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## **Clinical presentation and treatment of thrombotic thrombocytopenic purpura - analysis of recent diagnostic and therapeutic methods**

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## **Abstract**

### **Introduction**

Thrombotic thrombocytopenic purpura (TTP) is a rare hematologic disease caused by reduced ADAMTS13 (A disintegrin and metalloproteinase with thrombospondin type 1 motif, member 13) activity. This disease can lead to a variety of symptoms and be difficult to diagnose. Correct diagnosis is very important to reduce mortality and initiate appropriate treatment. New treatment methods may offer better chances of survival from this potentially fatal disease.

### **Aim of the study**

The aim of the article was to evaluation of different diagnostic pathways and the effectiveness of treatment of thrombotic thrombocytopenic purpura. Drawing the attention of the medical community to the discussed issue. Highlighting the importance of the issue due to the high mortality rate in the absence of treatment.

### **Materials and methods**

The article was prepared by analyzing multiple databases, including PubMed, Google Scholar, and Elsevier covering the period from 2018 to 2024.

### **Conclusion**

Thrombotic thrombocytopenic purpura (TTP) is a rare but serious disease, especially if appropriate treatment is not initiated. There is need a special attention to TTP, as treatment

needs to begin even before a definitive diagnosis is established, due to the lengthy wait for laboratory results. Although modern biological drugs are available, further research is needed to streamline treatment methods and provide new therapeutic opportunities.

**Key words:** thrombotic thrombocytopenic purpura, thrombocytopenia, ADAMTS13

### **1. TTP etiopathology and epidemiology**

TTP can arise from different pathophysiological mechanisms, being either congenital or acquired. In the congenital form of TTP (congenital TTP; cTTP), mutations in the *ADAMTS13* gene are responsible for the disease. This type is inherited in an autosomal recessive manner. In the acquired form, the disease involves the production mainly immunoglobulin G type autoantibodies that inhibit ADAMTS13 activity, referred to as immune-mediated thrombotic thrombocytopenic purpura (iTTP). Deficiency of ADAMTS13 leads to uprisings unusually large Von Willebrand Factor (VWF) multimers. VWF platelet-binding affinity depends on its molecular weight, with large VWF multimers more likely to form platelet clots than normal ones. In TTP, low ADAMTS13 activity causes Unusually Large Von Willebrand Factor (UL-VWF) multimers to remain uncleaved in the bloodstream. This promotes platelet adhesion and thrombosis in microvessels, leading to damage in organs like the kidneys, brain and others. [1,2,17]

ADAMTS13 plays a main role in the regulation of VWF during hemostasis, but requires further scientific research into the mechanisms of its function, regulation in the body, and potential therapeutic applications. [13] The first description of a case of TTP was described over 100 years ago by Dr. Eli Moschcowitz, although the term thrombotic thrombocytopenic purpura was used for the first time in 1947. [22]

Thrombotic thrombocytopenic purpura (TTP) is predominantly classified as immune TTP (iTTP), accounting for over 95% of cases, while congenital TTP (cTTP) is much rarer, representing less than 5%. Overall, this condition is extremely uncommon, affecting only 2 to 6 people per million. [3] Due to the rarity of the disease and its wide range of symptoms, epidemiological data are often inconsistent and limited. [6] There are significant disparities in the reported prevalence of the disease. For example, studies estimate it to be 13 cases per million in France, compared to 1 to 2.7 cases per million in the USA. Slightly more women

than men are affected by both types of disease. The proportion of male patients varies widely between studies, ranging from 7% to 55.6%, female sex and African ancestry is a risk factor of the iTTP. [4,29]

It is a dangerous disease - acute attacks of the disease are associated with a 90% mortality rate if appropriate treatment is not initiated. Mortality ranges from 10 to 20% in the case of treatment. Mortality is highest within the first six months following diagnosis. Older patients are at greater risk due to longer episodes of iTTP attacks and the presence of additional comorbidities like myocardial infarction, chronic kidney disease, cancer. In younger patients, disease episodes are associated with lower mortality, typically due to the absence of comorbidities and the lack of need for treatments unrelated to TTP. [6]

We can distinguish between primary iTTP, where are no any factor that may trigger disease, and secondary iTTP. There are many factors that can be responsible for the development of secondary iTTP, such as: pregnancy or infection (main causes), but also autoimmune diseases, drugs (e.g. Ticlopidine, oral contraception), vaccines. [4] Primary iTTP was more likely to result in a more severe disease course, such as lower platelet counts  $<20 \times 10^9/L$ , gastrointestinal symptoms, or neurological impairment. [8]

## **2. Diagnosis and symptoms**

Diagnosing TTP is challenging due to limited access to ADAMTS13 testing and overlapping clinical symptoms with other thrombotic microangiopathies (TMA). It should be differentiated from disseminated intravascular coagulation (DIC), where APTT and PT are prolonged, and fibrinogen levels are decreased, unlike in TTP, where these remain normal. TTP must also be distinguished from typical and atypical haemolytic uraemic syndrome (aHUS), as well as drug-induced TMA. In cases of TMA, all other potential causes must be excluded. [8,29]

TTP is still an underdiagnosed disease and therefore requires special attention because delay in treatment may result in increased mortality. [18]

The main symptoms of TTP are: thrombocytopenia ( $<100 \times 10^9/L$  – usually  $10-30 \times 10^9/L$ ), hemolytic anemia (80-100 g/L), renal failure - usually creatinine below 2mg/dL, fever, fluctuating neurological status (e.g) confusion, delirium). These symptoms occur in other TMA so the gold standard for diagnosis is the assessment of ADAMTS13 activity. [9] The pentad of these symptoms occurred only in 40% patients diagnosed with TTP. [15] Hemolytic anemia is characterized by the presence of schistocytes. These cells can occur among healthy

people, most likely they arise during damage caused by blood collection, while in the case of thrombotic microangiopathies (including TTP), their number is increased and they arise due to mechanical damage caused by microthrombi. An increase in schistocytes can occur after the onset of symptoms. Other symptoms of hemolytic anemia include: decreased haptoglobin, hyperbilirubinemia, increased lactate dehydrogenase (LDH). [8]

The occurrence of only thrombocytopenia and hemolytic anemia should prompt the performance of ADAMTS13 activity test. ADAMTS13 activity titer below 10% will allow for the diagnosis of TTP. When ADAMTS13 activity levels oscillates between 10% and 20%, the diagnosis can be uncertain. In such challenging cases, assessing the conformation of ADAMTS13 helps in identifying iTTP. [8, 15]

The plasma protease ADAMTS13 can exist in various conformations. Under physiological conditions, it predominantly adopts a "closed" conformation, which can be activated by different factors. Mouse antibodies have been developed that, by binding to the C-terminus of ADAMTS13, enable activation of the protease rather than inhibition. This led to the hypothesis that these antibodies may induce a shift to the "open" conformation.[17]

There are tools available to help clinicians make rapid decisions about diagnostics and ordering treatment before receiving ADAMTS13 activity result. These include two scales that assess the likelihood of iTTP: the French score and the PLASMIC score. They incorporate clinical and laboratory results such as creatinine and platelet count. [3, 9]

There are known two types of antibodies responsible for binding to ADAMTS13: neutralizing (inhibitor) and non-neutralizing (binding). Neutralizing antibodies inhibits protease in vitro, whereas non-neutralizing only binds to the protease without changing its activity. In clinical practice, only the neutralizing antibodies are measured while the binding antibodies are studied exclusively for scientific purposes. Most patients have high titers of inhibitor which can be measured. However, if these antibodies are not detected and the patient exhibits symptoms of the disease, iTTP should not be ruled out, as non-neutralizing antibodies, undetectable by standard tests (ELISA test), may be present. For this reason, in 10-15% of patients with iTTP, the antibody test result will be false negative.[2,9]

In pediatric patients with symptoms of TTP, the presence of the congenital form of TTP should be particularly considered, and *ADAMTS13* gene sequencing should be performed. Mutation of this gene may cause reduced ADAMTS13 activity, without the presence of antibodies. In case of poor response to standard treatment of iTTP, the possibility of

congenital TTP should be suspected. [9] In newborns with jaundice that does not respond to treatment, a serological conflict should first be ruled out, followed by considering the possibility of TTP. [7]

Recurrent strokes despite anticoagulant treatment may indicate the development of cTTP, even in adulthood. [12] Factors such as aPTT, troponins, LDH, albumin levels, as well as markers related to inflammation, such as the assessment of complement components like sC5b-9, can aid in identifying patients who require more intensive treatment. [19] Antibodies can be a marker of relapses in the remission phase. For this reason, it is worth testing for autoantibodies even in the latency phase and assessing the need for drugs or the risk of remission. [16]

### **3. Treatment**

Treatment depends on the type of TTP. In the immune form, plasmapheresis is recommended to remove antibodies from the body, which one inhibit the ADAMTS13. In contrast, cTTP requires plasma infusions. These treatments have significantly reduced mortality rates from 90% to as low as 10%. [4,9,29]

Patients with a high probability of disease, as indicated by e.g. the PLASMIC score, should receive treatment with plasma therapy as soon as possible. [23]

Patients recovering from an acute episode of iTTP are at risk of relapse. To minimize this risk, treatment includes immunosuppressive drugs (e.g., glucocorticosteroids, cyclosporine, cyclophosphamide) and biological agents such as rituximab and caplacizumab. These medications act indirectly, helping to further control the symptoms of the disease.

**Plasma exchange** is often initiated as a first-line treatment for TTP, which is typically diagnosed based on clinical symptoms. Much less commonly, cryoprecipitate-poor plasma (CPP) has also been used in treatment and has shown even better outcomes in some cases. However, its limited availability has made it a less common option. [27] The purpose of plasma infusion is to supply the patient with the deficient ADAMTS13 protein, which has a half-life of approximately 5 days, necessitating repeated plasma infusions. In the case of cTTP, it produces similar effects to rhADAMTS13. [28]

**Corticosteroids** as immunosuppressive drugs (to suppress production of autoantibodies) are used in the treatment of iTTP the dose reduction regimen is determined based on the platelet

count and the results of the ADAMTS13 test, most often oral prednisolone is used at a dose of 1 mg/kg/day. [2]

**Caplacizumab**, a single-domain antibody, acts on the A1 domain of von Willebrand factor (VWF) to inhibit platelet adhesion and microthrombus formation. It received approval for routine clinical use in 2018. Patients receiving caplacizumab achieve platelet count normalization more quickly, require shorter hospital stays, and need fewer plasma exchange procedures. The use of this medicine may be associated with side effects, the most common of which are mucocutaneous bleeding, that resolved without intervention. [4,9,21,23,26] This medicine can also be safely used in children. [25]

**Rituximab** is an anti-human CD20 chimeric monoclonal antibody that suppresses ADAMTS13 inhibitor production by depleting B lymphocytes. Since Rituximab has a different mechanism of action compared to glucocorticoids or plasma exchange, it may be effective in patients resistant to these, treatments particularly in those with other autoimmune diseases, by reducing the number of inhibitory antibodies through the depletion of B lymphocytes. [19]

This drug has become a supportive therapy for first-line treatment. It is a safe medication with few side effects. The most common reactions are infusion-related, such as pyrexia, decreased blood pressure, urticaria, and hypoxemia, which respond well to premedication with an antihistamine. [2, 22] Rituximab is typically dosed similarly to its use in lymphoma patients; however, lower doses have also demonstrated comparable effectiveness.[23] The use of rituximab in relapse prevention has shown very good results, leading to the widespread adoption of rituximab for this purpose. It is important to note that approximately 15% of patients may be resistant to this drug or exhibit only a transient response. [5,22]

Drugs used as immunosuppression also included cyclosporine A (used when the patient was resistant to rituximab), bortezonib, or daratumumab. Surgical treatment in the form of splenectomy was also undertaken, which brought similar effects to the use of rituximab, but is a procedure with higher risk. [5,18]

There is a lack of a unified treatment strategy in the upcoming era of anti-vWF therapy, therefore further research is needed to standardize the treatment. [27]



## **Recombinant humanized ADAMTS13 (rhADAMTS13)**

This is a new opportunity for treatment outcomes, especially for cTTP patients. This drug can also be used in patients with iTTP, but requires higher doses due to complete antibody saturation.[18] RADAMTS13 also shows promise for improving outcomes in long-term treatment and reducing the number of, for example, recurrent strokes. Treatment with recombinant ADAMTS13 is associated with a lower incidence of adverse effects compared to standard treatment, and these effects are typically mild or moderate. Additionally, recombinant ADAMTS13 treatment results in significantly higher ADAMTS13 activity in the serum (around 100%) compared to standard therapy. This drug has also been used in diseases such as arterial thrombosis (stroke, heart attack) and has shown good results. This brings hope for a new anticoagulant drug, but more research is needed.[12, 13, 14]

In the future, the use of rADAMTS13 may make it possible to implement regimens without the use of plasma therapy, which depends on donor availability and may not always be available in optimal quantities. [22]

Research is emerging that utilizes mRNA technology to deliver ribonucleic acid encoding ADAMTS13 to hepatocytes, which then translate this code into the required protein. The mRNA encoding the M5 variant of ADAMTS13, which may be resistant to inhibitory antibodies and exhibit a longer duration of action, has so far been studied in mice. [24]

### **4. Complications of disease**

Complications of the disease can affect various systems, most commonly the cardiovascular system (manifesting as TIA, stroke, or myocardial infarction), the nervous system (e.g., depression, cognitive impairments), autoimmune diseases, and the excretory system. Late complications are the primary cause of mortality, as most appropriately treated patients survive the acute phase of iTTP. [4,5,6]

The risk of stroke in individuals who have survived an iTTP episode is five times higher than in the general population. Low ADAMTS13 activity following an acute episode is a significant risk factor for the aforementioned conditions, highlighting the importance of monitoring ADAMTS13 activity in these patients. [4,5,6]

Relapses of iTTP occur in 30-50% of patients, and these recurrences are often more resistant to treatment. The most significant risk factor for relapse is low ADAMTS13 activity. Other

potential factors include male gender, blood group O, black race, previous relapses, and younger age. [4,5,6]

## **5. TTP in pregnancy**

Pregnancy may be a factor that will lead to the manifestation of iTTP as well as cTTP. In women of reproductive age who are at high risk of the disease, ADAMTS13 should be monitored, because studies report that low levels of enzyme activity before pregnancy will result in a high probability of disease recurrence during pregnancy. There is a possibility of recurrence of the disease in subsequent pregnancies, in women the treatment is preferred to plasma exchange and a small dose of corticosteroids although rituximab can be used during pregnancy; however, it may lead to a reduction in fetal B lymphocyte count. Therefore, rituximab should generally be avoided. TTP can be triggered by pregnancy, with symptoms, such as acute kidney injury (AKI), most often appearing during the second or third trimester. [5, 11, 30, 31]

### **1.6 Conclusion**

Thrombotic thrombocytopenic purpura is a life-threatening but treatable condition. Advances in understanding its pathophysiology and the development of novel therapeutic options, such as caplacizumab and recombinant ADAMTS13, have improved outcomes. However, challenges remain in early diagnosis, relapse prevention, and treatment standardization. Continued research is needed to optimize management strategies and reduce long-term complications, particularly in high-risk populations, including pregnant women and patients with recurrent disease. Effective monitoring of ADAMTS13 activity and personalized treatment approaches remain critical in reducing morbidity and mortality.

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Authors do not report any disclosures

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