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IMPACT OF TARGETED TEMPERATURE MANAGEMENT ON INFLAMMATORY BIOMARKERS IN NEUROSURGICAL ICU : A PROSPECTIVE STUDY

Anaesthesiology

Dr Sana Khan MD Senior Resident Department Of Anaesthesiology , Critical Care , Pain And Palliative Medicine

Dr Mudasir Amin* MS, MCh Neurosurgery Senior Resident , Department Of Neurosurgery *Corresponding Author

ABSTRACT

Background: Neurosurgical ICU patients often experience brain injury, leading to inflammation and poor outcomes. **Aim :** This study investigates Targeted Temperature Management's (TTM) impact on inflammatory biomarkers in 100 neurosurgical ICU patients. **Methods**: Prospective observational study of 100 consecutive neurosurgical ICU patients. TTM protocol: 32-34°C for 24-48 hours. IL-6, IL-10, TNF-α, and CRP levels were measured. **Results:** TTM significantly reduced IL-6 (35.7%, $p < 0.01$), TNF-α (28.5%, $p < 0.01$), and CRP (25.1%, $p < 0.05$) levels. IL-10 increased by 21.9% ($p < 0.05$). **Conclusion:** TTM reduces inflammatory biomarkers, suggesting anti-inflammatory effects.

KEYWORDS

INTRODUCTION

Targeted Temperature Management (TTM), also known as therapeutic hypothermia, has emerged as a critical therapy in the management of post-cardiac arrest patients, as well as in other critical care settings such as traumatic brain injury (TBI) and stroke. It involves controlled cooling of the body to a specific temperature range (usually 32°C–34°C) to mitigate the harmful effects of neurological injury and systemic inflammation. The rationale for TTM lies in its ability to reduce neurological damage, improve neurological recovery, and increase survival by modulating several biological pathways involved in cellular injury, metabolism, and inflammation (Zhou et al., 2019; Tiruvadi et al., 2019).

In neurosurgical ICU patients, who often present with traumatic brain injury, stroke, or post-operative complications, inflammation plays a significant role in the pathophysiology of brain injury and overall recovery. The neuroinflammatory response, which includes the activation of immune cells and the release of pro-inflammatory cytokines, is a well-established mechanism contributing to secondary brain injury following initial trauma or ischemia (Perry et al., 2018). Excessive and sustained inflammation is associated with worsened outcomes, including brain edema, neuronal death, blood-brain barrier disruption, and impaired neurological function (Tiruvadi et al., 2019). Thus, understanding how therapies like TTM can modulate these inflammatory pathways is critical to improving clinical outcomes in neurosurgical ICU patients.

Inflammatory Biomarkers and Their Role in Neurosurgical ICU Patients

Several inflammatory biomarkers are routinely measured to assess the degree of inflammation in critically ill patients. These biomarkers include pro-inflammatory cytokines such as interleukin-6 (IL-6), tumor necrosis factor-alpha (TNF-α), and C-reactive protein (CRP), as well as anti-inflammatory cytokines like interleukin-10 (IL-10).

- IL-6 is a pleiotropic cytokine that is produced during acute and chronic inflammation. It has been shown to be a strong predictor of poor outcomes in patients with TBI, stroke, and cardiac arrest (Mayer et al., 2015). IL-6 is involved in the acute-phase response and has been associated with increased mortality, worse functional recovery, and complications such as infection and sepsis (Hoedemaekers et al., 2016). Elevated IL-6 levels in post-TBI or post-stroke patients reflect an exaggerated inflammatory response, which contributes to secondary neuronal injury (Mayer et al., 2015).
- TNF-α is another pro-inflammatory cytokine that plays a pivotal role in the pathophysiology of neurological diseases. TNF-α is involved in neuronal apoptosis, blood-brain barrier disruption, and microglial activation, leading to worsened neurological outcomes after TBI or stroke (Hoedemaekers et al., 2016). Its elevated levels in critically ill patients are predictive of worsened brain injury and increased morbidity.
- CRP, an acute-phase reactant, is often elevated in response to systemic inflammation and is commonly used as a marker of inflammation in critically ill patients. Higher levels of CRP have been associated with worse neurological outcomes and longer ICU stays in patients with TBI (Mayer et al., 2015).

On the other hand, IL-10 is an anti-inflammatory cytokine that counteracts the effects of pro-inflammatory cytokines. IL-10 is thought to have neuroprotective effects by promoting tissue repair, reducing neuronal injury, and mitigating the harmful effects of neuroinflammation (Tiruvadi et al., 2019). High levels of IL-10 have been linked to better neurological recovery and functional outcomes after brain injury.

Given the significant role that inflammation plays in determining outcomes for neurosurgical ICU patients, therapeutic interventions that modulate these inflammatory markers may improve patient recovery and survival. This is where TTM comes into play.

The Mechanisms of TTM in Modulating Inflammation

The neurological benefits of TTM have been well-established, particularly in the context of post-cardiac arrest (Zhou et al., 2019). Cooling is believed to reduce brain metabolism, limit oxidative stress, and decrease the release of excitotoxic neurotransmitters like glutamate, which are all implicated in secondary brain injury following trauma or ischemia (Perry et al., 2018). By reducing brain temperature, TTM can slow down the cascade of cellular processes that exacerbate neuronal injury, such as calcium influx, mitochondrial dysfunction, and apoptosis (Tiruvadi et al., 2019).

In terms of inflammation, hypothermia has been shown to modulate the immune response. Specifically, cooling has been linked to a reduction in pro-inflammatory cytokines like IL-6 and TNF-α while promoting the release of anti-inflammatory cytokines like IL-10 (Zhou et al., 2019). This immunomodulatory effect may explain some of the neuroprotective benefits associated with TTM. Cooling has been shown to inhibit the activation of NF-kB, a transcription factor that regulates the expression of pro-inflammatory cytokines, thereby attenuating the inflammatory response (Yen et al., 2017).

In patients with TBI and stroke, systemic inflammation plays a critical role in the progression of secondary brain injury, and controlling this inflammatory cascade may be essential for improving long-term neurological outcomes. Previous studies have demonstrated that therapeutic hypothermia reduces inflammatory cytokines and improves neurological recovery in these patient populations (Hoedemaekers et al., 2016; Yen et al., 2017).

Objectives

I. To evaluate the effect of TTM on inflammatory biomarker levels in critically ill neurosurgical patients.
II. To compare the biomarker changes between TTM-treated patients and control patients.
III. To assess the clinical outcomes (neurological, ICU stay, and mortality) in both groups.

This study also seeks to contribute to the growing body of literature supporting TTM as a potential therapeutic strategy not only for reducing neurological injury but also for modulating systemic

inflammation in critically ill neurosurgical patients. By elucidating the relationship between inflammatory biomarker modulation and clinical outcomes, the findings of this study may provide a stronger foundation for the use of temperature management in critical care

METHODS:

Study Design : This prospective, randomized controlled trial was conducted over a two-year period at Government Medical College Srinagar, enrolling 100 patients who were admitted to the neurosurgical ICU following major brain surgery.

Patients Were Randomized Into Two Groups: 50 in the TTM group (32-34°C) and 50 in the control group (normothermia, 36-37°C).

Inclusion And Exclusion Criteria

Inclusion Criteria:

- Adults aged 18-70 years
- Admitted to ICU post-major neurosurgical procedure (e.g., TBI, aneurysm clipping, tumor resection)
- Postoperative Glasgow Coma Scale (GCS) score ≤12

Exclusion Criteria:

- Contraindications to TTM (e.g., coagulopathy, hemodynamic instability)
- Chronic inflammatory or autoimmune disorders affecting biomarker levels Intervention

Patients in the TTM group underwent external cooling to achieve and maintain a temperature of 32-34°C for 24 hours, followed by gradual rewarming at a rate of 0.25-0.5°C/hour.The control group received standard care aimed at maintaining normothermia (36-37°C).

Primary Biomarkers Measured

- **IL-6 (Interleukin-6):** A pro-inflammatory cytokine that plays a key role in the acute-phase response to inflammation.
- **TNF-α (Tumor Necrosis Factor-alpha):** A major mediator of systemic inflammation, often elevated in patients with critical illness.
- **CRP (C-Reactive Protein):** An acute-phase protein produced by the liver in response to inflammation.
- **IL-10 (Interleukin-10):** An anti-inflammatory cytokine that helps regulate the immune response.

METHODS

- **Sample Collection:** Blood samples were taken at baseline, 24 hours, 48 hours, and 7 days after ICU admission for biomarker analysis.
- **Assays:** Enzyme-linked immunosorbent assays (ELISA) were used to quantify IL-6, TNF-α, CRP, and IL-10 levels.

Outcome Measures

Primary outcomes: were changes in inflammatory biomarkers over time.

Secondary Outcomes: Included neurological function at discharge (assessed via Glasgow Outcome Scale), ICU length of stay, and mortality.

Data Analysis Repeated measures ANOVA was used to analyze differences in biomarker levels over time between groups.

Correlations between biomarker changes and clinical outcomes were also assessed.

RESULTS

Table 1. Biomarker Changes Over Time in TTM and Control Groups

Biomarker	TTM Group (n=50)	Control Group (n=50)	p-Value
IL-6 (pg/mL)			
- Baseline	95.4 ± 10.2	94.8 ± 9.7	0.75
- 24 hours	64.2 ± 8.5	81.6 ± 9.2	< 0.01
- 48 hours	52.6 ± 7.9	80.3 ± 9.0	< 0.01
- 7 days	47.2 ± 8.3	74.5 ± 8.8	< 0.01
TNF-α (pg/mL)			
- Baseline	75.8 ± 9.1	76.3 ± 9.3	0.82
- 24 hours	55.1 ± 7.6	71.9 ± 8.2	< 0.01
- 48 hours	48.7 ± 6.9	70.5 ± 7.7	< 0.01
- 7 days	45.2 ± 6.8	68.1 ± 7.5	< 0.01
CRP (mg/L)			
- Baseline	10.5 ± 2.1	10.6 ± 2.2	0.90
- 24 hours	7.8 ± 1.8	9.8 ± 2.1	< 0.01
- 48 hours	6.3 ± 1.5	9.6 ± 2.0	< 0.01
- 7 days	5.8 ± 1.4	9.0 ± 1.9	< 0.01
IL-10 (pg/mL)			
- Baseline	18.3 ± 4.2	17.9 ± 4.1	0.68
- 24 hours	25.1 ± 5.0	19.8 ± 4.6	< 0.01
- 48 hours	28.4 ± 5.4	21.3 ± 4.9	< 0.01
- 7 days	30.2 ± 5.7	23.1 ± 5.2	< 0.01

Table 2. Clinical Outcomes in TTM and Control Groups

Outcome	TTM Group (n=50)	Control Group (n=50)	p-Value
Favorable Neurological Outcome (GOS 4-5)	36 (72%)	24 (48%)	< 0.05
Unfavorable Neurological Outcome (GOS 1-3)	14 (28%)	26 (52%)	< 0.05
ICU Length of Stay (days)	8.5 ± 1.2	11.3 ± 1.4	< 0.01
Mortality	4 (8%)	10 (20%)	0.04

Summary of Key Findings:

1. **Biomarkers:**

- The TTM group showed a significantly greater reduction in pro-inflammatory biomarkers (IL-6, TNF-α, CRP) and a greater increase in the anti-inflammatory marker IL-10 compared to the control group at all time points (24 hours, 48 hours, and 7 days).

2. **Clinical Outcomes:**

- The TTM group had significantly better clinical outcomes, including:
- Higher percentage of favorable neurological outcomes (72% vs. 48%).
- Shorter ICU length of stay (8.5 days vs. 11.3 days).
- Lower mortality rates (8% vs. 20%).

DISCUSSION

This study demonstrates the beneficial effects of Targeted Temperature Management (TTM) on inflammatory biomarkers in critically ill neurosurgical ICU patients. The findings highlight a significant modulation of the pro-inflammatory cytokines IL-6, TNF-α, and CRP, alongside an increase in the anti-inflammatory cytokine IL-10 in the TTM group. These results suggest that TTM not only provides neuroprotective effects but also plays a critical role in immune modulation. The clinical significance of these findings is underscored by the improvements in neurological outcomes, shorter ICU stays, and lower mortality rates in the TTM group. The results of this study provide compelling evidence for the beneficial effects of Targeted Temperature Management (TTM) in neurosurgical ICU patients, particularly with regard to inflammatory modulation. The significant reduction in inflammatory biomarkers such as IL-6, TNF-α, and CRP in the TTM group compared to the control group aligns with previous research demonstrating the neuroprotective benefits of controlled hypothermia in neurocritical care settings. TTM appears to attenuate the systemic inflammatory response, which is crucial for minimizing secondary brain injury after neurosurgical interventions. Our study also observed a higher level of IL-10 in the TTM group, suggesting an anti-inflammatory shift that may help facilitate recovery after major brain surgery. This finding is consistent with studies that have shown elevated IL-10 levels in response to TTM, indicating an enhanced anti-inflammatory response, which could potentially explain the improved neurological outcomes in these patients. In terms of clinical outcomes, patients in the TTM group demonstrated significantly better neurological function at discharge, as indicated by the Glasgow Outcome Scale (GOS). The higher proportion of favorable outcomes in the TTM group (72% vs. 48%) and shorter ICU length of stay (8.5 ± 1.2 days vs. 11.3 ± 1.4 days) suggest that TTM not only reduces inflammation but also improves recovery trajectories in neurosurgical ICU patients. Furthermore, the reduction in mortality (8% vs. 20%) in the TTM group emphasizes the potential life-saving benefits of this intervention. These findings are consistent with several studies that have explored the effects of TTM in various neurocritical care contexts.

For instance, studies have shown that TTM improves outcomes in patients with traumatic brain injury, stroke, and cardiac arrest by reducing neuroinflammation and preserving brain tissue. Similarly, the improvement in clinical outcomes observed in our study aligns with

findings from randomized controlled trials and observational studies that have reported better neurological recovery and survival rates in patients treated with TTM following neurosurgical procedures.

However, while this study contributes important insights into the potential benefits of TTM, several limitations must be acknowledged. The relatively small sample size and the specific setting of a single-center study may limit the generalizability of the findings. Further multicenter, larger-scale studies are needed to confirm these results and explore the long-term effects of TTM on neurological recovery and quality of life in neurosurgical patients. Conclusion In conclusion, Targeted Temperature Management (TTM) effectively reduces inflammatory biomarkers and improves clinical outcomes, including neurological function and survival, in neurosurgical ICU patients. This study supports the use of TTM as an important adjunctive therapy in the neurocritical care setting, particularly for mitigating neuroinflammation and promoting recovery following major neurosurgical procedures.

Impact of TTM on Inflammatory Markers

The modulation of the immune response is central to understanding how TTM improves patient outcomes. In this study, IL-6, a marker of systemic inflammation and a key mediator in the inflammatory response following traumatic brain injury (TBI), showed significant reduction in the TTM group at all time points compared to the control group. Elevated IL-6 levels have been associated with poor outcomes in neurosurgical ICU patients (Tiruvadi et al., 2019). By reducing IL-6 levels, TTM may help attenuate the systemic inflammatory response that exacerbates brain injury, potentially improving long-term neurological recovery.

Similarly, TNF-α, another pro-inflammatory cytokine, also decreased significantly in the TTM group. TNF-α plays a crucial role in the pathophysiology of neuroinflammation and has been linked to neuronal apoptosis and secondary brain injury (Hoedemaekers et al., 2016). The reduction in TNF-α levels with TTM suggests that it may help reduce the extent of neuroinflammation, thereby mitigating secondary damage in the brain. Previous studies have demonstrated that cooling or temperature modulation significantly lowers TNF-α levels in patients following cardiac arrest or stroke (Zhou et al., 2019), which supports our findings and further indicates the global therapeutic potential of TTM.

CRP levels, an important acute-phase reactant and another marker of inflammation, also decreased more rapidly in the TTM group. Elevated CRP levels are often seen in the early stages of severe illness, and their persistence has been associated with poorer outcomes in patients with neurological conditions (Yen et al., 2017). By lowering CRP levels, TTM may play a role in limiting the chronic inflammatory state that can impair recovery after neurosurgical procedures or brain injury.

In contrast, IL-10, an anti-inflammatory cytokine that counteracts the effects of pro-inflammatory mediators, increased significantly in the TTM group. IL-10 has been shown to enhance neuroprotection, reduce neuronal injury, and promote tissue repair (Yen et al., 2017). The rise in IL-10 levels observed in the TTM group may suggest that temperature management helps restore a balanced immune response, contributing to better outcomes.

Clinical Implications of Inflammatory Modulation

The clinical benefits of TTM observed in this study are likely linked to its ability to modulate the immune response. We observed significantly better neurological outcomes (as assessed by the Glasgow Outcome Scale), shorter ICU lengths of stay, and lower mortality rates in the TTM group compared to the control group. These findings align with previous studies suggesting that TTM can improve neurological recovery and reduce mortality in critically ill patients (Zhou et al., 2019).

The improved neurological outcomes in the TTM group may be attributed, in part, to the reduction in inflammation. Neuroinflammation is a major factor contributing to secondary brain injury, and by decreasing the levels of pro-inflammatory cytokines like IL-6 and TNF-α, TTM likely reduces this secondary damage. Neuroprotective effects of cooling have been well-documented in the context of cardiac arrest (Tiruvadi et al., 2019), and these benefits appear to extend to other critically ill neurosurgical patients. The reduction in ICU length of stay may be a consequence of the improved clinical trajectory in the TTM group. Patients with better neurological outcomes tend to recover more rapidly, requiring less intensive monitoring and shorter durations of mechanical ventilation or other life-sustaining interventions.

The reduction in mortality rates in the TTM group is a particularly important finding. Mortality in neurosurgical ICU patients is often linked to neurological deterioration, and interventions that can improve neurological recovery are likely to reduce mortality. The immunomodulatory effects of TTM, including the reduction of systemic inflammation, may contribute to better survival outcomes by reducing complications such as infection, multi-organ failure, and worsening brain injury, all of which are influenced by inflammation.

Comparison With Previous Studies

This study corroborates previous research highlighting the immune-modulatory effects of TTM. Studies have consistently shown that temperature regulation can reduce the levels of pro-inflammatory cytokines in critically ill patients, especially those with TBI or cardiac arrest (Zhou et al., 2019). For instance, a study by Hoedemaekers et al. (2016) found that therapeutic hypothermia (a component of TTM) reduced IL-6 levels and improved clinical outcomes in patients with severe TBI. Similarly, Tiruvadi et al. (2019) demonstrated that mild hypothermia after cardiac arrest reduced TNF-α and IL-6 levels, contributing to improved neurological function.

However, while much of the existing literature focuses on cardiac arrest or stroke patients, this study extends these findings to a broader range of neurosurgical ICU patients, including those with TBI and other neurological conditions. The consistent findings across different patient populations underscore the broad applicability of TTM as a therapeutic intervention for modulating inflammation and improving outcomes in critically ill patients.

Mechanisms of Action of TTM

The exact mechanisms by which TTM modulates the immune response remain an area of active research. Cooling may affect inflammatory pathways by inhibiting the activation of pro-inflammatory transcription factors such as NF-κB, which are responsible for the production of cytokines like IL-6 and TNF-α (Yen et al., 2017). Hypothermia may also reduce the release of excitotoxic neurotransmitters and minimize oxidative stress, both of which contribute to neuroinflammation (Hoedemaekers et al., 2016). Furthermore, cooling may help preserve the blood-brain barrier, reducing the infiltration of inflammatory cells into the central nervous system and minimizing neuroinflammation at the cellular level.

While further studies are needed to fully elucidate these mechanisms, the current evidence supports the notion that temperature management plays a significant role in attenuating systemic inflammation, improving neurological outcomes, and ultimately enhancing survival.

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