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Acute pulmonary embolism: a specific scent?

T.M. Fabius¹, R.W. van Leuteren¹, R.W. van der Palen¹, F.H.C. de Jongh¹, J.W. Gerritsen³, J.J. van der Palen⁴, J.M. M. Eijsvogel¹
¹: Department of Pulmonology, Medisch Spectrum Twente, Enschede, the Netherlands. 2: Technical Medicine, University of Twente, Enschede, the Netherlands. 3: The eNose Company, Zutphen, the Netherlands. 4: Medical School Twente, Medisch Spectrum Twente, Enschede, the Netherlands. 5: Engineering Fluid Dynamics, University of Twente, Enschede, the Netherlands.

Introduction

Computed tomography pulmonary angiogram (CTPA) scans performed to diagnose acute pulmonary embolism (PE) at the emergency department, prove PE in less than 30%. Electronic nose technology might aid in the decision to perform a CTPA in PE suspected patients.

Methods

Patients seen at the emergency department that received a CTPA scan due to suspected PE (based on increased D-dimer or Wells-score) breathed normally into an electronic nose (the Aeonose™, The eNose Company, Zutphen, the Netherlands, see figure 1) for five minutes. The Aeonose™ measurement data were compared with the CTPA result to train an artificial neural network. Resulting Aeonose™ classifications into PE or no PE were obtained using Leave-10%-Out cross validation. For full details on the analysis see Kort et al.[1].

Results / Discussion

61 Subjects (mean age 61.8±15.5 years; 56% male) were included and PE was confirmed on CTPA in 20 (33%). Median D-dimer was 1427 (IQR 704 – 3244) µg/L. Median Wells-score was 3.0 (IQR 3.0 – 4.5). Classifications of the Aeonose™ measurements are provide in figure 2. The area under the ROC curve was 0.73. The optimal threshold to rule out PE resulted in a sensitivity of 90% with a specificity of 54%, positive predictive value of 49% and negative predictive value of 92%. Thus, 24 subjects (39%) were classified as not having PE of which 2 cases did have PE on CTPA (false-omission rate: 8.3%).

Conclusion

The use of electronic nose technology to rule out pulmonary embolism seems promising. Caution is warranted as blind predictions haven’t been accomplished yet. Follow-up research is currently underway.

Contact:
E-mail: T.Fabius@mst.nl