

Frailty and rehabilitation outcome in older patients with cardiorespiratory disease: preliminary multidimensional data

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Key words: chronic heart failure; chronic obstructive pulmonary disease; older; frailty; clinical trial; rehabilitation.

Contributions: AP, conceptualization; MV, NG, data duration; RM, formal analysis; MV, NG, GC, RV, SC, GP, GCr, investigation; RM, AP, methodology; GC, RV, SC, GP, GCr, supervision; MV, NG, AP, manuscript drafting; MV, NG, RM, AP, manuscript revision and editing. All the authors read and approved the final version of the manuscript and agreed to be accountable for all aspects of the work.

Conflict of interest: the authors declare that they have no competing interests, and all authors confirm accuracy.

Ethics approval: the study was approved by the Institutional Review Board and Central Ethics Committee of the ICS Maugeri SpA SB (CEC) (approval number: CEC N.2424, 23/04/2020).

Availability of data and materials: the dataset generated for this study is available from the corresponding author upon reasonable request.

Funding: this work was supported by the Italian National funding (5x1000): project name “Decadimento cognitivo, fragilità e outcome riabilitativo in pazienti anziani affetti da patologia cardiorespiratoria. DEC_FRAinRIAB” (Grant Agreement Number 2424_20 04 20). MV and NG received a research grant from the project’s funder. The funders had no role in the study design, data collection, analysis, decision to publish, or preparation of the manuscript.

Acknowledgments: we would like to thank Dr. Silvia Audifreddi for her valuable support in the data collection phase of the research.

Received: 30 September 2022.

Accepted: 28 November 2022.

Early view: 1 December 2022.

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Monaldi Archives for Chest Disease 2023; 93:2447

doi: 10.4081/monaldi.2022.2447

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Abstract

Chronic heart failure (CHF) and chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD) are two clinical conditions often associated with cognitive dysfunctions, psychological distress, poor quality of life (QoL), and functional worsening. In addition, since patients suffering from these conditions are often older adults, frailty syndrome represents a further and important issue to be investigated. The present preliminary study aimed to perform a multidimensional assessment of CHF and/or COPD older patients (age ≥ 65) undergoing cardiac or pulmonary rehabilitation. The characteristics of the included patients (30 CHF and 30 COPD) resulted almost similar, except for the COPD patients’ longer duration of illness and better performances in Addenbrooke’s cognitive examination III subtests and short physical performance battery (SPPB). No significant differences were found in the frailty evaluation, but a consistent number of patients resulted in being frail (CHF=36.7% vs COPD=26.6%). After the rehabilitation program, a significant improvement was found in the whole sample concerning the executive functions (14.34 \pm 2.49 vs 15.62 \pm 2.22, $p=0.001$), quality of life (58.77 \pm 18.87 vs 65.82 \pm 18.45, $p=0.003$), depressive and anxious symptoms (6.27 \pm 4.21 vs 3.77 \pm 3.39, $p=0.001$ and 5.17 \pm 3.40 vs 3.38 \pm 3.21, $p=0.001$), frailty status [4.00 (3.00,5.00) vs 3.00 (3.00,5.00) $p=0.035$] and functional exercise abilities [SPPB, 7.40 \pm 3.10 vs 9.51 \pm 3.67, $p=0.0002$; timed up and go test, 14.62 \pm 4.90 vs 11.97 \pm 4.51, $p<0.0001$; 6-minute walking test, 353.85 \pm 127.62 vs 392.59 \pm 123.14, $p=0.0002$]. Preliminary results showed a substantial homogeneity of CHF and COPD older patients’ cognitive, psychosocial, frailty, and functional characteristics. Nevertheless, the specific rehabilitation intervention appears promising in both clinical populations. This trial has been registered with the ClinicalTrials.gov, with registration number NCT05230927 (clinicaltrials.gov/ct2/show/NCT05230927).

Introduction

Chronic heart failure (CHF) and chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD) are both globally widespread and they have a considerable burden on healthcare systems and a high impact on morbidity and mortality [1,2]. Specifically, CHF is a chronic condition associated with high rates of hospitalization, re-admissions, severe disability, and a high risk of mortality, and its prevalence varies widely ranging from 1 to 12% of people in the world and it increases with age: from around 1% for people aged <55 years to 10% in

those aged 70 years or older [2]. As to COPD, it is a chronic disease, whose typical onset is after 55 years old, characterized by a partially irreversible obstruction of lung airflow [1,3]. In 2010, the estimation of the number of COPD cases was around 384 million, with a global prevalence of 11.7% [95% confidence interval (CI) 8.4%-15.0%], and with mortality rates that resulted to be around 3 million people per year². Both clinical conditions present numerous challenges to healthcare providers, in particular, due to the multiple interactions between each other, since both clinical conditions have similar symptoms such as dyspnea and poor exercise tolerance. In addition, COPD is often responsible for delayed diagnosis of CHF and *vice versa* [4].

Beyond specific medical aspects, in the last few years, literature has highlighted that the functional and clinical worsening in patients affected by cardiac and/or respiratory disease/s increases the risk of cognitive deterioration. This impairment principally affects the frontal lobe and subcortical areas of the brain, leading to different deficits concerning executive functions, attention, memory (working memory and learning abilities), and psychomotor speed [5-10]. The clinical, cognitive, and functional worsening appeared to have a high impact on health-related quality of life (HRQoL) that was reported to be low in these clinical populations [11-13]. Moreover, emotional factors, such as anxiety and depression, are of paramount importance since they play an important role in disease adaptation and in the rehabilitation outcome in both cardiac [14,15] and respiratory diseases [16].

Besides cognitive decline and emotional factors, frailty syndrome is an important comorbidity to deal with when it comes to cardiac and respiratory diseases, in particular in the older adult population. Despite the importance and the interest towards frailty, there is no agreement on the definition [17]. In fact, according to the literature, two main theoretical paradigms try to define frailty: the biomedical and bio-psycho-social paradigms. As to the biomedical paradigm, frailty is considered a biological syndrome in which there is an important reduction in the functional reserves and a diminished resistance to stressors. These features result in a cumulative impairment of the multiple physiological systems that cause a state of increased vulnerability and adverse consequences [18]. Conversely, the bio-psycho-social paradigm defines frailty as a dynamic state that affects an individual that loses one or more functional domains (physical, psychological, and social) due to the influence of different variables that increase the risk of adverse health outcomes [19]. A further definition has been provided by Rockwood and colleagues, that is the operational definition [20]. It is based on the idea that frailty is a state of chaotic disorganization of physiological systems that can be estimated by evaluating certain indexes such as functional status, diseases, physical and cognitive deficits, psychosocial risk factors, and geriatric syndromes.

Despite the differences between the considered paradigms or definitions, a common conclusion could be identified: frailty is associated with the loss of different functional domains, which leads to an increased vulnerability to adverse events such as the risk of falls, hospitalization, disability, and mortality [21].

Indeed, frailty evaluation, both with screening or assessment scales, provides predictive information on the risk of death and length of hospitalization, and it represents a good predictor of acute clinical condition outcomes too [22,23]. In particular, in COPD patients, frailty appears to be a reliable outcome measure, an independent predictor of rehabilitation program interruption, but it was also described as a reversible condition in the short term after rehabilitation [24,25]. However, as far as we know and according to the most recent literature, frailty is still poorly considered and measured in cardiorespiratory rehabilitation settings [26]. Considering the pro-

gressive aging of the population and the promising prognostic use of this index, its assessment could assume a pivotal role in maximizing the clinical outcome.

In this vein, the current study aims to bridge this gap. In particular, this paper presents the preliminary data of an ongoing prospective clinical trial. The first aim is to define the multidimensional profiles (socio-demographic, clinical, and functional characteristics, cognitive impairment, perceived HRQoL, anxiety, depression, and frailty) of two samples of older (age ≥ 65) CHF or COPD inpatients. The second aim is to compare the profiles of the two samples at admission to the inpatient cardiac or pulmonary rehabilitation program. Finally, the third aim is to evaluate the whole CHF and COPD sample at admission and discharge from the rehabilitation program to evaluate the outcomes.

Methods

Participants

All old inpatients (≥ 65 years) consecutively admitted to the Cardiac Rehabilitation Department and the Pulmonary Rehabilitation Department of ICS Maugeri, Institute of Tradate (Province of Varese) and Institute of Montescano (Province of Pavia), Italy, undergoing cardiac or pulmonary rehabilitation, were evaluated for their eligibility in the study. The whole recruiting period was from July 2020 to June 2022, while the period considered in the present study was from July 2020 to January 2021.

In particular, CHF definition is i) signs (*e.g.*, elevated jugular venous pressure, pulmonary crackles, and peripheral edema) and symptoms of HF [New York Heart Association (NYHA) functional class II-IV] in the presence of reduced ejection fraction (LVEF $< 40\%$); or ii) signs and symptoms of HF (*e.g.*, elevated brain natriuretic peptides and significant structural heart disease/diastolic dysfunction) with mid-range ejection fraction (LVEF 40-49%) or preserved (LVEF $\geq 50\%$) [2].

Furthermore, COPD is defined according to the Global Initiative for Chronic Obstructive Lung Disease (GOLD) criteria (stage II-IV, C-D). Patients should be in a clinically stable condition (no exacerbations in the last 3 months) with optimized pharmacological therapy (inhalation therapy with long-acting anticholinergic and/or β_2 -agonists, inhaled corticosteroids when needed) [1].

The exclusion criteria were severe clinical (chronic inflammatory diseases, neoplasia) or psychiatric and neurological (at anamnestic or actual clinical evaluation) conditions, no Italian education, illiteracy or relapse into illiteracy, severe visual-perceptual deficits, lack of motivation or refusal to undergo the evaluation, and severe cognitive deterioration (Mini-Mental State Examination – MMSE score < 18.3) [27].

All the patients included in the study were orally and written informed about all procedures. In addition, all patients signed an informed consent.

The study was approved by the Institutional Review Board and Central Ethics Committee of the ICS Maugeri IRCCS (approval number: CEC N.2424, 23/04/2020), and it was registered on January 28, 2022, with the ClinicalTrials.gov, with registration number NCT05230927 (clinicaltrials.gov/ct2/show/NCT05230927).

Neuropsychological evaluation

Addenbrooke's Cognitive Examination III (ACE III) is a screening test, designed for the early detection of cognitive deterioration. It is composed of the following five cognitive domains: Attention-

Orientation (ACE III-AO = 0-18), Memory (ACE III-M 0 0-26), Verbal Fluency (ACE III-VF = 0-14), Language (ACE III-L = 0-26), and Visuospatial abilities (ACE III-VS = 0-16) [28]. Frontal Assessment Battery (FAB) is a screening test used to assess executive functions. It is divided into the following six sub-tests: conceptualization, mental flexibility, motor programming, sensitivity to interference, inhibitory control, and environmental dependency [29].

In this research, ACE III scores allow dividing the sample into two subpopulations: patients affected by Mild Cognitive Impairment (MCI) (ACE III-total impaired \leq 68.68 or borderline = 68.69-75.93 score, or impaired score in at least one subtest: ACE III-AO \leq 13.2, ACE III-M \leq 13.04, ACE III-VF \leq 5.52, ACE III-L \leq 18.39, and ACE III-VS \leq 9.97) and patients without cognitive impairment. Furthermore, FAB-impaired scores of \leq 12.03 detect patients with executive dysfunctions.

Health-related quality of life and psychological evaluation

The EQ-5D-5L is a generic quality of life measurement tool which investigates the following five dimensions: mobility, self-care, usual activities, pain/discomfort, and anxiety/depression. The second section consists of a visual analogue scale (VAS) where the subject is asked to indicate the level of self-perceived wellness [30].

Generalized anxiety disorder-7 (GAD) is a questionnaire built to measure the severity of anxiety symptoms in the previous two weeks through 7 items organized on a 4-point Likert scale. Scores of 5, 10, and 15 are considered cut-offs for mild, moderate, and severe anxiety, respectively [31]. In this study, we used the Italian version freely downloadable on the PHQ website [32]. Patient Health Questionnaire-9 (PHQ-9) is a scale used to evaluate depressive illnesses. It is divided into nine sub-items identifying depressive symptoms within the last two weeks (following DSM criteria). Scores of

5, 10, and 15 are considered cut-offs for subthreshold, mild major, moderate major, and severe major depression [33,34].

Frailty evaluation

The clinical frailty scale (CFS) is a scale based on clinical judgment only. This scale considers clinical data on the subject's cognition, mobility, functional abilities, and comorbidity, collected through medical history obtained from the patient, the caregiver, and/or other healthcare providers [20]. Frailty index (FI) is a frailty measurement tool that includes variables about mobility, muscle strength, comorbidities, cognitive deficits, mood, anthropometric indices, mini nutritional assessment, and social support. It is made up of 40 items and 17 additional items relating to the social support scale [22].

Functional evaluation

The short physical performance battery (SPPB) is a battery used to investigate the association between physical performance and a self-assessed disability and it is also used as a functional frailty indicator [35,36]. It evaluates the functional capacity of lower limbs and it is composed of three tests.

The timed up and go test (TUG), is a simple test to measure a person's mobility level and requires static and dynamic balancing skills. It measures the time it takes a person to get up from a chair, walk ten feet, turn around, come back to the chair and sit down again [37].

The 6-minute walking test (6MWT) is a self-limited test used to measure functional exercise abilities in people with HF, acute coronary syndrome, and COPD. It is a test in which the person is asked to walk as fast as possible compatible with his clinical condition for a time of 6 minutes, measuring the meters traveled [38].

A summary of the characteristics of measures used for data collection is presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Measures for data collection with related construct and score interpretation.

Measures	Construct	Range	Score interpretation (↗ High, ↘ Low)
Neuropsychological evaluation			
ACE III ^a	Cognitive status (attention, orientation, memory, language, word/semantic fluency, and visuospatial abilities)	0-100	↗ Scores ↗ Cognitive status
FAB ^b	Executive functions	0-18	↗ Scores ↗ Executive functions
Health-related quality of life evaluation			
EQ 5D-5L ^c	Perceived health-related quality of life (questionnaire form)	0-25	↗ Scores ↘ HRQoL
EQ VAS ^d	Perceived health-related quality of life (visual-analogue form)	0-100	↗ Scores ↗ HRQoL
Psychological evaluation			
GAD-7 ^e	Anxiety	0-21	↗ Scores ↗ Anxiety symptom
PHQ-9 ^f	Depression	0-27	↗ Scores ↗ Depressive symptom
Frailty evaluation			
Frailty Index	Frailty	1-40	↗ Scores ↗ Greater frailty
CFS ^g	Frailty	1-9	↗ Scores ↗ Greater frailty
Functional evaluation			
SPPB ^h	Functional capacity of lower limbs	0-12	↗ Scores ↗ Lower limbs capacity
TUG ⁱ	Static and dynamic balancing skills	0-...	↗ Scores ↘ Balancing skills
6MWT ^l	Functional exercise abilities	0-...	↗ Scores ↗ Exercise abilities

^aAddenbrooke's cognitive examination III; ^bfrontal assessment battery; ^cEuroQol 5D-5L; ^dEuroQol visual analogue scale; ^egeneralized anxiety disorder - 7; ^fpatient health questionnaire - 9; ^gclinical frailty scale; ^hshort physical performance battery; ⁱtimed up and go; ^l6 minutes walking test.

Data collection

All CHF and COPD inpatients admitted to an inpatient rehabilitation program underwent medical history collection, physical, clinical, and functional examination, exercise testing (SPBB, TUG, 6MWT), educational sessions, exercise training (cycle ergometer/treadmill, arm ergometer, breathing, and strength exercises where indicated, calisthenics exercises), psychological counseling, and metabolic evaluation with a personalized diet when needed. All procedures are in depth explained in the study protocol [39].

The rehabilitation treatment is carried out according to Maugeri's diagnostic therapeutic care pathway following the most recent national and international guidelines [3,40].

The patients included in the study signed informed consent for all procedures and research explanations and underwent an evaluation at three different times that is at the baseline, at the hospital discharge, and at 6 months through a phone follow-up (not described in this preliminary study).

Baseline (T_0)

The first assessment was performed within a maximum of two to four days from the patient's rehabilitation admission or, if necessary, after a therapeutic optimization, by a psychologist (ACE III, FAB, EQ 5D-5L, EQ-VAS, PHQ-9, and GAD-7), by a physiotherapist (SPPB, TUG, and 6MWT), while the cardiologist or pulmonologist will monitor individualized patient's clinical pathway. Concerning frailty screening (CFS) and evaluation (FI) frailty, it was performed by the three aforementioned healthcare professionals and nurses, from an interdisciplinary perspective.

End of hospitalization (T_1)

After at least 2-3 weeks from the rehabilitation admission, FAB, EQ 5D-5L, EQ-VAS, CFS, SPPB, TUG, and 6MWT were re-administered as well as the collection of clinical indices related to the disease.

Sample size and preliminary analysis

The sample size estimation is extensively described in the study protocol [39]. Instead, concerning preliminary data, descriptive statistics were reported as mean \pm SD for continuous variables and as percent frequency for categorical variables. Between-group comparisons (CHF vs COPD) were carried out by Mann-Whitney U-test and by the Chi-square test for continuous and categorical variables respectively. Within-group comparisons (T_0 vs T_1) for continuous variables were carried out by the Wilcoxon signed-rank test. All statistical tests were two-tailed and statistical significance was set at $p < 0.05$. All analyses were carried out using the SAS/STAT statistical package, release 9.4 (SAS Institute Inc., Cary, NC, USA).

Results

Overall, 92 patients were recruited; out of these, 32 patients were excluded for the following reasons: clinical exacerbation during hospitalization or patient's transferal to another hospital ($n=11$), illiteracy ($n=1$), low subjective motivation, or refusal, to undergo the evaluation ($n=11$), severe neurological diseases ($n=4$), and severe cognitive impairment ($MMSE \leq 18.3$) ($n=5$). Thus, this preliminary data was referred to 60 patients (Figure 1). The sample was composed of 30 CHF and 30 COPD patients, whose clinical data are presented in Table 2. As for the CHF group, patients were 60% males, 76.7% were retired, 33.3% lived alone, the whole sample had a primary caregiver (43.3% husband/wife/partner, 46.7% son/daughter, 10% other family members), and an actual (6.7%) or past (70%) smoking habit was referred. As for the COPD group, patients were 73.3% males, 90% were retired, 33.3% lived alone, 93.4% had a primary caregiver (46.7% husband/wife/partner, 30.0% son/daughter, 16.7% other family members), and an actual (20%) or past (73.3%) smoking habit. Table 3 shows the comparison between CHF and COPD concerning socio-demographic and clinical characteristics, cognitive status, quality of life, depressive and anxious symptoms, frailty, and functional variables assessed at baseline. COPD patients'

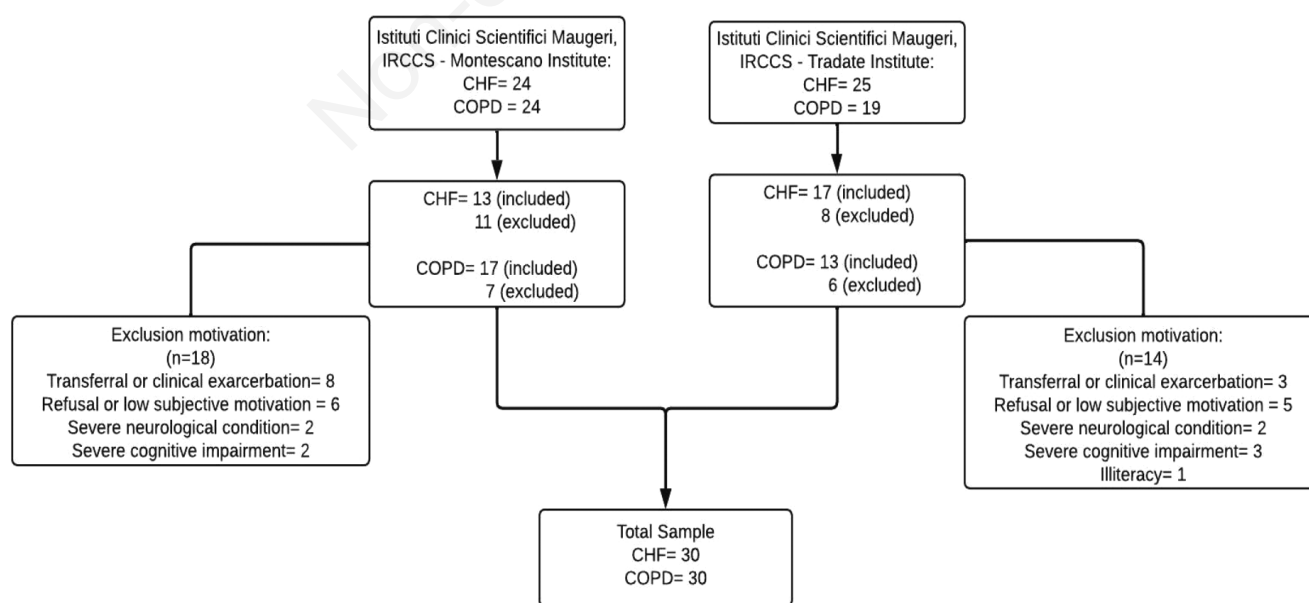


Figure 1. Flowchart of patients' recruitment.

duration of illness (months) resulted to be significantly longer than CHF patients (117.07±87.36 vs 53.17±95.93, $p=0.001$, respectively). Two of the ACE III sub-scales were significantly higher for COPD patients compared to CHF ones (ACE III attention and orientation, 17.54±0.75 vs 16.54±1.86, $p=0.009$; ACE III language, 25.66±0.59 vs 24.69±2.43, $p=0.038$, respectively). Finally, SPPB scores were significantly higher for COPD patients (10.21±9.04 vs 6.23±3.24, $p=0.006$). As further data on cognitive status, ACE III total or at least one subscale score resulted impaired in 33.3% of the CHF and in 23.3% of the COPD sample. As for FAB, the percentage of impaired scores is 46.7% in CHF and 36.7% in COPD patients. Table 4 shows the comparison between the whole CHF and COPD sample at admission (T₀) and discharge from the hospital (T₁). Overall, results indicate that executive functions, quality of life, depressive and anxious symptoms, and functional exercise abilities were significantly improved after the hospitalization. Concerning frailty scores related to CFS, 36.7% of CHF patients and 26.6% of COPD patients were frail (CFS score ≥5). No statistically significant differences emerged between the two clinical conditions considered, instead, there are statistically significant differences between T₀ and T₁ ($p=0.035$): the score remained unchanged in 51 patients, improved in 8 patients, and worsened in 1 patient.

Table 2. Clinical values of the CHF and COPD study samples.

Variable	Mean ±SD	Range
CHF (n=30)		
BNP ^a (pg/ml)	556.73±583.63	52-1816
LVEF ^b (%)	44.40±15.15	18-72
Teldia Vol ^c (mL/m ²)	58.82±20.79	21-101
TAPSE ^d (mm)	18.88±3.53	10-25
PAPs ^e (mmHg)	40.11±13.80	23-85
COPD (n=30)		
FEV1 ^f	1.23±0.62	0.44-2.44
FEV1% ^g	57.92±21.42	22-101
FEV1/VC% ^h	56.35±19.11	29.9-103
SpO ₂ ⁱ	94.60±2.91	90-98
Blood pH	7.41±0.02	7.37-7.45

^aBrain natriuretic peptide; ^bleft ventricular ejection fraction; ^ctelediastolic volume; ^dtri-cuspid annulus plane systolic excursion; ^epulmonary artery pressure; ^fforced expiratory volume in the 1st second; ^gforced expiratory volume in the 1st second%; ^hforced expiratory volume in the 1st second/forced vital capacity; ⁱperipheral oxygen saturation.

Table 3. Comparison between CHF and COPD multidimensional variables.

Variables	CHF n (mean ± SD)	COPD n (mean ±SD)	p-value
Socio-demographic and clinical data			
Age	30 (74.87±5.97)	30 (74.10±6.34)	0.53
Education (years)	30 (7.63±3.54)	30 (8.07±3.44)	0.44
Duration of illness (months)	30 (53.17±95.93)	30 (117.07±87.36)	0.001
BMI ^a	30 (26.44±5.40)	30 (26.94±9.22)	0.77
Cognitive status			
ACE III ^b total	30 (88.13±9.97)	30 (93.17±6.23)	0.06
ACE III attention orientation	30 (16.71±1.84)	30 (17.72±0.55)	0.009
ACE III memory	30 (21.30±4.56)	30 (22.75±3.29)	0.21
ACE III fluency	30 (9.69±2.39)	30 (10.01±2.28)	0.42
ACE III language	30 (24.88±2.18)	30 (25.96±0.18)	0.008
ACE III visual-spatial	30 (14.37±2.11)	30 (14.75±1.43)	0.77
FAB ^c	30 (13.91±2.92)	30 (14.77±1.93)	0.51
Quality of life			
EQ 5D-5L ^d	30 (7.77±3.23)	30 (7.20±2.20)	0.83
EQ VAS ^e	30 (61.00±18.96)	30 (56.53±18.83)	0.41
Psychological variables			
GAD7 ^f	30 (4.93±3.24)	30 (5.40±3.59)	0.30
PHQ-9 ^g	30 (5.63±3.09)	30 (6.90±5.07)	0.55
Frailty			
Frailty index	30 (10.84±5.15)	30 (9.38±5.27)	0.15
Social support	30 (5.20±1.63)	30 (5.77±3.09)	0.86
Functional variables			
SPPB ^h	26 (6.23±3.24)	28 (10.21±9.04)	0.006
TUG ⁱ	19 (15.29±6.21)	27 (13.73±3.63)	0.66
6MWT ^j	8 (392.88±118.26)	22 (338.68±132.32)	0.44

^aBody mass index; ^bAddenbrooke's cognitive examination III; ^cfrontal assessment battery; ^dEuroQol 5D 5L; ^eEuroQol visual analogue scale; ^fgeneralized anxiety disorder - 7; ^gpatient health questionnaire - 9; ^hshort physical performance battery; ⁱtimed up and go; ^j6 minutes walking test.

Table 4. Comparisons of the whole CHF and COPD sample (n=60) at T₀ and T₁.

Variables	Mean ±SD (T ₀)	Mean ±SD (T ₁)	Delta	p-value
FAB ^a	14.34±2.49	15.62±2.22	1.28±1.68	<0.0001
EQ VAS ^b	58.77±18.87	65.82±18.45	7.05±17.05	0.003
PHQ-9 ^c	6.27±4.21	3.77±3.39	-2.50±3.74	<0.0001
GAD7 ^d	5.17±3.40	3.38±3.21	-1.78±3.05	<0.0001
SPPB ^e	7.40±3.10	9.51±3.67	2.11±3.62	0.0002
TUGf	14.62±4.90	11.97±4.51	-2.66±3.97	<0.0001
6MWT ^g	353.85±127.62	392.59±123.14	38.74±48.30	0.0002

^aFrontal assessment battery; ^bEuroQol visual analogue scale; ^cpatient health questionnaire – 9; ^dgeneralized anxiety disorder 7; ^eshort physical performance battery; ^ftimed up and go; ^g6 minutes walking test.

Discussion

The present multi-center cross-sectional observational preliminary study investigates and compares cognitive impairment, anxiety, depression, and frailty in a population of older CHF or COPD patients at admission and discharge from an inpatient cardiac or pulmonary interdisciplinary rehabilitation program. This study provides a specific focus on older and frail patients with CHF or COPD, contributing to bridging a literature gap. Although there is a growing interest concerning these clinical populations, research data are still lacking, controversial, and need further investigations [26,41-43].

In this research, CHF and COPD patients showed a moderate-severe level of disease severity. The two samples differ in the duration of illness, which resulted to be longer in the COPD sample. To our knowledge, there is no literature regarding the comparison between these chronic conditions. Nevertheless, the majority of the CHF sample was composed of patients with a recent diagnosis of CHF but with a medical history of cardiovascular diseases. This data is consistent with the literature, describing CHF as the result of hereditary defects, systemic diseases, and prior cardiac conditions [44].

As to socio-demographic characteristics, concerning age and education, no statistically significant differences between the two samples emerged. Conversely, the percentage of male patients resulted to be slightly higher in both CHF and COPD patients (60% and 73.3%, respectively). Literature about CHF patients reported that the demographic and clinical characteristics differ considerably between HF with preserved ejection fraction (HfpEF) and HF with reduced ejection fraction (HFReEF). In particular, HFpEF patients are more likely to be women and older, obese, with a higher NYHA class and both cardiovascular and non-cardiovascular comorbidities; on the other side, HFReEF, mainly a consequence of coronary artery disease, particularly affects males and older patients [45]. Our results appear to be in line with this data since the CHF sample comprehends both HfpEF and HFReEF patients, old and almost equally distributed between males and females. As to COPD, our data is consistent with the results of a recent systematic review and meta-analysis that showed a prevalence of 9.23% (95% CrI: 8.16-10.36%) in men and 6.16% (95% CrI: 5.41-6.95%) in women [46]. The other socio-demographic characteristics (actual work, living conditions, and primary caregiver) resulted to be similar in both samples, except for the actual smoking habit which percentage higher in COPD patients (20% compared to 6.7% of CHF patients). This result is supported by a recent prospective study that followed COPD patients for seven years and the findings showed that two-thirds of the sample (n=572) continued to smoke despite the pulmonary disease and the prescriptions to stop smoking [47].

Moving on to multidimensional measures, the two samples are

substantially similar except for attention/orientation and language ACE III subtests and SPPB results. This similarity is consistent with previous literature which underlines that these two diseases share decreased functional, psychological, and HRQoL characteristics [48,49]. A review and meta-analysis conducted by Yohannes *et al.* showed that the prevalence of MCI is higher in CHF (35%) and COPD (25%) patients [50] compared to the general older population (10-20%) [51]. Our data strengthen these findings since they provide similar percentages of MCI in the two samples (33.3% and 23.3%, respectively). Additionally, in our study, a specific high percentage of executive impaired scores (46.7% in CHF and 36.7% in COPD patients) was found by a screening battery on procedural dysfunction, which resulted to be pivotal to the study due to the connection with rehabilitation implication and self-care management [9,52].

As to frailty screening results, no statistically significant differences emerged between the two samples. A slight difference in the frailty percentages can be noticed (CHF 36.7% vs COPD 26.6%) and these data are consistent with the results of two systematic reviews and meta-analyses on the prevalence of frailty in CHF and COPD patients [53,54]: despite the differences across studies, the overall estimated prevalence of frailty in HF was 44.5% (95% CI, 36.2-52.8%; $z = 10.54$; $p < 0.001$) [53], while the pooled prevalence of frailty in individuals with COPD was 19% (95% CI, 14-24; $I^2 = 94.4\%$) [54].

As for SPPB results, a slightly significant difference was found comparing CHF and COPD patients' performance (6.23±3.24 vs 10.21±9.04, $p = 0.005$, respectively). As far as we know, no other studies compared SPPB results between these clinical populations. Nevertheless, by examining the research addressing only CHF or COPD patients in different studies, our findings are in line with the data distribution of these clinical populations. Specifically, SPPB results appear to be lower in CHF patients than in COPD patients [55,56].

Finally, concerning the comparison between the cognitive, psychological, quality of life, and functional data at admission and discharge, a significant improvement can be observed in all the investigated areas in CHF and COPD patients. The data concerning the benefits of cardiac and pulmonary rehabilitation has been extensively reported in literature in both CHF and COPD patients [41,57-65]. As to CHF, literature shows that cardiac rehabilitation induced significant improvements in physical and psychological parameters in a sample of patients ranging from less than 65 years to 80 years or over [59]. Specifically, results concerning executive functions find support in literature where significant improvements were detected after cardiac rehabilitation [61]. Moreover, another study showed that exercise capacity, assessed by the 6MWT, and HRQoL improved after rehabilitation, regardless of individual patient char-

acteristics [63]. Finally, a recent study showed the potential benefits of cardiac rehabilitation in patients suffering from cardiovascular diseases on frailty as in our CHF sample [62]. Concerning COPD, a recent systematic review, performed on nineteen randomized controlled trials that compared pulmonary rehabilitation groups with usual care groups, showed statistically significant improvements in patient's quality of life [60]. A recent study showed significant improvements in COPD patients' cognitive functions after a rehabilitation program focused on attention, memory, language, visuospatial perception, executive functions, and problem-solving [65]. Moreover, the results of a prospective study in which COPD older patients performed an 8-week pulmonary rehabilitation program, showed a sustained improvement in anxiety and quality of life 2 years after the intervention [64]. In another prospective study COPD patients, after a 5-years multidisciplinary pulmonary rehabilitation maintenance program, showed significant improvements at 4 years for exercise capacity and HRQoL and at 5 years for dyspnea symptoms [58]. Finally, in a recent systematic review, the authors found that frailty could be reversed after specific and tailored pulmonary rehabilitation similarly to our study [41].

Strengths and limitations

The present preliminary study shows a limitation concerning the small sample size that does not allow the generalizability of the findings. Nevertheless, some strengths could be noticed. Firstly, to our knowledge, this study can be considered the first one trying to detect similarities and differences within these chronic conditions. Secondly, the results of cardiac or pulmonary rehabilitation appear to be promising as significant improvements were found in all the investigated areas, and they are substantially consistent with the most recent scientific literature. Finally, frailty is often considered in rehabilitation settings, but its evaluation is not always performed with standardized methods and measures as in the present research.

Conclusions

The preliminary results of the present study showed a substantial homogeneity of the cognitive, psychosocial, frailty, and functional characteristics of CHF and COPD older patients, with slight differences, which deserve specific attention. Furthermore, our data showed the potential benefits of specific rehabilitation interventions in both samples on the multidimensional spectrum including a frailty measure.

Recruitment of larger sample size is ongoing since further investigations are necessary to corroborate these findings and to support the fundamental role of cardiac and pulmonary rehabilitation in older chronic patients.

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