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## EFFECTIVENESS OF THE COX MAZE-IV PROCEDURE IN CARDIAC SURGERY PATIENTS WITH ATRIAL FIBRILLATION

<i>Aim</i>	Analyzing a 5-year experience of surgical treatment of cardiosurgical patients with atrial fibrillation (AF).
<i>Material and methods</i>	The study analyzed results of surgical treatment with extracorporeal circulation in 132 patients with AF who underwent the Maze-IV procedure using a radiofrequency ablator with transmural feedback from 2013 through 2018.
<i>Results</i>	Two fatal outcomes were observed in the study group. These outcomes took place in the early postoperative period and were associated with progressive acute heart failure in patients with repeated surgery for mitral valve restenosis. 61.2% of the patients had no AF. Recurrent AF was observed during the first three years after surgery in association with withdrawal of the antiarrhythmic medication, which confirmed a need for long-term antiarrhythmic therapy. Analysis of risk factors for AF relapse identified significant predictors, including left ventricular dilatation larger than 5.5 cm at baseline and more than two-year duration of a history of arrhythmias.
<i>Conclusion</i>	The Maze-IV procedure proved an effective and safe method of surgical treatment in AF patients with acquired heart defects and ischemic heart disease, which allowed maintaining sinus rhythm in 61.2% of patients for 5 years. Preventive amiodarone saturation reduced the risk of AF relapse by 24.2% ( $p=0.038$ ) and incidence of postoperative arrhythmic complications by 34.9% ( $p=0.008$ ) in cardiosurgical patients.
<i>Keywords</i>	Atrial fibrillation; Maze-IV; amiodarone
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**L**onger life expectancy paradoxically contributes to an increase in the prevalence of cardiovascular diseases [1]. Many international researchers have addressed this issue [2–12]. According to a multi-center, randomized Euro Heart Survey of more than 5,000 patients with valvular heart disease (VHD), aortic valve disease accounted for 44% of all cases of acquired VHD. Mitral valve disease accounted for 34% of cases, including stenosis in 9% and insufficiency in 25% of patients. Isolated tricuspid valve disease was found in 1% and multiple valve disease in 20% of cases [13]. The prevalence of degenerative valve disease is actively increasing throughout the world, including Russia [1, 14].

The natural course of mitral valve disease is complicated by heart rhythm disorders, such as atrial fibrillation (AF), in 30 to 84% of cases [15]. Moreover, the first AF paroxysms after surgical intervention for acquired valve heart disease in patients with sinus rhythm before surgery account for 50% of cases [16].

The prevalence of AF in the general population reaches 2% and has been steadily increasing in recent years. According to foreign literature, the annual costs of AF treatment are \$ 26 billion in the United States and € 3.2 billion in Europe [17]. AF has been diagnosed in more than 6 million people in Europe and in more than 2.5 million people in the US. The number of patients with

AF is expected to increase 1.5 to 3 times in the next 40–50 years [18].

Pathomorphological changes of the atrial wall developing during the natural course of mitral valve disease contribute to stimulation of the autonomous nervous system via cardiac ganglionic plexuses which results in pathological triggering and ectopic focal activity and formation of reentry circles [19–21]. Fibrosis and hypertrophy associated with continuous ischemia and chronic inflammation are the key predisposing factors of pathomorphological changes of the atrial wall. Isolated surgical treatment of mitral valve disease in patients with AF restores normal sinus rhythm in only 8.5–20% of patients, and additional antiarrhythmic therapy is required [22–24].

The presence of concomitant AF in cardiosurgical patients is directly related to the increased risk of thromboembolic complications, sudden cardiac death, and progression of heart failure [25]. The probability of cerebrovascular accidents also increases 2 to 5 times with AF [17].

Radiofrequency atrial ablation (Cox-Maze IV) is currently the most common technique of surgical treatment in AF. Cox-Maze IV, developed by J. Cox in the late 1980s, is the fourth modification of Maze surgery, which differs from the first three by using a radiofrequency ablation catheter. The number of cuts made is significantly less than in the first version. This procedure proved to be safe and effective in restoring stable sinus rhythm [26, 27]. Cox-Maze IV is recommended as a class IIa indication [28].

Nevertheless, there are still challenges concerning the prevention of postoperative recurrences of AF and the feasibility of surgery in patients with severe atriomegaly or long history of arrhythmia.

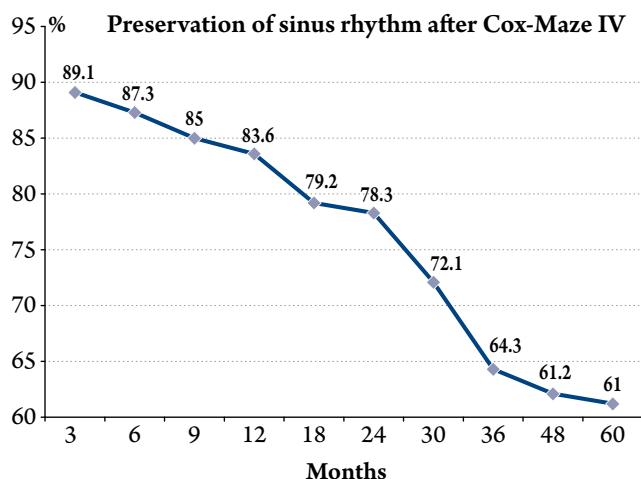
The objective of the study was to analyze the results of a 5-year experience with surgical treatment of patients with AF.

**Table 1.** Results of clinical diagnosis of 132 subjects

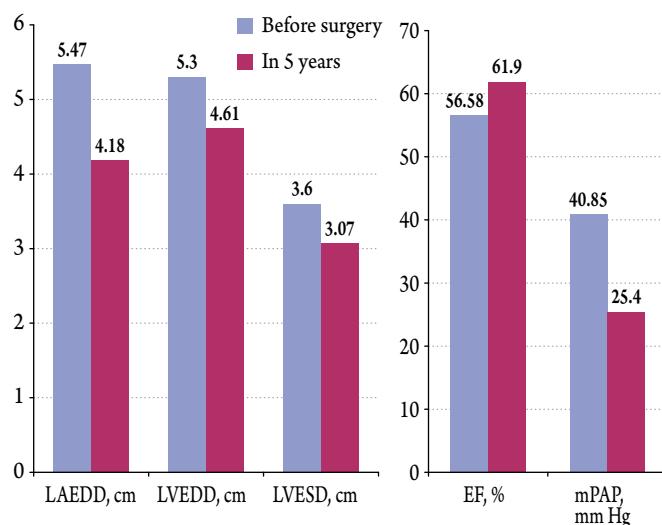
Parameter	Mean value	Disorder*, the absolute number of patients		
		mild	moderate	severe
Mean age, years		53.4±6.12 (from 24 to 74)		
Male/female		75/57		
LA ESD, cm	5.47±0.65 (from 4 to 8.1)	0	43	89
LVEDD, cm	5.3±0.49 (from 4.1 to 7.7)	2	36	94
LVESD, cm	3.6±0.46 (from 2 to 5.4)	3	37	92
LVEF, %	56.58±8.21 (from 34 to 77)	48	39	45
mPAP, mm Hg	40.85±13.26 (from 19 to 93)	59	71	2

\*. Guidelines on quantitative evaluation of the structure and function of the cardiac chambers [29]. EDD, end-diastolic dimension; ESD, end-systolic dimension; LV, left ventricle; LA, left atrium; mPAP, mean pulmonary artery pressure; LVEF, LV ejection fraction.

**Figure 1.** Five-year efficacy of the Cox-Maze IV procedure



**Figure 2.** Changes of echocardiographic parameters in subjects before and 5 years after surgery



LA, left atrium; EDD, end-diastolic dimension; LV, left ventricle; ESD, end-systolic dimension; EF, ejection fraction; mPAP, mean pulmonary artery pressure.

rate 10 bpm higher than their rhythm. Antiarrhythmic therapy was performed with amiodarone.

Statistical analysis was performed using Statistica 10.0. The quantitative data are expressed as the mean and standard deviation ( $M \pm \sigma$ ). The statistical significance of the differences between normally distributed quantitative data was assessed by the Student's t-test. The Mann-Whitney test was used in non-normal distributions and for ranking data. Differences between relative values of qualitative data were assessed with the chi-square test. If at least one cell of a 2x2 table had less than 5 observations, calculations were made using Fisher's exact test. The differences were considered to be significant with  $p < 0.05$  [30].

## Results and Discussion

Two deaths were reported in the study group. These occurred in the early postoperative period during evolving acute heart failure in patients who had undergone repeat cardiac surgery for mitral valve restenosis.

During the study period, 61% of cases had no AF. During over the first 3 years after surgical intervention, the most significant number of AF recurrences were detected when antiarrhythmic agents were withdrawn (Figure 1). Thus, class III antiarrhythmic agents, e.g., amiodarone, should be administered longer, i.e., more than 6 months. Further studies are needed to assess the use of antiarrhythmic agents in patients after the Cox-Maze IV procedure. Transthoracic echocardiography demonstrated reverse remodeling of the heart chambers, improved left ventricular contractility, and decreased pulmonary hypertension (Figure 2).

Our research included assessment of the efficacy of preventive, preoperative administration of amiodarone, 1200 mg/day until the total dose of 10 g was reached, or the QT interval was prolonged to 450 ms, and comparison of this procedure with administration of amiodarone only after surgery. Pretreatment with amiodarone produced significantly improved (by more than 300%) preservation of sinus rhythm, and reduced (by more than 50%) the incidence of arrhythmic complications in the postoperative period (Table 2).

The analysis of risk factors for the recurrence of AF identified significant predictors: initial left atrial dilation and duration of arrhythmic history (Table 3). A more detailed analysis of risk factors revealed recurrence predictors: left atrial dilation more than 5.1 cm and more than 2.5-year arrhythmic history (Figure 3).

Our research demonstrated good efficacy of the Cox-Maze IV procedure with sinus rhythm in 61% of patients 5 years after surgery. Nevertheless, many patients experienced recurrences of AF. Analysis of arrhythmia recurrence identified adverse predictors: initial left atrial dilation and arrhythmic history, which should be considered in the surgical correction of rhythm disorders in this cohort of patients. Moreover, analysis of the effect of preventive administration of amiodarone in patients of this group showed a significant improvement in preservation of sinus rhythm and reduction in arrhythmic complications.

## Conclusions

1. The Cox-Maze IV procedure is an effective and safe surgical technique used in patients with acquired valvular heart diseases and coronary artery disease with atrial fibrillation. It preserved sinus rhythm in 61% of patients over a 5-year follow-up period.

**Table 2.** The effect of preoperative administration of amiodarone on the preservation of sinus rhythm and postoperative arrhythmic complications

Parameter	Pre- and operative amiodarone (n=22)	Postoperative amiodarone (n=42)	p ( $\chi^2$ )
Restoration of sinus rhythm after declamping of the aorta	15 (68.2%)	25 (59.5%)	0.497
<b>Intraoperative complications</b>			
Sinus bradycardia < 55 bpm	6 (27.3%)	5 (12%)	0.122
Ventricular fibrillation	1 (4.5%)	6 (14.3%)	0.406
Atrial rhythm	0	1 (2.4%)	1.0
AF	0	5 (11.9%)	0.155
At least one intraoperative complication	7 (31.8%)	17 (40.1%)	0.497
<b>Postoperative complications</b>			
Sinus bradycardia < 55 bpm	2 (9.1%)	9 (21.4%)	0.304
Sinoatrial block	0	1 (2.4%)	1.0
Atrioventricular block	1 (4.6%)	4 (9.5%)	0.652
Atrioventricular block requiring a pacemaker	1 (4.6%)	1 (2.4%)	1.0
AF paroxysms	4 (18.2%)	14 (33.3%)	0.251
AF paroxysms with recurrence of long-term persistent AF	2 (9.1%)	14 (33.3%)	0.038
At least one early postoperative arrhythmic complication	7 (31.8%)	28 (66.7%)	0.008
Death	0	0	1.0

AF, atrial fibrillation.

**Table 3.** Risk factors of AF recurrence

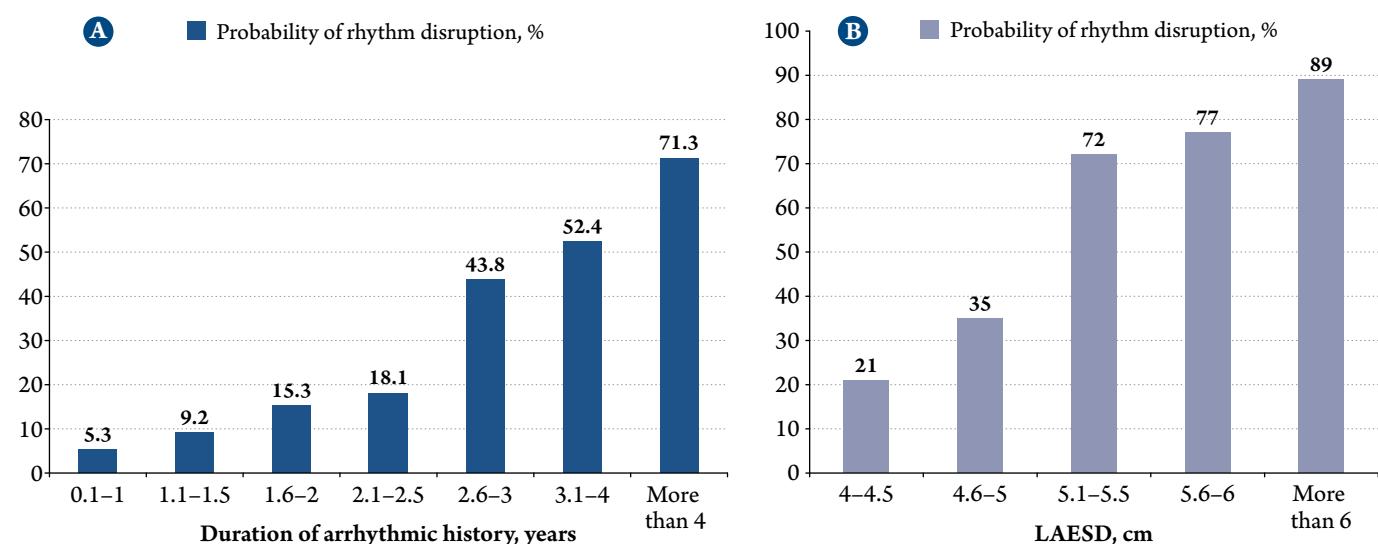
Factor	Restoration of sinus rhythm	Recurrence of AF	p
HF FC	3.04±0.04	3.25±0.11	0.035
Age of AF, years	2.49±0.31	3.75±0.41	0.037
LA, cm	5.59±0.14	6.62±0.30	< 0.001
RV, cm	3.30±0.06	3.54±0.07	0.048

AF, atrial fibrillation; FC, functional class;  
HF, heart failure; LA, left atrium; RV, right ventricle.

2. Preventive administration of amiodarone to cardiosurgical patients reduced the risk of recurrence of atrial fibrillation by 24.2% ( $p=0.038$ ) and reduced the incidence of postoperative arrhythmic complications by 34.9% ( $p=0.008$ ) cardiosurgical patients.

3. Predictors of postoperative recurrence of atrial fibrillation after the Cox-Maze IV procedure are:  
1) more than 2.5-year history of arrhythmia ( $p=0.026$ ),  
2) initial left atrial dilation greater 5.1 cm ( $p=0.019$ ).

**Figure 3.** Predictors of AF recurrence



A – more than 2.5-year arrhythmic history ( $p=0.026$ , OR 5.8); B – initial left atrial dimensions more than 5.1 cm ( $p=0.019$ , OR 6.3). OR, odds ratio; LAESD, left atrial end-systolic dimension.



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*No conflict of interest is reported.*

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