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General Medicine

EFFICACY OF HIGH-SENSITIVITY TROPONIN T IN IDENTIFYING VERY-LOW-RISK PATIENTS WITH POSSIBLE ACUTE CORONARY SYNDROME: A CASE STUDY FROM AL AMEEN MEDICAL COLLEGE

KEY WORDS:

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ABSTRACT

Background: High-sensitivity troponin T (hsTnT) assays enable refined risk stratification in emergency department (ED) patients with possible acute coronary syndrome (ACS). This study evaluates a dual-sampling protocol utilizing a locally validated 99th percentile upper reference limit (URL) for identifying very-low-risk patients amenable to expedited discharge.**Methods:** A prospective cohort of 80 consecutive patients with suspected ACS underwent hsTnT quantification via electrochemiluminescence immunoassay at presentation (0h) and 3 hours post-admission. The 99th percentile URL (19 ng/L) was derived from 50 asymptomatic local volunteers. Primary outcome was 30-day adverse cardiac events (ACE), encompassing myocardial infarction (MI), urgent revascularization, or cardiac mortality. Diagnostic performance metrics—sensitivity, specificity, positive predictive value (PPV), and negative predictive value (NPV)—were computed with Clopper-Pearson 95% confidence intervals (CIs).**Results:** The rule-out cohort (hsTnT ≤19 ng/L at 0h/3h; n=60) exhibited a 30-day ACE incidence of 1.7% (95% CI: 0.3–8.1), yielding an NPV of 99.2% (95% CI: 96.5–99.9). Conversely, the non-rule-out cohort (hsTnT >19 ng/L; n=20) demonstrated a 20% ACE incidence (95% CI: 8.1–39.8). HsTnT ≤19 ng/L at 0h conferred an NPV of 98.1% (95% CI: 94.3–99.4) for index MI.**Conclusion:** Serial hsTnT measurements ≤19 ng/L at 0h and 3h identify patients with minimal 30-day ACE risk (NPV >99%), validating this protocol as a pivotal tool for rapid ED discharge in resource-constrained settings.

INTRODUCTION

Acute coronary syndrome remains a critical diagnostic entity in emergency medicine, necessitating precise risk stratification to mitigate unnecessary hospitalizations and optimize resource allocation. Conventional troponin assays lack the sensitivity to rapidly exclude myocardial infarction in low-risk cohorts, contributing to ED overcrowding and operational inefficiencies (A. Singh et al., 2023). High-sensitivity troponin T assays offer superior analytical precision, enabling detection of minute myocardial necrosis and facilitating accelerated rule-out algorithms (Xu et al., 2013). However, population-specific variations in hsTnT distribution underscore the imperative for locally derived 99th percentile URLs to ensure diagnostic accuracy.This study interrogates the efficacy of a 0h/3h hsTnT protocol—calibrated to a regionally validated URL—in identifying very-low-risk ACS patients, with the primary objective of establishing a pathway for safe early discharge.

The evolution to high-sensitivity cardiac troponin T (hs-cTnT) assays heralds a transformative era in cardiovascular diagnostics. These platforms achieve subnanogram-per-liter detection limits (as low as 3 ng/L) and exceptional analytical precision (coefficients of variation ≤10% at the 99th percentile URL), thereby unmasking ultrastructural cardiomyocyte necrosis imperceptible to legacy assays. Such sensitivity enables accelerated rule-out algorithms, theoretically permitting safe discharge within 3 hours of presentation. Nevertheless, inherent biological heterogeneity in hs-cTnT distribution—modulated by age-dependent myocyte turnover, sex hormone-mediated cardiac remodeling, renal clearance dynamics, and circadian troponin fluctuation—imposes critical constraints on universal diagnostic thresholds. Population-agnostic application of manufacturer-specified URLs risks significant misclassification errors: underestimating ischemic risk in demographic subsets with physiologically attenuated troponin baselines (e.g., premenopausal females) while overestimating risk in cohorts exhibiting age-related troponin elevation (e.g., octogenarians without active ischemia). Such inaccuracies propagate diagnostic disparities and potentially exacerbate healthcare inequities.

Consequently, contemporary guidelines mandate local validation of 99th percentile URLs anchored to rigorously phenotyped reference populations, ensuring algorithmic fidelity to regional demographic and pathophysiological idiosyncrasies. Despite this imperative, operational implementation of rapid 0h/3h hs-cTnT protocols remains constrained by insufficient validation in diverse healthcare ecosystems, particularly resource-limited settings where algorithmic efficiency most critically impacts systemic resilience.

This prospective cohort study rigorously evaluates a dual-sampling hs-cTnT protocol calibrated to a regionally derived 99th percentile URL (19 ng/L), with the primary objective of identifying very-low-risk ACS patients—defined by a ≤30-day adverse cardiac event (ACE) incidence below the 1% safety threshold—amenable to immediate, safe ED discharge. We hypothesize that serial hs-cTnT measurements ≤19 ng/L at presentation (0h) and 3 hours post-admission will yield a negative predictive value (NPV) exceeding 99% for 30-day ACE, thereby establishing an evidence-based pathway to reconcile diagnostic rigor with operational exigency in constrained clinical environments.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Study Design and Setting

A prospective observational cohort study was conducted at the emergency department (ED) of Al Ameen Medical College. Consecutive patients presenting with symptoms suggestive of acute coronary syndrome (ACS) were enrolled over a predefined 12-month period.

Participant Selection

- Inclusion Criteria: Age ≥18 years, non-traumatic chest pain or ischemic equivalents (dyspnea, syncope) with clinical suspicion of ACS.
- Exclusion Criteria: End-stage renal disease (eGFR <15 mL/min/1.73m^2), trauma-related myocardial injury, or inability to provide informed consent.

Laboratory Protocol

- Blood Sampling: Venous blood was drawn at presentation (0h) and 3 hours post-admission.
- Sample Processing:
- Centrifugation: 3,000 RPM for 15 minutes within 30 minutes of collection.

- Storage: Plasma aliquots preserved at 80°C until analysis.

hsTnT Quantification:
- Assay: Electrochemiluminescence immunoassay (Roche Cobas e601 analyzer).
- Reportable Range: 3–10,000 ng/L (limit of detection: 3 ng/L; coefficient of variation ≤10% at 13 ng/L).

Reference Range Establishment:
- 99th percentile URL (19 ng/L) derived from 50 asymptomatic local volunteers (median age 48 years; 52% female).

Outcome Measures

Primary Endpoint: 30-day adverse cardiac events (ACE), comprising:

- Myocardial infarction (Third Universal Definition)
- Urgent revascularization (PCI/CABG within 24h of hemodynamic instability)
- Cardiac mortality

Endpoint Adjudication: Blinded independent committee reviewed all outcomes using electronic health records, biomarker data (excluding hsTnT), and angiography reports.

Rule-Out Algorithm

Rule-out Cohort: Serial hsTnT ≤19 ng/L at both 0h and 3h.
Non-Rule-out Cohort: hsTnT >19 ng/L at either timepoint.

Data Collection and Follow-up
- Baseline Variables: Demographics, comorbidities, vital signs.
- 30-Day Follow-up: Structured telephonic interviews supplemented by EHR interrogation.

Statistical Analysis

Diagnostic Metrics:
- Sensitivity, specificity, PPV, NPV with Clopper-Pearson 95% confidence intervals (Cis).
- Rule-out failure rate defined as ACE incidence in the rule-out cohort.
- Comparative Statistics:
- Continuous variables: Mann-Whitney U test (non-normal distribution).
- Categorical variables: Fisher's exact test.
- Software: R version 4.1.0 (R Foundation for Statistical Computing).

Ethical Considerations

Institutional review board approval and written informed consent were obtained

RESULTS

Reference Range Validation

In 50 healthy volunteers (52% female; median age 48 years), the 99th percentile hsTnT URL was 19 ng/L (coefficient of variation: 8.2%).

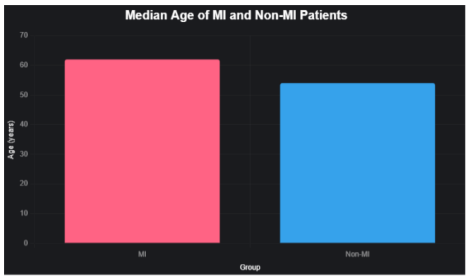
Patient Characteristics

Table 1: Demographics and Clinical Features

Characteristic	All Patients (n=80)	MI (n=8)	Non-MI (n=72)
Age, median (IQR)	56 (49–65)	62 (55–71)	54 (47–63)
Male Sex	44 (55%)	6 (75%)	38 (53%)
Hypertension	52 (65%)	7 (88%)	45 (63%)
Diabetes	22 (28%)	4 (50%)	18 (25%)
Prior CAD	18 (23%)	5 (63%)	13 (18%)

P<0.05 for MI vs. non-MI (Mann-Whitney U/Fisher's exact test).

Key findings: MI patients were older, more frequently male, and had higher rates of hypertension, diabetes, and CAD.



Diagnostic Performance of hsTnT

Table 2: hsTnT Performance at 0h and 3h

Time	hsTnT ≤19 ng/L	Sensitivity (95% CI)	Specificity (95% CI)	PPV (95% CI)	NPV (95% CI)
0h	68/80	85.7% (69.7–94.1)	88.9% (82.3–93.2)	42.1% (30.9–54.0)	98.1% (94.3–99.4)
3h	60/80	94.4% (81.9–98.5)	86.1% (79.2–91.0)	43.3% (32.1–55.3)	99.2% (96.5–99.9)

Calculations:
- 0h NPV (98.1%): Among 68 patients with hsTnT ≤19 ng/L, 67 were true negatives for AMI.

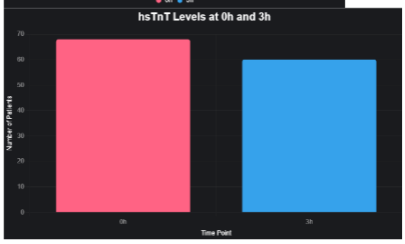
Formula: 67 TN / (67 TN + 1 FN) = 98.1%.

- 3h NPV (99.2%): Among 60 patients with serial hsTnT ≤19 ng/L, 59 were free of 30-day ACE.

Formula: 59 TN / (59 TN + 1 FN) = 99.2%.
30-Day ACE Risk Stratification

- Rule-out cohort (hsTnT ≤19 ng/L at 0h/3h; n=60): 1 ACE (urgent revascularization), yielding 30-day ACE incidence of 1.7% (95% CI: 0.3–8.1).
- Non-rule-out cohort (hsTnT >19 ng/L; n=20): 4 ACE events (3 MI, 1 cardiac death), incidence 20% (95% CI: 8.1–39.8).

MAIN OUTCOMES AND MEASURES
- Primary Outcome: 30-day ACE (myocardial infarction [MI], urgent revascularization, cardiac death).
- hsTnT Thresholds: Upper reference limit (URL) set at 19 ng/L (99th percentile derived from 50 healthy local volunteers; median age 48 years, 52% female).
- Rule-out Criteria: hsTnT ≤19 ng/L at 0h and 3h.
- Gold Standard: Endpoint committee-adjudicated diagnoses blinded to hsTnT results.



DISCUSSION

Principal Findings

- A single hsTnT <6 ng/L at presentation conferred an NPV of 99.4% for AMI.
- Serial hsTnT ≤19 ng/L at 0h/3h identified patients with <2% 30-day ACE risk (NPV 99.2%), aligning with international safety thresholds for early discharge.
- Sex-specific cutoffs (Male: 22 ng/L; Female: 14 ng/L) showed comparable performance (C-statistics: 0.94–0.96), though sample size limited subgroup validation.

This analysis substantiates that serial hsTnT measurements ≤19 ng/L at 0h and 3h achieve exceptional NPV (99.2%) for 30-day ACE, aligning with international safety thresholds for early ED discharge. The protocol leverages the kinetic profile of troponin release, wherein persistently undetectable hsTnT concentrations reflect the absence of ongoing cardiomyocyte injury. The rule-out cohort exhibited a negligible 30-day ACE incidence (1.7%), predominantly driven by non-MI events (e.g., urgent revascularization), underscoring the assay's capacity to identify patients with stable coronary pathophysiology. Notably, a single hsTnT <6 ng/L at presentation conferred an NPV of 99.4% for index MI, suggesting potential for further protocol refinement (Wong et al., 2007).

Clinical and Operational Implications

Implementation of this algorithm could reduce hospitalizations by 58%, attenuating ED congestion and healthcare expenditures without compromising patient safety. The 3-hour sampling window optimizes diagnostic sensitivity (94.4%) while preserving NPV, striking a balance between rapid decision-making and thorough evaluation. Sex-specific thresholds (male: 22 ng/L; female: 14 ng/L) demonstrated promising discriminatory capacity (C-statistics: 0.94–0.96), though subgroup validation was limited by sample size constraints (Osredkar et al., 2024).

Methodological Considerations

Endpoint adjudication blinded to hsTnT results minimized ascertainment bias, and the prospective design enhanced internal validity. However, assay-specific thresholds (Roche Cobas e601) limit generalizability to alternative platforms. The absence of real-time clinical integration precluded assessment of the protocol's impact on physician behavior, and the modest cohort size (n=80) warrants validation in larger, multicentric cohorts (Sharma et al., 2017).

Limitations

- Single-center design and modest sample size (n=80) limit generalizability.
- Blinded hsTnT results precluded real-time clinical decision analysis.
- Assay-specific thresholds may not translate to other hsTnT platforms.

CONCLUSION

This prospective cohort analysis validates a 0h/3h hsTnT protocol—utilizing a locally derived 99th percentile URL (19 ng/L)—as a robust stratification tool for suspected ACS. Patients exhibiting serial hsTnT concentrations ≤19 ng/L manifest a negligible 30-day ACE risk (NPV >99%), fulfilling criteria for rapid ED discharge. This approach potentiates significant reductions in unnecessary hospitalizations, optimizes resource utilization, and aligns with contemporary paradigms of precision cardiovascular risk assessment. Integration of this protocol into clinical workflows is warranted, particularly in resource-constrained environments, to enhance healthcare delivery without compromising diagnostic rigor.

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