Contemporary Endocrinology

Cardiovascular Endocrinology

Shared Pathways and Clinical Crossroads

Edited by

Vivian A. Fonseca, MD

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Cardiovascular Endocrinology

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Tulane University Health Sciences Center, New Orleans, LO, USA

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Editor
Vivian A. Fonseca
Tulane University Health
Sciences Center
New Orleans, LO
USA
vfonseca@tulane.edu

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Preface

CARDIOVASCULAR ENDOCRINOLOGY

In the last two to three decades, cardiovascular disease and diabetes have emerged as a major public health problem. This is partly related to the epidemic of obesity, which plays a major role in the pathogenesis of both diabetes and cardiovascular disease. In addition, several other hormones and cytokines have been shown to play an important role in the regulation of the vascular system. This increase in the clinical problems of cardiovascular disease in a large segment of the population has brought together the two disciplines of vascular biology and endocrinology. This book highlights the many common pathophysiological processes involved in this epidemic and the common clinical manifestations that result from them.

The book has several important contributions from distinguished workers in the field. Derek Leroith begins with a novel view of the hormonal regulation of the vascular system, starting, not surprisingly, with pituitary and hypothalamic factors that may impact vascular disease.

The problems of diabetes and cardiovascular disease are extensively covered in a number of chapters, including a review of the epidemiology of the problem by James Meigs, and the important disruption of the nitric oxide signaling system, as well as the role of fatty acids and cytokines in the development of this problem, which are discussed by Bobby Nossaman and Gunther Boden, respectively.

Management of the problem of cardiovascular disease and diabetes in relation to screening of patients using modern cardiovascular techniques is discussed by Paolo Raggi, followed by discussions of the role of insulin (Dandona) and insulin sensitizers (Thethi), and their potential for impacting cardiovascular health.

Endocrine hypertension has long been recognized as an important contributed to cardiovascular morbidity, and the renin-angiotensin system plays a key role in not only endocrine-mediated hypertension, but hypertension in general. This system and its impact on cardiovascular events is discussed by Jim Sowers and followed by a discussion on microalbuminuria and chronic kidney disease by George Bakris.

Adiponectin has emerged as a natural endogenous vascular protective and anti-inflammatory substance of considerable importance in the context of cardiovascular endocrinology, and is reviewed by Mandeep Bajaj. Another important peptide hormone that affects vascular function is the group of natriuretic peptides, reviewed by Kailash Pandey.

Finally, the interaction of sexual dysfunction and cardiovascular disease has attracted much attention, and the overlap of these conditions and therapeutic approaches to overcome them are reviewed by Glen Matfin. Closely related is the effect of testosterone, often neglected as a player in vascular function and reviewed by Alan Seftel.

This textbook of cardiovascular endocrinology comes back full circle to the role of insulin-like growth factors and cardiovascular disease with the final contribution by Patrice Delafontaine.

Finally, I would like to dedicate this book to our many patients who have participated in clinical research to improve our understanding of their disease process. More importantly I wish to dedicate it to the people of New Orleans and wish that city a speedy recovery.

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Contributors

MANDEEP BAJAJ, MD • *Division of Diabetes, Endocrinology and Metabolism and Molecular and Cellular Biology, Baylor College of Medicine, Houston, TX*

GEORGE BAKRIS, MD • *Department of Medicine, Hypertension Center, Endocrine Division, The University of Chicago, Chicago, IL*

GUENTHER BODEN, MD • *Divisions of Endocrinology/Diabetes/Metabolism, Temple University School of Medicine, Philadelphia, PA*

ISLAM BOLAD MBBS, MD, MRCP, FESC • *Section of Cardiology, Tulane University School of Medicine, New Orleans, LA*

AJAY CHAUDHURI, MD • *Division of Endocrinology, SUNY at Buffalo and Kaleida Health, Buffalo, NY*

PARESH DANDONA, MD, PhD • *Division of Endocrinology, SUNY at Buffalo and Kaleida Health, Buffalo, NY*

PATRICE DELAFONTAINE, MD • *Tulane University School of Medicine, New Orleans, LA*

DAVID S. FRANKEL, MD • *Department of Medicine, Massachusetts General Hospital, Boston, MA*

VIVIAN FONSECA, MD • *Tullis-Tulane Professor of Medicine, Department of Medicine and Pharmacology, Tulane University Health Sciences Center, New Orleans, LA*

HUSAM GHANIM, PhD • *Division of Endocrinology, SUNY at Buffalo and Kaleida Health, Buffalo, NY*

MEDHAVI JOGI, MD • *Department of Medicine, Baylor College of Medicine Houston, TX*

PHILIP J. KADOWITZ, PhD • *Department of Pharmacology, Tulane University Medical Center, New Orleans, LA*

L. ROMAYNE KURUKULASURIYA MD, FACE • *Diabetes Center, University of Missouri – Columbia, Columbia, MO*

DR. LAND, MD • *Case Western Reserve University, School of Medicine, Cleveland, OH*

DEREK LEROITH, MD, PhD • *Division of Endocrinology, Diabetes and Bone Diseases, Mount Sinai School of Medicine, New York, NY*

GLENN MATFIN, BSC (HONS), M.B. Ch.B., DGM, FFPM, FACE, FACP, FRCP • *Division of Endocrinology, Department of Medicine, New York University School of Medicine, New York, New York 10016, USA*

JAMES B. MEIGS, MD • *General Medicine Division, Clinical Epidemiology Unit and Diabetes Research Unit, Massachusetts General Hospital, Harvard Medical School, Boston, MA*

PRIYA MOHANTY, MD • *Division of Endocrinology, SUNY at Buffalo and Kaleida Health, Buffalo, NY*

SUBRAMANYAM N. MURTHY, PhD • *Department of Pharmacology and Department of Medicine, Tulane University Medical Center, New Orleans, LA*

BOBBY D. NOSSAMAN, MD • *Critical Care Medicine, Department of Anesthesiology Ochsner Health System, Department of Pharmacology, Tulane University Medical Center, New Orleans, LA*

KAILASH N. PANDEY, PhD • *Department of Physiology, Tulane University Health Sciences Center and School of Medicine, New Orleans, LA*
PAOLO RAGGI, MD • *Division of Cardiology, Emory University School of Medicine, Atlanta, GA*
PANTELIS A. SARAFIDIS, MD, PhD • *Department of Medicine, Hypertension Center, Endocrine Division, The University of Chicago, Chicago, IL*
ALLEN D. SEFTEL, MD • *Case Western Reserve University, School of Medicine, Cleveland, OH*
LESLEE J. SHAW, PhD • *Division of Cardiology, Emory University School of Medicine, Atlanta, GA*
SHIPRA SINGH • *Department of Medicine and Pharmacology, Tulane University Health Sciences Center, New Orleans, LA*
JAMES R. SOWERS, MD • *Diabetes Center, University of Missouri – Columbia, Columbia, MO*
TINA K. THETHI, MD • *Department of Medicine and Pharmacology, Tulane University Health Sciences Center, New Orleans, LA*

Color Plates

Color Plate 1 Kaplan-Meier estimates of the probability (with 95% confidence intervals) of death from coronary heart disease in 1059 subjects with type 2 diabetes and 1378 nondiabetic subjects with and without prior myocardial infarction (MI) in a Finnish population-based study (Chapter 2, Fig. 1; *see* discussion on p. 21).

Color Plate 2 Example of myocardial perfusion performed by echocardiography after intravascular injection of echocontrast (microbubbles). The arrows point at an area of decreased perfusion of the inferior wall of the myocardium during dobutamine stress (panels B and C) (courtesy of Dr. Sanjiv Kaul, Oregon Health and Science University, Portland, OR) (Chapter 7, Fig. 3; *see* discussion on p. 101).

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Color Plate 4 An example of assessment of left ventricular function on PET imaging. The calculated left ventricular ejection fraction is 74%. The top row shows diastolic images of the left ventricle (the chamber is larger and the walls are thinner) while the bottom row shows systolic frames (the chamber is almost virtual and the walls are thick) (Chapter 7, Fig. 5; *see* discussion on p. 102).

Color Plate 5 Guidelines proposed by the American Diabetic Association on performance of exercise stress testing, with or without an imaging modality associated with it, in diabetic patients (modified from reference *(54)*) (Chapter 7, Fig. 10; *see* discussion on p. 112).

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1 Hormonal Regulation of the Vascular System: An Overview

Ronald Tamler, MD, PhD,
and Derek LeRoith, MD, PhD

CONTENTS

SUMMARY

This chapter discusses hormonal influence on the vasculature. Catecholamines are the best-known and classic stimulators of vascular tone. The rennin–angiotensin–aldosterone system (RAAS) induces vasoconstriction and may damage the vasculature. Sex steroids have gender-dependent disparate genomic and rapid, nongenomic effects on the vasculature. Insulin may have beneficial properties, whereas growth hormone and IGF-1 imbalances are tied to coronary heart disease (CHD). Adipokines are produced in the fat tissue and also affect the vasculature in many ways. While this overview can only briefly touch on all the systems mentioned, later chapters provide greater depth to the reader.

Key Words: Insulin resistance, Hypertension, Coronary heart disease, Angiotensin, Estrogen, Testosterone

INTRODUCTION

When Thomas Addison discovered that the adrenal glands were essential for life *(1)* and later George Oliver and Edward Sharpey-Schafer purified adrenaline in the nineteenth century *(2)*, they were the first to discover the importance of hormonal control of the vasculature. In the

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twenty-first century, we are aware of a greater number of hormonal and nonhormonal vascular stimuli with highly complex interactions. Still, there is a sense that many pathways need to be better understood and many discoveries yet to be made.

Arterial blood pressure is influenced by vascular tone and cardiac output, both of which are subject to hormonal control. In addition to an inner coating with endothelium, arteries – particularly the resistance vessels, called arterioles – sport a surrounding muscular layer in the tunica media. This layer, directly and indirectly regulated by parasympathetic and hormonal influences, is responsible for arterial tone, a significant contributor to diastolic blood pressure. Meanwhile, the endothelium is influenced by a powerful vasorelaxant, endothelial-derived relaxing factor (EDRF), now identified as nitric oxide (NO) *(3)*, which in turn counteracts the vasoconstrictive effects of catecholamines and angiotensin II (ATII) *(4)*. Beyond acute vasoconstriction, chronic alterations of the vasculature, such as atherosclerosis are also hormonally influenced and can increase systemic blood pressure. Finally, cardiac output, the product of stroke volume and heart rate, affects systolic blood pressure and is regulated by parasympathetic and hormonal activity.

Hormones therefore influence the vasculature in multiple ways: by regulating volume status, modifying smooth muscle contractility directly and through the NO pathway, and, finally, by altering cardiac output.

In this chapter, we can only attempt to give a brief overview on what is known about how hormones control the cardiovascular system. We will address only a limited number of hormonal pathways as examples of the interaction between the endocrine and cardiovascular systems. The following chapters will provide a deeper and more thorough understanding of individual pathways.

1. Catecholamines

Catecholamines are a family of hormonally active amines derived from the amino acid tyrosine. Adrenaline (also called epinephrine) and dopamine can act centrally as neurotransmitters, whereas norepinephrine fulfills that role in the periphery. When found in the bloodstream, these compounds are typically spillover from neuronal ganglia *(5)* or synthesized in the adrenal medulla in response to sympathetic activation, the "fight or flight" reaction. General effects include increased heart rate, blood pressure, and stroke volume, but vascular catecholamine effects can vary and depend entirely on G-protein-coupled membrane receptors:

α1-Adrenoreceptors are divided into three subtypes (α1A, α1B, and α1D) with different efficiencies of activating phospholipase C via G-protein. Subsequently, the second messengers inositol triphosphate and diacylglycerol are increased and ultimately lead to calcium influx into the cell. The result is contraction of smooth muscle, leading to higher resistance and higher arterial blood pressure. α1-Adrenoreceptors are mainly stimulated by norepinephrine, but can also be activated by adrenaline.

α2-Receptors are also classified into three subtypes. They are coupled with a GTP-binding protein that inhibits adenylyl cyclase, eventually preventing the opening of Ca and K channels. α2 receptors are observed in noradrenergic neurons. While α1 receptors are typically found near sympathetic nerve terminals, α2 receptors are found extrajunctionally and are probably activated mainly by circulating catecholamines.

β-Adrenoreceptors are coupled to a stimulatory G-protein, leading to increased cAMP levels and calcium influx. They are also divided into three subtypes:

Cardiac β1 receptors counter vagal effects and they mediate positive inotropic, chronotropic, and dromotropic effects of catecholamines, mainly noradrenaline derived from sympathetic nerve activity. Over longer periods of time, these receptors, together with aldosterone from the

renin-angiotensin-aldosterone system (RAAS), mediate cardiotoxicity. Selective inhibition of β1 receptors has proven an effective treatment *(6)*, but even greater survival benefit is seen with additional blockade of the RAAS *(7)*.

β2-Receptors mediate vasorelaxation and are stimulated by circulating epinephrine, but not by norepinephrine. Due to the selective response, a counterintuitive drop in blood pressure can sometimes be observed when adrenaline is administered and norepinephrine-sensitive α1 receptors are blocked. Depending on distribution and concentration of adrenoreceptors in the vasculature, vasodilation may outweigh vasoconstrictive effects. β2 receptors are found on the endothelium and are thought to mediate their vasodilatory effects through the NO pathway: removal of endothelium and pretreatment with L-NAME may both curb vasorelaxation *(8)*. β2-adrenoreceptor stimulation activates via increased cAMP levels cleaving of L-arginine and NO production, which in turn leads to cGMP formation and vasodilation.

β3 receptors also mediate vasodilation and are not blocked by propranolol or other β-blockers routinely used in practice *(9)*. However, a more fascinating function may lie in their mediation of lipolysis in visceral fat *(9)*, which in turn plays a role in obesity and the metabolic syndrome. Metabolically active adipose tissue enhances atherogenesis via inflammatory cytokines such as interleukin-6 (IL-6) or tumor necrosis factor-alpha (TNF-a) and directly regulates vasoconstriction via angiotensinogen *(10)*.

Dopamine can occupy alpha- and beta-adrenergic receptors when given in higher, pharmacologic concentrations, but mainly acts through five subclasses of D receptors. In the kidney, dopamine acts as an ATII antagonist by enhancing natriuresis via tubular D1-receptors and directly decreasing ATII production. The net effect is lower systemic blood pressure *(11)*.

2. Renin-angiotensin-aldosterone system (RAAS)

The glycoprotein renin is produced in the juxtaglomerular apparatus of the afferent renal arterioles in response to hyponatremia and hypotension. Renin cleaves angiotensinogen, which is mainly produced in the liver and is elevated in patients with visceral adiposity and the metabolic syndrome in general. The resulting biologically inactive ATI is converted to the vasoconstrictive ATII by angiotensin-converting enzyme (ACE) in the pulmonary vasculature. ACE-mediated vasoconstriction is potentiated by degradation of bradykinin, a vasodilatory agent. Cardiovascular effects of ATII throughout the body are mediated by the transmembranous AT1 receptor, which is coupled to a G-protein. Activation results in decreased cAMP levels with subsequent Ca influx and vasoconstriction and increased protein kinase C levels. The latter is a pathway shared with other hormonal regulators, such as insulin. In addition to systemic effects, there are several organ systems in which mRNA for all components of the RAAS can be found and thus operate independently: renal autocrine and paracrine activity of the RAAS in general and ATII in particular has been described for vasoconstriction of the afferent arterioles with subsequent reduction in renal blood flow *(12)*. It is also held responsible for enhanced tubular Na/H exchange and Na/K ATPase activity *(13)*, leading to sodium reabsorption, and modified tubuloglomerular feedback sensitivity *(14)*.

Similar to the kidney, the myocardium features receptors for renin, angiotensinogen, and ATII *(15)* in fibroblasts and myocytes, as do the endothelium and smooth muscle of the coronaries. In fact, most ATII acting on cardiac tissue is not derived from the circulation, but is rather the product of the local cardiac RAAS *(16)* and conversion by chymase *(17)*. Renin, glucocorticoids, estradiol, thyroid hormone, and atrial natriuretic peptide all increase local production of angiotensinogen *(18,19)*, and mechanical stretch of the myocardium leads to increased local ATII levels *(20)*. ATII can stimulate local production of angiotensinogen in the kidney and the heart, thus inducing positive feedback *(21)*.

ATII induces vasoconstriction via increased free radical production *(22)*, by modulating the endothelial NO pathway *(23)* and directly through its own AT1 receptor. However, its best-known endocrine effect is stimulation of aldosterone production in the adrenal gland. Interestingly, while aldosterone production is activated by systemic ATII, local RAAS effects from the zona glomerulosa *(24)* have also been described.

Aldosterone has long-known effects on sodium retention and hypertension *(25)*. Other effects are cardiac hypertrophy and vascular fibrosis *(26)*. It probably exhibits a contradictory effect in that it facilitates endothelial-dependent vasodilation and vascular smooth muscle cell (VSMC)-mediated vasoconstriction *(27)*. Nongenomic, rapid effects of aldosterone include dose-dependent myosin light-chain phosphorylation, which can be inhibited by spironolactone, and phosphatidylinositol 3-kinase (PI3k) inhibition in VSMCs. The result is a contraction, which apparently can also be generated by estradiol and hydrocortisone *(28)*. Aldosterone antagonists, such as eplerenone or spironolactone, have been shown to improve clinical outcomes in patients with heart disease *(29)* and exert protective effects on the endothelium *(30)*.

3. Glucocorticoids

Glucocorticoids may exert vascular effects by cross-stimulation of pathways used by other steroid hormones, such as aldosterone *(31)*. Produced in the adrenal cortex or administered as drugs, they exert nuclear effects by binding to a ubiquitous ligand-activated transcription factor *(32)*. Anti-inflammatory properties *(33)* and increased insulin resistance are well described. In animal models, highly dosed glucocorticoids nongenomically activate endothelial nitric oxide (eNOS) and thus improve endothelial function *(34)*. However, the opposite effect has been described as well, and generation of reactive oxidant species has been invoked as the provoking mechanism responsible for decreased endothelial reactivity *(35)*. While the exact mechanism of action on the vasculature demands further attention, it should be noted that patients with Cushing's disease, a state of chronic glucocorticoid excess, have increased carotid intima-media thickness *(36)* and a higher risk of cardiovascular disease *(37)* that may persist even beyond cure *(38)*.

4. Insulin

Insulin resistance is commonly seen in both obesity and type 2 diabetes, a condition associated with increased cardiovascular risk *(39)*. While many other factors such as hyperglycemia, hypertriglyceridemia, and inflammatory cytokines affect the vasculature, insulin itself has direct effects. Acting via the insulin receptor signaling pathways, particularly the PI3kinase/Akt pathways, insulin induces eNOS activity in endothelial cells, leading to increased NO production *(40)*. This in turn affects the vascular smooth cells and leads to vasodilation. On the other hand, insulin stimulates production of endothelin-1, PAI-1, as well as the adhesion molecules VCAM-1 and E-selectin in endothelial cells via the ERK pathway. Insulin is thus capable of inducing vasodilation in a NO-dependent manner, increasing blood flow to skeletal muscle, for example, which in turn increases glucose uptake in skeletal muscle *(41)*.

Insulin, in addition, can attenuate the contractility of VSMCs by opposing increases in cytosolic calcium through the voltage-dependent sensitive calcium channels. These effects are apparently also mediated by NO.

Under certain circumstances of insulin resistance, endothelial dysfunction can be explained by the altered state of the insulin-stimulated PI3k/Akt pathway. As in the case of skeletal muscle, hyperglycemia, hyperlipidemia, increased oxidative stress, and increased inflammatory cytokines inhibit the PI3k/Akt pathway. In contrast, the mitogen-activated protein