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Systematic Review

ChAdOx1 nCoV-19 Vaccine and Thrombosis with Thrombocytopenia Syndrome among Adults: A Systematic Review

Homa Faghihi¹, Negar Mottaghi-Dastjerdi^{2*}, Mohammad Sharifzadeh³, Nader Rahimi Kakavandi^{4, 5}

¹ Department of Pharmaceutics and Pharmaceutical Nanotechnology, Iran University of Medical Sciences, Tehran, Iran.

² Department of Pharmacognosy and Pharmaceutical Biotechnology, School of Pharmacy, Iran University of Medical Sciences, Tehran, Iran.

³ Department of Pharmacology and Toxicology, Faculty of Pharmacy, Toxicology and Poisoning Research Centre, Tehran University of Medical Sciences, Tehran, Iran

⁴ Department of Toxicology & Pharmacology, Faculty of Pharmacy, Tehran University of Medical Sciences, Tehran, Iran.

⁵ Health and Environment Research Center, Ilam University of Medical Sciences, Ilam, Iran.

* Correspondence

Negar Mottaghi-Dastjerdi, PharmD, PhD

Department of Pharmacognosy and Pharmaceutical Biotechnology, School of Pharmacy, Iran University of Medical Sciences, Tehran, Iran P.O. Box 1475886671

Tel: +982144606181

Fax: +982144606181

Email: Mottaghi.n@iums.ac.ir

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Homa Faghihi: <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-1505-4936>

Negar Mottaghi-Dastjerdi: <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-8386-774X>

Kakavandi: <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-9328-1408>

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Abstract

Several vaccine-induced thrombotic thrombocytopenia syndrome (VITTS) cases have been reported after the ChAdOx1 nCoV-19 vaccination. The current study systematically reviewed the reported post-ChAdOx1 nCoV-19 vaccination thrombotic thrombocytopenia cases. Their laboratory and clinical features, as well as the diagnostic and therapeutic measures, were investigated. Online databases were searched until 25 August 2021. Studies reporting post-ChAdOx1 nCoV-19 vaccination TTS were included. Overall, 167 cases (21-77 years old) from 53 publications were included showing a female dominance of 1.75 times. About 85% of the cases exhibited the primary symptoms within the first two weeks post-vaccination. Headache was the most common initial symptom (>44.2%), and hemorrhage/thrombotic problems

(22.46%), as well as discoordination/weakness/numbness/hemiparesis/cyanotic toes (19.6%), were the most prevalent uncommon initial symptoms. Prothrombin time (PT), D-dimers, and C-reactive protein were the most remarkable increased laboratory parameters in 50.6%, 99.1%, and 55.6% of cases, respectively. In comparison, platelet and fibrinogen were the most remarkable decreased laboratory parameters in 92.7% and 50.5% of cases, respectively. Most VITT cases presented with cerebral venous thrombosis (CVT)/cerebral venous sinus thrombosis (CVST), supraventricular tachycardia (SVT), transverse sinus/cerebral thrombosis, pulmonary embolism (PE), and cerebral hemorrhage. Anti-PF4 antibody measurement through immunoassays and functional assays were positive in 86.2% and 73% of cases, respectively. About 31% of the cases died. Early diagnosis and proper therapeutic measures are important in ChAdOx1 nCov-19 vaccine-induced VITT patients. Therefore, experts are recommended to know the corresponding clinical and laboratory features, as well as diagnostic methods. Elucidation of the pathophysiologic mechanism of ChAdOx1 nCov-19 vaccine-induced TTS deserves further investigation.

Keywords: Cerebral venous sinus thrombosis (CVST), Cerebral venous thrombosis (CVT), ChAdOx1 nCov-19 vaccine, Oxford AstraZeneca COVID-19 vaccine, Thrombotic thrombocytopenia syndrome (TTS).

1. Introduction

Vaccine-induced thrombotic thrombocytopenia (VITT) is a severe adverse event upon vaccination associated with extraordinary thrombosis and a concurrent decrease in platelet counts. VITT is likewise known as vaccine-induced prothrombotic immune thrombocytopenia (VIPIT) and/or thrombosis with thrombocytopenia syndrome (TTS)¹. ChAdOx1 nCoV-19 (Oxford/AstraZeneca) and Janssen COVID-19 vaccines, as adenoviral vector-based vaccines, have been implicated in creating VITT. The probable explanation for such phenomenon is that the free existing DNA in these vaccines might bind to anti-platelet factor 4 (PF4) antibodies². VITT is mainly attributed to PF4 antibodies partially like heparin-induced thrombocytopenia (HIT) regarding clinical and biochemical aspects. These immunoglobulin G class antibodies activate platelets via FcγRIIIa receptors, causing them to clump together, leading to clot formation and thrombocytopenia³.

About a hundred cases of thrombosis at atypical sites such as cerebral sinus, splanchnic veins, and the right ventricle with variable degrees of thrombocytopenia have been reported 5 to 30 days upon vaccination with Oxford/AstraZeneca and Janssen COVID-19 vaccines. Microvascular events in the brain, the lungs, and the kidneys have been additionally observed⁴. The precise incidence of VITT after vaccination against COVID-19 remains ambiguous due to insufficient clinical experiences, complicated diagnostic methods, several feasibly-involved mechanisms, and lack of well-defined periods for follow-up^{5,6}. Based on data latest updated in November 2021 offered by Uptodate.com, the highest incidence rates following Oxford/AstraZeneca and Janssen vaccine were 1 in 26,000 and 1 in 533,333, respectively. While crucial risk factors for VITT have not been comprehensively known, young females are proposed as the most vulnerable groups to such an adverse event. Unfortunately, patients with VITT often exhibit intravascular coagulation combined with thrombocytopenia without noticeable clinical symptoms until the immediate onset of thrombosis⁷.

Infection with SARS-CoV-2 can cause the systemic release of viral RNA leading to activation of the innate immune coagulation pathway associated with systemic and pulmonary immunothrombosis. Recently, COVID-19 viral vectored vaccines such as the ChAdOx1 nCoV-19 vaccine are associated with thrombotic thrombocytopenia after vaccination called VITT³. One of the main mechanisms clarified by the Greifswald Working Group with Andreas Greinacher leadership was antibody formation against platelet antigens (anti-Platelet Factor-4 (PF4)) due to the stimulation of the immune system and inflammatory reactions. These

antibodies can finally lead to an extensive activation of the platelets via the Fc receptor (FcR), which resembles heparin-induced thrombocytopenia or HIT⁸. After intramuscular administration of an adenoviral-vectored vaccine, a cascade of events occurs, including microvascular damage, microbleeding and activation of the platelets with the release of PF4 and disperse of the adenovirus cargo with the engagement of DNA-PF4 can interrupt the immune tolerance causing rare autoimmunity directed by PF4³. According to the reported deaths associated with ChAdOx1 nCoV-19 post-vaccination VITT, early diagnosis and fast therapeutic measures could benefit the outcome of the patients.

In this study, we systematically reviewed the reported cases of post-vaccination thrombotic thrombocytopenia contributed to the ChAdOx1 nCoV-19 vaccine and investigated their laboratory and clinical features and the diagnostic and therapeutic measures applied in these cases.

2. Methods

This study was performed based on the PRISMA (Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses) protocol for reporting systematic reviews and meta-analyses.

2.1. Search strategy

We performed a comprehensive literature search in the online databases of PubMed, Scopus, and Google Scholar up to August 25th, 2021. In the investigation, we purposed to identify case reports investigating the effects of ChAdOx1 nCoV-19 vaccination on vaccine-induced immune thrombotic thrombocytopenia in adults. The following keywords were used in the search strategy: (Thrombosis OR Thromboses OR Thrombus OR "Blood Clot" OR "Blood Clots" OR "Clot, Blood" OR "Clots, Blood" OR Thrombocytopenia OR "cerebral venous sinus thrombosis (CVST)" OR "Vaccine-induced immune thrombotic thrombocytopenia (VITT)" OR "vaccine-induced prothrombotic immune thrombocytopenia (VIPIT)" OR Platelets OR "Blood Platelet" OR "Platelet, Blood" OR "Platelets, Blood" OR Thrombocytes OR thrombocyte OR platelets OR platelet OR "low-platelet syndrome" OR Thrombocytopenias OR thrombopenia OR thrombopenias) AND (AstraZeneca OR "ChAdOx1 SARS2 vaccine" OR "ChAdOx1 nCoV-19 " OR Covishield OR AZD1222 OR "Oxford AstraZeneca COVID-19 vaccine" OR "ChAdOx1 COVID-19 vaccine" OR "COVID-19 vaccine" OR "SARS-CoV-2 vaccine"). No time restriction was applied. References of the relevant publications were manually screened to avoid missing any eligible studies. Unpublished researches were not included. Two independent investigators conducted a literature search.

2.2. Inclusion criteria

We included eligible studies that met the following criteria: 1) case reports, 2) studies that administered ChAdOx1 nCoV-19, 3) case reports and case series with thrombocytopenia and thrombosis after ChAdOx1 nCoV-19 administration. The complete one was included if >1 article was published for one dataset.

2.3. Exclusion criteria

In the current systematic review, we excluded experimental studies, those with a cohort, cross-sectional, and case-control design, clinical trials, and review articles. We also excluded studies with reports on thrombosis without thrombocytopenia or thrombocytopenia without thrombosis after ChAdOx1 nCoV-19 vaccine administration.

2.4. Data extraction

Two independent investigators performed data extraction from each eligible case report and case series. The following information was extracted: name of the first author, publication year, individuals' characteristics (age, sex, ethnicity, smoker/non-smoker), place of measure, number of cases in each study, first dose of ChAdOx1 nCoV-19 vaccine, medical history, previous exposure to heparin, medication on admission, chief complaint/initial symptom, onset

of symptom (days) post vaccination (initial symptoms/thrombocytopenia/thrombotic complications), therapeutic measures, medical examination/imaging method/site of thrombosis/hemorrhages, outcome, laboratory parameters including hemoglobin, platelets/white/red blood cells count, prothrombin time (PT)/INR, Activated partial thromboplastin time (ratio)/aPTT/PTT, thrombin time, fibrinogen, D-dimers, antithrombin, C-reactive protein, haptoglobin, neutrophil, lymphocyte, monocyte, eosinophil, aminotransferase, Gamma glutamyl transferase, sodium, potassium, calcium, glucose, nitrogen urea, Lactate dehydrogenase (LDH), Lactate, Total bilirubin, Amylase, Coagulation factor, Folic acid, Vitamin B12, Pro-calcitonin, Creatinine, Total protein, Albumin, Paroxysmal nocturnal haemoglobinuria, Ferritin, Interleukin, Cholesterol/HDL ratio, urea, EXTEM CT, EXTEM A10, FIBTEM A10, INTEM CT, fibrin degradation product, Protein C activity, Protein S (free antigen), VWF, Thrombophilia mutations (Factor V Leiden, Prothrombin G20210A, MTHFR, Janus Kinase 2 (JAK2)), Antiphospholipid antibodies, anti-thyroid peroxidase, Myeloperoxidase, anti-neutrophil cytoplasmic anti-bodies (ANCA), rheumatoid factor, antinuclear antibodies, extractable nuclear antigen, dsDNA, anti-globulin test, Neutrophil DNA extracellular traps (NETs), Schistocytes on peripheral blood smear, Blood film, Immunoglobulins IgA/IgM/IgG, Complement, Cryoglobulins, ADAMTS13, Antiplatelet antibodies, Homocysteine, septic screen of blood/urine/respiratory cultures, acute kidney injury (AKI), SARS-CoV-2 screening, test for other possible causes of thrombocytopenia including hepatitis B virus (HBV), hepatitis C virus (HCV), HIV, Epstein-Barr virus (EBV), cytomegalovirus (CMV), hantaviruses, and Helicobacter pylori infections, as well as anti-PF4 antibodies screening (immunoassays and functional assays). If data on laboratory parameters were reported in different units, we converted them to the most frequently used unit.

3. Results and discussion

Many regulatory agencies approve the Oxford-AstraZeneca COVID-19 vaccine with the viral vector platform for the prevention of COVID-19. Also called Vaxzevria, Covishield, AZD1222, ChAdOx1 SARS2 vaccine, and ChAdOx1 nCov-19, this vaccine has an efficacy of 66.7% two weeks after the second dose⁹. Common side effects of the ChAdOx1 nCov-19 vaccine include site reaction (tenderness, pain, warmth, itching or bruising), chills or feverish, headache, nausea, fatigue, unwell feeling, and joint pain, or muscle ache; all be resolved within a few days¹⁰. However, there were few reports on rare cases of thrombosis at unusual sites associated with thrombocytopenia shortly after ChAdOx1 nCov-19 vaccine administration^{2,11}. Accordingly, in this systematic review, we investigated different features of the studies reporting the cases with thrombotic thrombocytopenia syndrome (TTS) after the ChAdOx1 nCov-19 vaccine administration.

Totally, 4924 publications were identified in our initial search. After the screening, 4856 unrelated articles were excluded based on duplication (n=108), title, and abstract assessment. Then, 62 publications remained for further evaluation of a full text. Out of these 62 eligible publications, five studies were also excluded due to the absence of thrombosis¹²⁻¹⁶, and four studies were excluded due to the lack of thrombocytopenia¹⁷⁻²⁰. The flow diagram of study selection is outlined in **Fig. 1**.

3.1. Characteristics of the included studies

The characteristics of 53 case reports included in the current systematic review are illustrated in **Table 1**. One hundred and sixty-seven cases are included in the 53 studies in this systematic review (63.6 % females and 36.4 % males). These cases were between 21 to 77 years old (19.6% (20-29 y/o), 20.9% (30-39 y/o), 21.5% (40-49 y/o), 15.3% (50-59 y/o), 16.6% (60-69 y/o), and 6.1% (70-77 y/o)). The primary symptoms after ChAdOx1 nCov-19 vaccination initiated from the first day ranged from 0-26 days after vaccination. However, these cases'

thrombocytopenia/thrombotic complications started from day 2 to 35 days after vaccination with ChAdOx1 nCov-19.

3.2. Findings from the systematic review

3.2.1. Patient characteristics, site of thrombosis, and outcome of case reports on VITT after ChAdOx1 nCov-19 vaccination

Our results showed that TTS occurs 1.75 times more in women. Most cases (62%) aged between 20-49 years old. Among the cases with TTS in this systematic review, about 60% had no remarkable PMH of any personal or familial disease/risk factors, and about 24% had pre-existing conditions. In addition, less than 30% of the cases had several regular medications with contraceptives as the most used medication²¹⁻²⁸. However, the number of cases for each condition or medication is not enough to find a relationship between the pre-existing condition or regular medication and TTS risk post-ChAdOx1 nCoV-19 vaccination.

In addition to the common symptoms associated with administration of ChAdOx1 nCoV-19 vaccine with headache as the most common initial symptom (>44.2%)^{2,11,21-26,29-59}, cases in this systematic review reported having some uncommon initial symptoms, including hemorrhage/thrombotic problems (22.46%)^{11,24,28,52,60,61} and discoordination/weakness/numbness/hemiparesis/cyanotic toes (19.6%)^{21-23,29-31,37-41,48,52,54,56,62,63} as the most prevalent uncommon initial symptoms which could be a signal alert to be aware of VITTS. However, further study is needed to figure out a relationship between these initial symptoms and the risk of VITTS.

The initial symptoms were appeared within the first, second, third, fourth, and fifth week post vaccination with ChAdOx1 nCov-19 vaccine in 32.1%^{2,11,21,22,24,25,27-32,34,35,37,40,42,43,45-50,53-59,62,64-67}, 53.3%^{2,11,22-29,31,33,36-44,51,52,54,56,60,61,66,68,69}, 11.5%^{2,11,24,27,28,40,41,52,60,63,70}, 1.8%^{24,25,27}, and 1.2%²⁷ of the cases, respectively. These results showed that the initial symptoms after ChAdOx1 nCov-19 vaccination might start from the first day ranging from 0-26 days after vaccination. However, the thrombocytopenia/thrombotic complications in these cases started from day 2 to 35 days after vaccination with ChAdOx1 nCov-19. Our results confirmed that more than 85% of the cases showed the initial symptoms within the first- and second-week post-vaccination.

This systematic review also investigated the clinical features in a cohort of cases presenting with acute atypical thrombosis, mainly involving the cerebral veins and concurrent thrombocytopenia. Most cases involved in this systematic review presented with CVT/CVST^{2,11,22,24-29,33,34,36,39,45,47,54,56,58,60-62,71}, SVT (thrombosis of the portal (PVT), mesenteric, splenic, ileal, or hepatic veins)^{2,11,22,24-29,31,33-36,38-40,44,45,47,52,54-58,61,62,65,66,69,71}, transverse sinus/cerebral thrombosis^{21-23,25,29,32-35,37-40,42,44,45,47,50,52,54,56,62,69} and PE^{2,11,22,24,25,28,29,35,39-41,52,54,57,58,60,61,63,65,66,68,70}, as well as cerebral hemorrhage (occipital, temporo-occipital, frontal, juxtacortical, cerebellar, intraparenchymal/hemispheric/parenchymal hemorrhage/subarachnoid hemorrhage (SAH)^{2,21-25,31,32,34,37,39,42,44,47,50,54,55,59,62,69}). However, further study is needed to make a reliable conclusion on the relationship between the outcome of the cases and ChAdOx1 nCov-19 vaccine-induced TTS.

About 31.4% of the reported cases died^{2,11,21,22,24,27-32,34,38,39,43,50,55,62,66,69,71} and about 68.6% of the cases fully recovered^{2,11,22-29,33,35-37,39-42,44-49,51-54,56,58,59,61,63-68,70}. Details on patient characteristics, therapeutic measures, site of thrombosis, and outcome of case reports on VITT after ChAdOx1 nCov-19 vaccination are illustrated in **Supplementary Table 1a** and summarized in **Supplementary Table 1b**.

3.3. Laboratory tests

Common laboratory parameters including hemoglobin, WBC, platelet, PT/INR, aPTT, fibrinogen, thrombin, D-dimers, C-reactive protein, and antithrombin were also assessed in the included cases with ChAdOx1 nCov-19 vaccine-induced TTS in our systematic review.

Summary of these laboratory blood tests are illustrated in **Table 2** and the details are illustrated in **Supplementary Table 2**. Our results showed normal levels of antithrombin in all cases, high levels of WBC, PT/INR, aPTT, fibrinogen, thrombin, D-dimers, C-reactive protein in 33.3%, 50.6%, 20.5%, 4.4%, 14.3%, 99.1%, and 55.6% of cases, respectively as well as lower than normal levels of hemoglobin, WBC, platelet, PT, aPTT and fibrinogen in 22.2%, 13.3%, 92.7%, 1.3%, 11.5%, and 50.5% of cases, respectively. Prothrombin time (PT), D-dimers, and C-reactive protein were the most remarkable increased laboratory parameters in 50.6%, 99.1%, and 55.6% of cases, respectively. In comparison, platelet and fibrinogen were the most remarkable decreased laboratory parameters in 92.7% and 50.5% of cases, respectively. Accordingly, these laboratory parameters should be considered most. In addition, abnormally increased levels of CRP are correlated with worse prospects and more rates of mortality in patients with COVID-19⁷². However, further studies are needed to find a reliable relationship between these common laboratory parameters and ChAdOx1 nCov-19 vaccine-induced TTS. Less common laboratory tests of case reports on VITT after ChAdOx1 nCov-19 vaccination are summarized in **Table 3**, and the details are illustrated in **Supplementary Table 3**.

Summary of thrombophilia marker assays in case reports on VITT after ChAdOx1 nCov-19 vaccination is illustrated in **Table 4**. Antiphospholipid antibodies (lupus anticoagulant, beta-2-glycoprotein 1, and anticardiolipin antibodies) as the most commonly evaluated thrombophilia markers were evaluated in a couple of cases as follows^{2,11,22-24,26,30,31,34,37,39,42,48-51,54,56,57,59,63-66,71}: Lupus anticoagulant measured in 20.3% of cases (positive in 8 cases, negative in 26 cases), Beta-2-glycoprotein was evaluated in 20.3% of cases (positive in 2 cases, negative in 32 cases), and anticardiolipin antibodies were measured in 21.5% of cases (positive in 4 cases, negative in 32 cases). Details of thrombophilia marker assays in case reports on VITT after ChAdOx1 nCov-19 vaccination is illustrated in **Supplementary Table 5**. Coagulopathy has been found in association with the detection of antiphospholipid antibodies, but the latter's relation with VITT remains controversial. Although the levels of these markers have been measured in about 20% of all-studied cases, the outcome did not provide significant evidence of antiphospholipid antibody linkages to the occurrence of VITT post-vaccination. It should be noted that there were no complete details of such screening in all cases, and therefore, the pathogenesis of these antibodies in VITT deserves further attention. Von Willebrand factor (VWF) was measured in 8 cases which were positive in 73%. In a previously performed research work, VWF and P-selectin were introduced as key factors which were involved in the formation of platelet-leukocyte complex, leading to platelet activation and enhanced thrombocytopenia upon adenovirus exposure which highlights the further assessments of this marker to elucidate its possible role in the pathogenesis of VITT⁷³.

Anti-PF4 antibody measurement through immunoassays and functional assays were positive in 86.2%^{2,11,21-27,30,31,34,35,39-41,45-49,51,52,54-56,58-62,66,71} and 73% of cases^{21-24,35,39,40,52,60,63,66,70,71}, respectively. Details on anti-PF4 antibody assays of case reports on VITT after ChAdOx1 nCov-19 vaccination is illustrated in **Supplementary Table 4**.

Binding of viral protein and free DNA particles in the vaccine to platelet factor 4 (PF4) and generation of specific antigens are assumed to stimulate the secretion of antibodies against PF4 further. The immune complex of the PF4-IgG antibody and heparin activates platelets via interaction with cellular FcγRIIa receptors on the platelet surface. Subsequent clotting will be developed in combination with thrombocytopenia known as VITT³⁸. VITT resembles heparin-induced thrombocytopenia (HIT) in terms of clinical symptoms and pathobiology. Autoimmune or spontaneous HIT syndrome provides anti-PF4 antibodies despite the absence of previous exposure to heparin and includes persisting HIT, spontaneous HIT syndrome, flush heparin HIT, and fondaparinux-associated HIT²⁶. The serological and clinical features of autoimmune HIT are like those seen in VITT. In contrast to HIT, platelet activation in VITT occurs in the presence of PF4 rather than low heparin concentrations. The specific detection of

antibodies contributed to ChAdOx1 nCov-19 vaccination should be regarded as a crucial task in confirming suspected VITT. The GTH expert committee highly recommends screening anti-PF4 antibodies if any thromboembolic events or thrombocytopenia observed during 2 weeks upon vaccination⁸. There are two main approaches to verify the existence of VITT-related antibodies as is demonstrated in **Fig. 2**. The preliminary screening phase is employment of immunoassays to confirm the presence and quantify the level of anti-PF4 antibodies. The further confirmatory step is via utilizing functional assays to detect the presence of platelet – activating antibodies independently of heparin.

As it has been reported in the results, the immunoassays were used to detect anti-PF4 antibodies in more than 82% of all-evaluated cases and resulted in 85% positive outcomes. Generally considering, immunoassays are categorized in 3 main subgroups namely optical density-based assessments, visual-based assessments as well as miscellaneous (such as CLIA and Latex-agglutination assay). Although screening for anti PF4 antibodies via a particle gel immune assay (ID-PaGIA) was positive in a few cases⁵¹, lack of precise sensitivity to recognize anti-PF4 antibodies were observed by PaGIA, and CLIA. While the results of a couple of studies exhibited the acceptable sensitivity of immunoassays such as Immucor® (which employs polyvinyl sulfonate and PF4) to recognize antibody-inducing VITT with up to 100% accuracy, employment of PaGIA or CLIA was not sufficiently precise. A prominent conclusion is indicative of the fact that establishing a diagnosis of VITT may require a combination of diverse tests. CLIA was previously reported to be well sensitive for HIT antibodies while VITT antibodies were not desirably responsive to CLIA which is possibly due to differences between epitopes in VITT and HIT antibodies⁴.

It is additionally worth noting that, among diverse IgG-specific ELISAs, the sensitivity and specificity has been reported to significantly vary in HIT from that of VITT. For instance, Asserachrom HPIA IgG has demonstrated 91.1 and 100% sensitivity and specificity for diagnosis of VITT while 72 and 93.8% sensitivity and specificity for diagnosis of HIT. Lifecodes PF4 IgG and Zymutest HIA IgG assays provide 94.1 and 77.8 % sensitivity and specificity to detect VITT while supplying more than 99 and 85% respective sensitivity and specificity to quantify HIT. It is worth considering that HemosIL AcuStar HIT-IgG and STic Expert, as frequently applicable rapid tests, with almost complete specificity for detection of both VITT and HIT are poorly sensitive to VITT-related antibodies, up to 5.9 and 4.2%, respectively. The sensitivity of both mentioned assays to detect HIT antibodies is more than 98%⁷⁴. In conclusion, the immunoassays, including HYPHEN BioMed ZYMUTEST and the Immucor, could be introduced as acceptably sensitive for VITT-relevant antibodies. The results of other comprehensive investigations concluded that for detection of VITT, the ELISA assays from Stago, Hyphen, and LIFECODES were acceptable. The assays from Acustar HIT assay, LIA, Stago STIC, were not reliably sensitive⁷⁵.

Immunoassays to detect antibodies against the platelet factor 4 (PF4)/heparin complex exhibit positive results should be further evaluated via functional tests since all existing tests for HIT diagnosis are not necessarily validated to detect antibodies involved in pathogenesis of VITT. Functional assays are technically complicated procedures to perform routinely. They are classified as serotonin release- based assay, platelet aggregation detection, flow cytometry, HIT-mimicking monoclonal antibody- based assay and miscellaneous (such as Latex immunoturbidimetric assay). In the current review, 63 cases were evaluated through functional assays which platelet-activating antibodies were detected in 73% of the totally assessed cases. It is recommended that upon positive immunoassays of PF4-heparin antibodies, a heparin-induced platelet activation (HIPA) assay or serotonin-release assay (SRA) be performed to confirm the diagnosis further. The advantage of HIPA over SRA is visual confirmation of platelet aggregation, unlike SRA, which makes use of radioactive agents⁷⁶. [12]. Simpler technologies are flow cytometry, turbidometry, aggregometry, and assessment of luciferase

activity. For functional assays, measured end points, employed technology, accurate selection of platelet-donor, varied types of heparin and between laboratory differences should be regarded as critical variables which have influence on interpretation of achieved results⁷⁷.

Functional assays can detect platelet-activating antibodies in both typical and autoimmune HIT. If conventional HIPA or SRA tests do not represent autoimmune HIT, a modified HIPA test is suggested which indicates the vaccine-induced prothrombotic immune thrombocytopenia (VIPIT) with a different reaction pattern⁸. Similarly, it has been exhibited that in VITT, the serotonin-release assay could investigate anti-PF4 IgG in the absence of heparin⁷⁸.

Recommended algorithm for diagnosis and treatments of patients with suspected ChAdOx1 nCoV-19 vaccine-induced TTS, 2 to 35 days after ChAdOx1 nCoV-19 vaccination is outlined in **Fig. 3**. Based on the GTH guideline, in the screening test for PF4/heparin antibodies with a positive result, functional confirmatory tests should be performed. These assays detect antibodies able to activate platelets dependent on (typical HIT) or independent of exogenous heparin (autoimmune HIT)⁸. About 43% of the cases in this systematic review had no previous exposure to heparin and therefore, positive test results in these cases can establish the diagnosis of other mechanisms including autoimmune HIT.

As the unknown mechanism and pathophysiological basis of VITTS after the administration of ChAdOx1 nCoV-19 vaccine, careful consideration should be prompted for the treatment. Platelet transfusion can provide further substrate for coagulopathy through antibody-mediated platelet activation mechanism²⁴. A comprehensive understanding of the exact mechanism involved in ChAdOx1 nCoV-19 vaccine associated TTS may allow for more targeted and efficient therapeutic measures.

There was no evidence yet suggesting the exacerbation of the patient condition after heparin administration, however, anticoagulation using a non-heparin anticoagulant including danaparoid, fondaparinux, or Argatroban, or DOACs is recommended. IVIG administration has been shown to be useful in patients with autoimmune HIT as the closest clinical manifestation to VITTS syndrome. Furthermore, plasma exchange with plasma instead of albumin can cause a temporary reduction in the levels of pathologic antibodies leading to amelioration of the coagulopathy in terms of hypofibrinogenemia²⁴.

Gundry and his colleagues used the PLUS Cardiac Test (GD Biosciences, Inc, Irvine, CA) as a clinically validated examination to measure different protein-based markers leading to the generation of a 5-year risk predicting the score of Acute Coronary Syndrome (ACS). Their results showed that the COVID-19 mRNA vaccines could substantially raise endothelium inflammation and T cell infiltration in the cardiac muscle. This might justify the high rate of cardiomyopathy, thrombosis, and different vascular problems observed after mRNA-based vaccination. Accordingly, it is recommended to do the same study with ChAdOx1 nCoV-19 induced TTS patients, which can help elucidate the possible TTS mechanisms in these patients. The most practical implication of these findings is that a low threshold should be considered to request immunoassays and confirmatory functional assays in cases with unexpected VITT clinical symptoms upon ChAdOx1 nCoV-19 vaccination. No individual immunoassay test can detect all feasibly existing VITT cases, and if a single test becomes negative, a further ELISA or a functional assay should be ordered in case of strong clinical features of VITT. It is additionally recommended that upon positive ELISA results, functional assays perform as well.

4. Conclusion

ChAdOx1 nCoV-19 vaccine-induced VITTS is an unusual and potentially fatal disorder that necessitates early diagnosis and appropriate therapeutic measures. Accordingly, familiarity with the clinical and laboratory features as well as diagnostic methods of this clotting complication is of great importance for health care providers to reduce the mortality rate in VITT patients. Further investigations on the pathophysiologic and molecular

mechanisms of ChAdOx1 nCov-19 vaccine-induced VITTS may improve the diagnostic and therapeutic measures.

Author contributions

All authors contributed to the study conception and design. Literature search and data analysis were performed by Homa Faghihi and Negar Mottaghi-Dastjerdi. The first draft of the manuscript was written by Homa Faghihi, Negar Mottaghi-Dastjerdi, Mohammad Sharifzadeh and Nader Rahimi Kakavandi. All authors commented on previous versions of the manuscript. All authors read and approved the final manuscript.

Conflict of interest

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

Data availability statement

All data generated or analyzed during this study are included in this published article [and/or its supplementary material].

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Figure Captions:

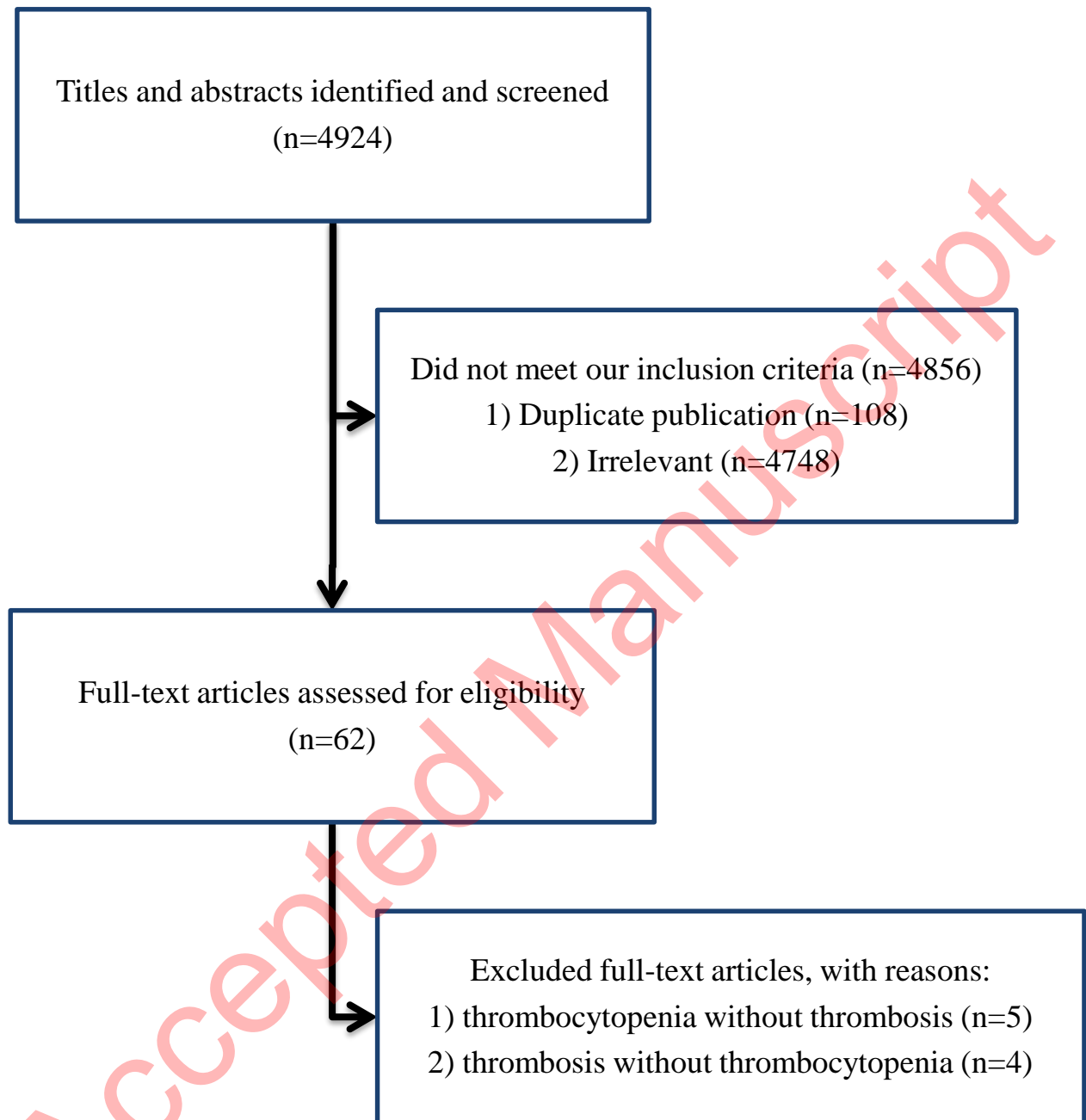
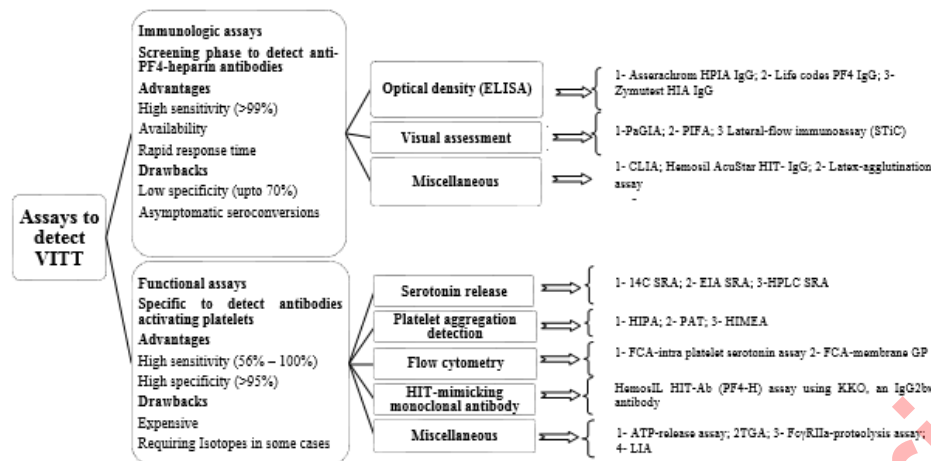


Figure. 1 Flow diagram of study selection



Abbreviations: ATP, adenosine triphosphate; 14C, carbon 14; EIA, enzyme immunoassay; FCA, flow-cytometry assay; GP, glycoprotein; HPLC, high-pressure liquid chromatography; HIT, heparin-induced thrombocytopenia; HIMEA, heparin-induced multielectrode aggregometry; HIPA, heparin-induced platelet activation; KKO, murine HIT-like monoclonal antibody; LIA, latex immunoturbidimetric assay; PF4, platelet factor 4; PAT, platelet-aggregation assay; SRA, serotonin-release assay; TGA, thrombin-generation assay; PaGIA, particle-gel immunoassay; PIFA, Particle-immunofiltration assay.

Figure. 2 Functional and immunologic assays for detection of anti-PF4 antibodies

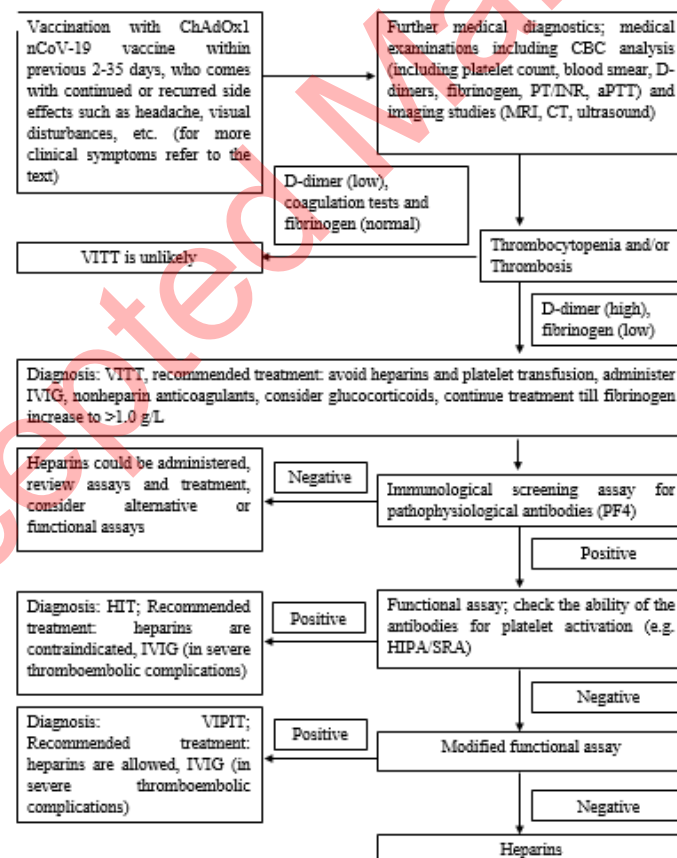


Figure. 3 Recommended algorithms for diagnosis and treatments of patients with suspected ChAdOx1 nCoV-19 vaccine-induced TTS, 2 to 35 days after ChAdOx1 nCoV-19 vaccination

Tables

Table 1 Summary of case reports on VITT after ChAdOx1 nCov-19 vaccination

No.	Author	Year	No. of cases	Onset of primary side effects post vaccination, days	Onset of symptoms (thrombocytopenia /thrombotic complications) post vaccination, days	Age (year)	Sex	Place of measure	Ethnicity	Ref.
1	Greinacher	2021	9	4-16	4-16	22-49	8 F, 1 M	Germany	NA	11
2	Al-Mayhany	2021	3	6-21	11-21	35-43	2 F, 1 M	UK	2 Asian 1 White	29
3	Scully	2021	23	NA	6-24 (22 out of 23)	21-77	14 F, 9 M	UK	NA	24
4	Schultz	2021	5	7-10	7-10	32-54	4 F, 1 M	Norway	NA	22
5	Greinacher	2021	11	NA	5-16	22-49	9 F, 2 M	Germany and Austria	NA	2
6	Bayas	2021	1	0	8	55	1 F	Germany	NA	64
7	Blauenfeldt	2021	1	<7	7	60	1 F	Denmark	Danish	30
8	Mehta	2021	2	6-9	6-9	25-32	2 M	UK	White	31
9	Castelli	2021	1	7	7	50	1 M	Italy	Caucasian	32
10	D'Agostino	2021	1	12	12	54	1 F	Italy	NA	69
11	Esba	2021	2	14	>14-16	40-61	1 F 1 M	Saudi Arabia	NA	33
12	Franchini	2021	1	7	11	50	1 M	Italy	White	34
13	Garnier	2021	1	0	8	26	1 F	France	NA	35
14	Geeraerts	2021	2	NA	NA	NA	NA	France	NA	71
15	Gras Champel	2021	27	NA	2-35	21-74	13 F, 14 M	France	NA	27
16	Jones	2021	1	20	25	63	1 M	UK	NA	63
17	Ramdeny	2021	1	14	21	54	1 M	UK	NA	36
18	Wolf	2021	3	0-8	7-17	22-46	3 F	Germany	NA	37
19	Xie	2021	1	<7	7	23	1 F	UK	NA	65
20	Muster	2021	1	8	8	51	1 F	Austria	NA	68
21	Aladdin	2021	1	14	14	36	1 F	Saudi Arabia	NA	38
22	Althaus	2021	8	6-20	6-20	41.5 (24-53)	5 F, 3 M	Germany	NA	28
23	Bano	2021	3	8-13	10-16	53-61	2 F 1 M	UK	NA	39
24	Bonato	2021	1	14	14	26	1 F	Italy	Italian	23
25	Bourguignon	2021	3	7-18	15-24	63-72	1 F, 2 M	Canada	NA	40
26	Choi	2021	1	0	12	33	1 M	Korea	Korean	62
27	Cliff-Patel	2021	3	8-21	8-28	28-61	3 M	UK	NA	41
28	Gangi	2021	6	3-26	9-31	38 (26-48)	4 M 2 F	UK	NA	25
29	Gattringer	2021	2	6-8	8-12	24-39	2 F	Austria	NA	42
30	Gessler	2021	2	7-12	7-12	47-50	2 F	Germany	NA	43
31	Graf	2021	1	9	14	29	1 M	Germany	NA	44
32	Guan	2021	1	5	10	52	1 M	Taiwan	East Asian	45
33	Huang	2021	1	0	10	34	1 M	Taiwan	Asian	46
34	Ikenberg	2021	1	0	7	early 30s	1 F	Germany	NA	47
35	Jacob	2021	1	0	7	39	1 F	UK	NA	48
36	Khuhapinant	2021	1	3	8	26	1 F	Thailand	Asian	49
37	Mauriello	2021	1	1	18	48	1 F	Italy	Caucasian	50
38	De Michele	2021	2	7-9	9-10	55-57	2 F	Italy	NA	66
39	Panovska-Stavridis	2021	1	9	10	29	1 F	Macedonia	Caucasian	51
40	Patriquin	2021	3	10-16	10-16	45-48	3 F	Canada	NA	52
41	Paul	2021	1	5	5	middle aged	1 M	India	NA	67
42	Ramessur	2021	1	0	14	73	1 M	UK	NA	53
43	Soleimani	2021	3	4-11	10-14	34-59	1 M, 2 F	UK	NA	54
44	Sørensen	2021	1	8	11	30	1 F	Denmark	NA	26
45	Suresh	2021	1	2	12	27	1 M	UK	NA	55
46	Tejpal	2021	1	20	20	61	1 M	Canada	NA	70
47	Tiede	2021	5	5-11	6-15	41-67	5 F	Germany	NA	56
48	Turi	2021	1	2	6	57	1 F	Italy	NA	57
49	Varona	2021	1	10	11	47	1 M	Spain	NA	61

50	Vayne	2021	9	9-18	9-18	44 (21-69)	2 M, 7 F	Singapore	NA	60
51	Wang	2021	1	0	7	41	1 F	Taiwan	NA	58
52	Wiedmann	2021	1	7	10	34	1 F	Norway	NA	21
53	Zanferrari	2021	1	0	7	40	1 F	Italy	NA	59

Table 2 Summary of common laboratory blood tests and SARS-CoV-2 screening of case reports on VITT after ChAdOx1 nCov-19 vaccination

Hemoglobin (n=27)	White cell (n=15)	Platelets (n=164)	Prothrombin time (PT)/INR (n=79)	Activated partial thromboplastin time (ratio)/aPTT/PTT (n=78)	Thrombin time (n=8)	Fibrinogen (n=91)	D-dimers (n=111)	Antithrombin (n=12)	C-reactive protein (n=27)	SARS-CoV-2 screening (n=80)
Normal: 77.8% Low: 22.2%	Normal: 53.3% High: 33.3% Low: 13.3%	Normal: 7.3% Thrombocytopenia: 92.7%	Normal: 48.1% High: 50.6% Low: 1.3%	Normal: 67.9% High: 20.5% Low: 11.5%	Normal: 75% High: 25%	Normal: 45.1% High: 4.4% Low: 50.5%	Normal: 0.9% High: 99.1% Low: 50.5%	Normal: 100%	Normal: 44.4% High: 55.6% Low: 1.25%	Negative: 98.75% Positive: 1.25%

Table 3 Summary of less common laboratory tests of case reports on VITT after ChAdOx1 nCov-19 vaccination

Laboratory parameters	Results
Haptoglobin (n=3)	Normal: 100%
RBC (n=5)	Normal: 80%; Low: 20%
Neutrophil (n=8)	Normal: 37.5%; High: 62.5%
Lymphocyte (n=5)	Normal: 60%; Low: 40%
Monocyte (n=5)	Normal: 80%; Low: 20%
Eosinophil (n=5)	Normal: 100%
Basophil (n=2)	Normal: 100%
Aspartate aminotransferase (n=6)	AST
Alanine aminotransferase (n=8)	Normal: 100%
	ALT
	Normal: 37.5%; High: 62.5%
Gamma glutamyl transferase (n=4)	Normal: 25%; High: 75%
Alkaline phosphatase (n=3)	Normal: 100%
Sodium; Potassium (n=2)	Normal: 100%
Nitrogen Urea (n=2)	Normal: 100%
Lactate dehydrogenase (n=12)	Normal: 41%; High: 59%
Lactate (n=3)	Normal: 100%
Total bilirubin (n=10)	Normal: 70%; High: 30%
Clotting factors (n=9)	Normal: 55%; Low: 33%; High: 11%
Folic acid (n=2)	Low: 100%
Vitamin B12 (n=1)	Normal: 100%
Procalcitonin (n=1)	Normal: 100%
Creatinine (n=13)	Normal: 85%; High: 15%
Total protein; Albumin (n=1)	Normal: 100%
Paroxysmal nocturnal hemoglobinuria (n=3)	Normal: 100%
Septic screening of blood, urine, and respiratory cultures (n=1)	Normal: 100%
Acute kidney injury (n=2)	Normal: 50%; High: 50%
Ferritin (n=2)	Normal: 100%
Cholesterol HDL ratio (n=2)	Normal: 50%; High: 50%
Urea (n=1)	Normal: 100%

Table 4 Summary of thrombophilia marker assays in case reports on VITT after ChAdOx1 nCov-19 vaccination

Thrombophilia marker assays	Results
EXTEM CT ^a (n=1)	High: 100%
EXTEM A10 ^b (n=1)	High: 100%
FIBTEM A10 ^c (n=1)	Normal: 100%
INTEM CT ^d (n=1)	High: 100%
Fibrin degradation product (n=1)	High: 100%
Protein C activity (n=19)	High: 5.26%; Normal: 94.74%
Protein S, free antigen (n=19)	Normal: 100%
VWF (n=8)	Normal: 12.5%; High: 87.5%
Thrombophilia mutations (Factor V Leiden, Prothrombin G20210A, MTHFR, JAK2)	- Generally mentioned as Thrombophilia (n=32) Normal: 100% - Factor V Leiden (n=12) Normal: 33%; High: 67% - Prothrombin (G20210A) (n=7) Normal: 43%; High: 57% - MTHFR (n=2) High: 100% - JAK2 (n=4) Normal: 100%
Antiphospholipid antibodies	- Lupus anticoagulant (n=34) Normal: 76.5%; High: 23.5% - Beta-2-glycoprotein (n=34) Normal: 94%; High: 6% - Anticardiolipin antibodies (n=36) Normal: 88.8%; High: 11.2%
Anti-thyroid peroxidase, Myeloperoxidase, Anti-neutrophil cytoplasmic anti-bodies (ANCA), Rheumatoid factor, and Antinuclear antibodies, Extractable nuclear antigen, dsDNA, Anti-globulin test	- Antinuclear antibodies (n=31) Normal: 100% - Extractable nuclear antigen (n=26) Normal: 96.16%; High: 3.84% - Myeloperoxidase (n=2) Normal: 50%; High: 50% - Proteinase 3 antineutrophil cytoplasmic antibody (n=1) High: 100% - Anti-double-stranded DNA antibody (n=2) Normal: 50%; High: 50% - Antineutrophilic antibodies (n=2) Normal: 100% - Anti-globulin (n=1) Normal: 100%
Neutrophil DNA extracellular traps (NETs) (n=1)	High: 100%
Schistocytes (n=11)	Normal: 18%; High: 82%
Blood film (n=16)	Normal: 20% - Thrombocytopenia without cell fragments: 20% - Leukocytosis of neutrophils with polychromasia, anisocytosis, and moderate thrombocytopenia: 6.66% - No hemolysis or fragments of red cell: 40% - Giant platelets: 6.66% - Platelet anisocytosis: 6.66%
Immunoglobulins (n=3)	Normal: 67%; High: 33%
Complement (n=11)	Normal: 72.7%; High: 9.1%; Low: 18.2%
Cryoglobulins (n=1)	Normal: 100%
ADAMTS13 (n=12)	Normal: 91.7%; High: 8.3%
Antiplatelet antibodies (n=8)	Normal: 50%; High: 50%
Homocysteine (n=8)	Normal: 50%; High: 50%

^a EXTEM: extrinsic pathway (tissue factor) clotting time, ^b EXTEM A10: amplitude of formed clot 10 min after formation, ^c FIBTEM A10: fibrin-dependent clot formation, amplitude of the formed clot at 10 min, ^d INTEM CT: intrinsic pathway clotting time