of ventricular repolarization, as it is not affected by changes in heart rate [22]. Panikkath et al. showed that the Tp-e interval, QTc, and the Tp-e/QT ratio were significantly prolonged in SCD cases compared to normal controls. This proved that Tp-e was a good risk predictor for VA in various cardiac disorders, including HF [16]. In the current study, it was shown that iron deficiency affects ventricular repolarization parameters, such as the Tp-e interval and the Tp-e/QT and Tp-e/QTc ratios, in the HF patients with iron deficiency.

Morin et al. examined the clinical use of Tp-e for arrhythmic events and mortality in patients with cardiomyopathy. They found that prolonged Tp-e was associated with a 14% increase in the risk of VA ($p<0.01$), and that the threshold value of Tp-e was 103.5 ms for ventricular arrhythmia [9]. In our study, the Tp-e interval of the HF patients with iron deficiency was 103.7 ± 19.1 ms, and we observed that the Tp-e interval was reduced to more acceptable values after IV FCM treatment.

Watanabe et al. reported that prolonged Tp-e is associated with ventricular tachycardia (VT) and inducibility in high-risk patients with structural heart disease [18]. In the retrospective study of Laudanski et al., serum ferritin and iron concentrations affected the QT interval in various clinical conditions, and the investigators stated that this condition could contribute to the emergence of cardiac arrhythmias [23]. The present study showed that the ferritin concentration was related with the Tp-e interval, and the Tp-e/QT and Tp-e/QTc ratios, which are predictors of ventricular arrhythmias.

In a study in patients with creatinine clearance of <90 ml/min and anemic heart failure, Toblli et al. determined that the NT-pro BNP concentration at the sixth month was significantly lower in those administered iron sucrose compared to those given placebo [24]. Similarly, in our study, a significant decrease was detected in NT-pro BNP in the HF patients with iron deficiency 12 wks after IV FCM treatment.

Toblli et al. detected a significant decrease in the diastolic diameter of the left ventricle and a 6.6% absolute increase in LVEF in the active treatment group in their study investigating the effect of iron deficiency on LVEF and LVEDD [25]. In an IRON-CRT study of patients with LVEF $<45\%$ and iron deficiency 6 mos after CRT insertion, ferric carboxy maltose treatment increased LVEF by 4% at the end of 3 mos [26]. However, in the current study, no significant difference was observed in LVEDD and LVEF on echocardiography performed 12 wks after FCM treatment in the HF patients with iron deficiency.

Yilmaz and Aydın found that low iron stores may increase arrhythmogenic sensibility in healthy women of reproductive age through a prolonged Tp-e interval and increased Tp-e/QT and Tp-e/QTc ratios. They also found a moderately negative correlation between the Tp-e interval and the ferritin concentration [27]. In our study, consistent with the literature, we found a negative correlation between the ferritin concentration and the Tp-e interval, and the Tp-e/QT and Tp-e/QTc ratios.

The limitations of this study are that it was a single center, non-randomized study with a relatively limited sample size.

Conclusion

In HF patients, iron deficiency causes prolonged Tp-e interval, high Tp-e/QT and Tp-e/QTc ratios. FCM treat-

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ment of HF patients with iron deficiency corrects prolonged Tp-e interval and high Tp-e/QT and Tp-e/QTc ratios, which are risk factors for ventricular arrhythmias.

No conflict of interest is reported.

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