

WORKSHOP PRESENTATION

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MRI reveals hemodynamic changes with acute maternal hyperoxygenation in human fetuses with and without congenital heart disease

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From 18th Annual SCMR Scientific Sessions
Nice, France. 4-7 February 2015

Background

Maternal hyperoxygenation (MH) has been used for intrauterine growth restriction and proposed as a way to improve ventricular growth in fetuses with congenital heart disease (CHD) [1,2]. Fetal lamb experiments reveal increases in the SaO₂ of umbilical venous (UV) blood and reduction in pulmonary vascular resistance during MH [3]. Doppler suggests that MH increases the human fetal pulmonary blood flow (PBF) [4]. The combination of fetal phase contrast (PC) MRI and MR oximetry using T₂ mapping offers a potential for comprehensive hemodynamic assessment of late gestation fetal circulation [5]. We investigated the physiologic impact of MH in human fetuses with and without CHD using MRI to explore the potential therapeutic benefits of chronic MH.

Methods

We examined 17 normal human fetuses [mean GA of 37.3 wks; SD ± 1 wk] and 20 fetuses with CHD (mean GA of 36.2 wks; SD ± 1 wk) on a 1.5T system (Siemens Avanto, Erlangen, Germany) after hospital IRB approval. Flows were measured in major fetal vessels using PC MRI and indexed to fetal weight along with T₂ of UV blood according to our previously published technique [5,6]. According to the Luz-Meiboom equation [7], the T₂ relaxation of blood is proportional to its O₂ saturation. The measurements were repeated during MH (12 L/min of O₂ via a non-rebreather mask, FiO₂ ~70%). Results were compared using Student's *t*-test, with results with *p*-value ≤ 0.05 considered statistically significant.

Results

At baseline, UV T₂ was lower in CHD fetuses than in normals. Although UV T₂ did not change significantly with MH in normals, we observed a significant increase in UV T₂ in CHD fetuses with MH (*p*=0.01, Fig. 1, Table 1). Both groups showed a statistically significant increase in PBF during MH but was more dramatic in CHD fetuses (*p*=0.005). While there was a significant reduction in ductus arteriosus (DA) flow in CHD fetuses during MH (*p*=0.04), this was not present in normals. There was no significant difference in blood flow in any of the other major vessels.

Conclusions

The reason for lower O₂ saturations in the UV of fetuses with CHD is uncertain, but may reflect abnormal placental and/or fetal cardiovascular function. The lower position of UV blood saturation on the O₂ dissociation curve of hemoglobin may explain the higher uptake of O₂ from maternal plasma in CHD fetuses. The expected increase in PBF with MH was observed in both groups. This increase in PBF also explains the lower DA flow in CHD fetuses with MH who had significantly higher DA flow compared to normal at baseline (*p*=0.002). This study suggests that fetal MR can assess hemodynamic changes resulting from MH and could provide useful additional fetal monitoring when MH is being used for therapy.

Funding

Labatt Family Heart Centre Innovations Fund.

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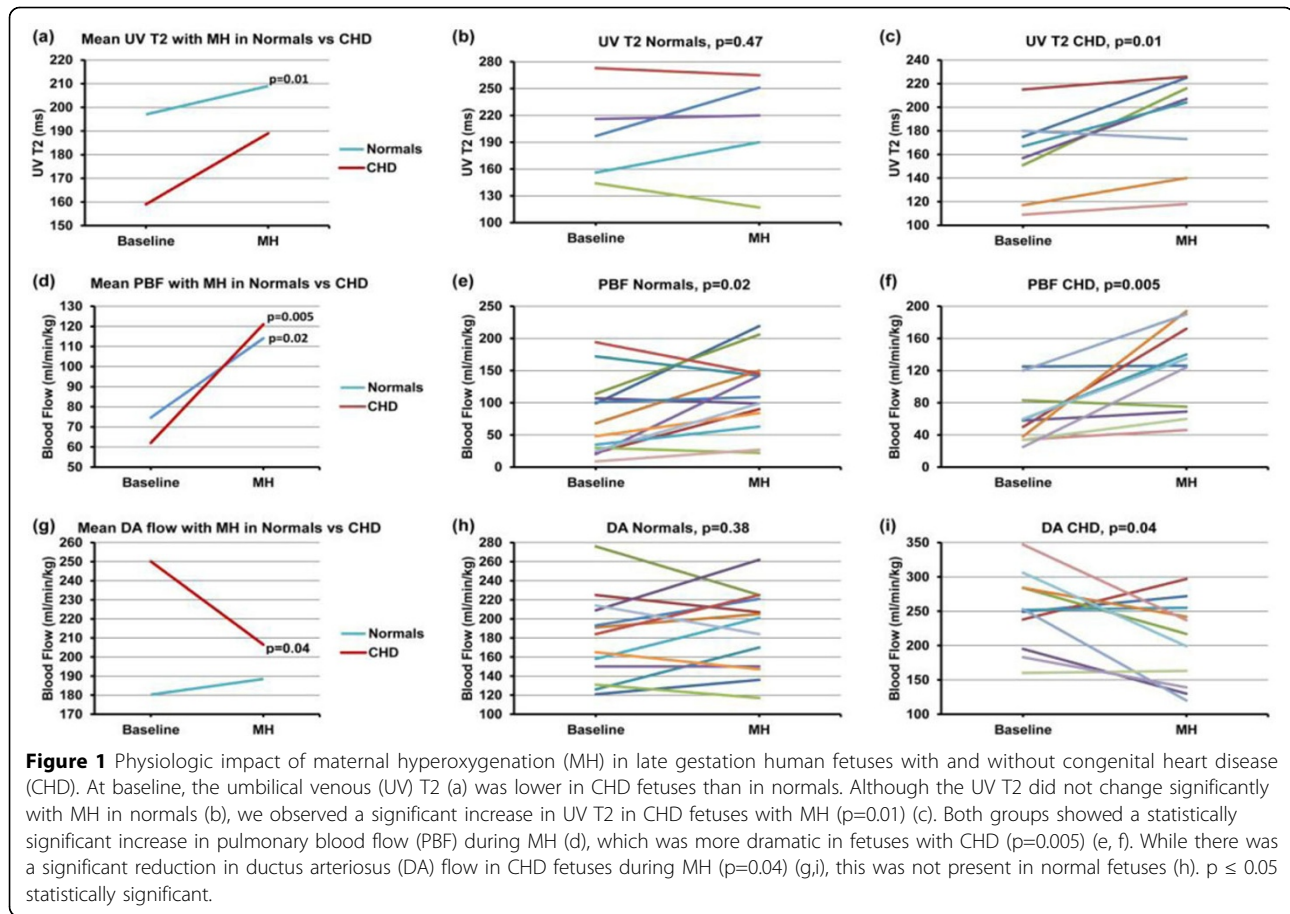


Table 1 Average blood flow and T2 with maternal hyperoxygenation in human fetuses with and without congenital heart disease

	Normals			CHD			
	Baseline	MH	<i>p</i>	Baseline	MH	<i>p</i>	
UV T2 (ms, n=5)	197.2	208.6	0.47	UV T2 (ms, n=8)	158.88	188.63	0.01
PBF(ml/kg/min, n=14)	74.57	114.1	0.02	PBF(ml/kg/min, n=11)	62.36	121	0.005
DA (ml/kg/min, n=13)	180.23	188.46	0.38	DA (ml/kg/min, n=11)	250.09	206.45	0.04

CHD: congenital heart disease, MH: maternal hyperoxygenation, UV: umbilical venous, PBF: pulmonary blood flow, DA: ductus arteriosus, $p < 0.05$ statistically significant

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doi:10.1186/1532-429X-17-S1-W13

Cite this article as: Porayette et al: MRI reveals hemodynamic changes with acute maternal hyperoxygenation in human fetuses with and without congenital heart disease. *Journal of Cardiovascular Magnetic Resonance* 2015 **17**(Suppl 1):W13.

Published: 3 February 2015

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