Do proton pump inhibitors influence SARS-CoV-2 related outcomes? A meta-analysis

The article by Lee et al.1 showed that the current use of proton pump inhibitors (PPIs) increased the risk of severe clinical outcomes of COVID-19 rather than the susceptibility to SARS-CoV-2 infection in a Korean nationwide cohort. Instead, a significant association between susceptibility to SARS-CoV-2 infection and current use of PPIs, either one time or two times a day, was found by another recent study2 based on US nationwide data. The conflicting results of these two large-scale observational studies may be due to regional epidemiological differences or considerable between-study variance and might compromise clinical decision-making. As the impact of PPI use on SARS-CoV-2 infection has very relevant clinical implications, we performed a meta-analysis to address the aforementioned discrepancies, which could lead to better informed clinical decision-making on PPI use during the ongoing pandemic.

We scrutinised 3413 records retrieved from a comprehensive search using the COVID-19 Research Articles Downloadable Database maintained by the US CDC (https://www.cdc.gov/library/research-guides/2019novelcoronavirus-researcharticles.html) and ultimately included 16 studies1–16 from 10 countries or regions reporting comparative data on PPI use and clinical outcomes of COVID-19 (online supplemental figure 1 and table). We pooled the data using an inverse variance-weighted random-effect model. Pooled estimates are presented as OR, HR or mean difference (MD), with associated 95% CIs. Intensive care unit admission, mechanical ventilation, acute respiratory distress syndrome or death were considered severe outcomes of COVID-19.

Six studies1–5,12–14 including 318 261 participants reported data on PPI usage and the risk of SARS-CoV-2 infection. Among them, five studies had information of current PPI users compared with non-users and four on past PPI users versus non-users. Analysis of five studies1–5 encompassing 145 428 patients who were tested for SARS-CoV-2 showed that the risk of SARS-CoV-2 infection was higher, although not significantly, among current PPI users (OR 1.94, 95% CI 1.59 to 2.36, p<0.0001; online supplemental figure 2). Furthermore, a leave-one-out sensitivity analysis revealed that the summary estimate of the association between current PPI usage and SARS-CoV-2 infection was overly influenced by a single Korean study (online supplemental figure 3).

Instead, current or regular PPI users were more likely to have severe outcomes of COVID-19 than PPI non-users, with a pooled OR of 1.67 (95% CI 1.19 to 2.33, p=0.003; n=42 405 from nine studies;1 3 7–13 I2=63%; figure 2) and a pooled HR of 1.87 (95% CI 1.29 to 2.73; p=0.003; n=42 405 from nine studies;1 3 7–13 I2=63%; figure 2).

**Figure 1** Forest plot showing the association between PPI use and SARS-CoV-2 infection. PPI, proton pump inhibitor.

**A Severe outcomes of COVID-19 (expressed as Odds Ratio)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Study or Subgroup</th>
<th>log(Odds Ratio)</th>
<th>SE</th>
<th>Weight</th>
<th>IV, Random, 95% CI</th>
<th>Odds Ratio</th>
<th>IV, Random, 95% CI</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Current or regular use of PPI</td>
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<tr>
<td>Almario CV, et al. 2020</td>
<td>0.41</td>
<td>0.41</td>
<td>469</td>
<td>16.7%</td>
<td>2.04 [1.56, 2.62]</td>
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<tr>
<td>Coecke, et al. 2020</td>
<td>0.69</td>
<td>0.69</td>
<td>469</td>
<td>16.7%</td>
<td>2.45 [1.78, 3.39]</td>
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**B Severe outcomes of COVID-19 (expressed as Hazard Ratio)**

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Study or Subgroup</th>
<th>log(Hazard Ratio)</th>
<th>SE</th>
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<th>IV, Random, 95% CI</th>
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<tr>
<td>Fredoom, et al. 2020</td>
<td>0.06</td>
<td>0.06</td>
<td>469</td>
<td>16.7%</td>
<td>1.06 [1.00, 1.13]</td>
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<td>Jimenez, et al. 2020 (North)</td>
<td>0.03</td>
<td>0.03</td>
<td>469</td>
<td>16.7%</td>
<td>1.03 [1.00, 1.06]</td>
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<td>Jimenez, et al. 2020 (Southwest)</td>
<td>0.02</td>
<td>0.02</td>
<td>469</td>
<td>16.7%</td>
<td>1.02 [1.00, 1.05]</td>
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**C Duration of hospital stay**

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<tr>
<th>Study or Subgroup</th>
<th>Mean Difference</th>
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<th>Weight</th>
<th>IV, Random, 95% CI</th>
<th>Mean Difference</th>
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<td>Current or regular use of PPI</td>
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<td>Total (95% CI)</td>
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**Figure 2** Forest plot showing the association of PPI use with severe outcomes of COVID-19 (A, OR; B, HR) or duration of hospital stay (C). PPI, proton pump inhibitor.
results were consistent with our leave-one-out sensitivity analysis (online supplemental figure 4), indicating that this association was strong. Furthermore, current PPI users tended to hospitalised longer than PPI non-users, although not by a statistically significant margin (n=353 from two studies; I²=80%; figure 2). Finally, past use of PPIs was not associated with increased susceptibility to SARS-CoV-2 infection (n=172833 from four studies; I²=92%; OR 0.85, 95% CI 0.57 to 1.27, p=0.43; I²=92%; figure 1) or with severe outcomes of COVID-19 (n=40 097 from three studies; I²=93% OR 1.03, 95% CI 0.85 to 1.23, p=0.79; I²=0%; figure 2).

In summary, this meta-analysis shows that regional differences can explain the heterogeneous findings concerning the association between current PPI use and incidence of SARS-CoV-2 infection and further underscores the increased risk of severe COVID-19 outcomes associated with current PPI use, highlighting that caution should be exercised when treating patients receiving PPIs during the COVID-19 pandemic. Further studies investigating different dosing regimens and durations of PPI use on COVID-19 outcomes should be warranted.

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