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Microarchitecture And Peripheral BMD Are Impaired In Postmenopausal Caucasian Women With Fracture Independently Of Total Hip T-score - An international Multicenter Study

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Abstract

Because single-center studies have reported conflicting associations between microarchitecture and fracture prevalence, we included HR-pQCT data from 5 centers worldwide into a large multicenter analysis of postmenopausal women with and without fracture. Volumetric density (vBMD) and microarchitecture were assessed at the distal radius and tibia in 1379 Caucasian postmenopausal women (67±8 yr); 470 (34%) had at least one fracture including 349 with a major fragility fracture.

Age, height, weight, and total hip T-score differed across centers and were employed as covariates in analyses. Women with fracture had higher BMI, were older, and had lower total hip T-score but lumbar spine T-score was similar between groups.

At the radius, total and trabecular vBMD and cortical thickness were significantly lower in fractured women in 3 out of 5 centers, and trabecular number in 2 centers. Similar results were found at the tibia. When data from 5 centers were combined, however, women with fracture had

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Study design and conduct: SB, DJM and ES.
Patient recruitment and data interpretation: SB, SK, ESR, MBZ, DJM, ACZ, RDC, JZ, EMS, CB, SM, AJB, ES.
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SB and DJM take responsibility for the integrity of the data analysis.

DISCLOSURE
All authors state that they have no conflicts of interest.

significantly lower total, trabecular and cortical vBMD (2%–7%), lower trabecular number (4%–5%) and thinner cortices (5%–6%) than women without fracture after adjustment for covariates. Results were similar at the radius and tibia. Similar results were observed with analysis restricted to major fragility fracture, vertebral and hip fractures and peripheral fracture (at the radius). When focusing on osteopenic women, each SD decrease of total and trabecular vBMD was associated with a significantly increased risk of major fragility fracture (OR=1.55–1.88, $p<0.01$) after adjustment for covariates. Moreover, trabecular architecture modestly improved fracture discrimination beyond peripheral total vBMD.

In conclusion, we observed differences by center in the magnitude of fracture/non fracture differences at both the distal radius and tibia. However, when data were pooled across centers and the sample size increased, we observed significant and consistent deficits in vBMD and microarchitecture independent of total hip T-score in all postmenopausal Caucasian women with fracture and in the subgroup of osteopenic women, compared to women who never had a fracture.

Keywords

HR-pQCT; Osteoporosis; Bone microstructure; Fracture risk; Multicenter studies

INTRODUCTION

Bone microarchitecture is a determinant of bone strength and its measurement may improve fracture risk prediction. Recent advances in imaging technology enable bone microarchitecture to be assessed in vivo, non-invasively, by High Resolution Peripheral Quantitative Computed Tomography (HR-pQCT). To date, several single-center cross-sectional studies have reported associations between fracture status and parameters of bone microarchitecture, but those studies have reported conflicting results, with differences observed only at the radius, at both sites, depending on the fracture's site and severity or no difference at all ([1–10]).

A likely source of these discrepancies is the limited number of fractures in each study (usually fewer than 100 women with prevalent fracture). To overcome the difficulty of enrolling thousands of patients per center, multi-center collaboration is required. So far, most multicenter studies with HR-pQCT focused on interventional / pharmaceutical efficacy with comparisons based on individuals' follow-up changes. While variability across different devices and imaging centers is important in these settings, it is probably even more crucial when cross-sectional data are compared, as these comparisons are based on absolute values rather than more stable change scores. Single-center reproducibility has been well established, varying from 0.2% to 1.5% for volumetric BMD, 0.4% to 5.1% for cortical thickness and 0.3% to 5.8% for trabecular microstructure ([1, 11–15]).

Engelke et al. have reported short-term *in vivo* precision data pooled from nine imaging centers. In a context of a multicenter clinical trial, with centralized training and scan analysis, they observed that precision was comparable to single-center results previously reported ([16]). Moreover, to fully investigate bone microstructure precision measurement across multiple centers, Burghardt et al have developed a set of anthropomorphic

microstructure-realistic imaging phantoms composed of human cadaveric distal radius embedded in resin and mounted on brackets to ensure a reproducible positioning and fixation within the scanner. These phantoms were scanned at nine different HR-pQCT centers and multicenter precision errors were generally less than 5% for volumetric density and microstructure parameters. While these precision errors were comparable with *in vivo* single center precision errors, they differed from *ex vivo* single center short-term precision by a factor of 2 to 5 ([17]).

Our aims were to determine in a large international multicenter cohort the magnitude and direction of bone microarchitectural parameter differences in post-menopausal women with and without a history of fracture, and to establish the feasibility of pooling HR-pQCT data across centers to address mechanistic and clinical issues concerning bone quality.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Study design and population

We have included HR-pQCT data from 5 academic centers in North America, South America and Europe into a large multicenter analysis of postmenopausal women with and without prevalent fracture. A total of 1544 post-menopausal women were recruited from 2005 to 2011. Data from 35 Black, 55 Hispanic, 57 Asian and 1397 Caucasian women were collected. Our study focused on the 1379 Caucasian women who had a valid measurement of the lumbar spine or total hip aBMD and of the distal radius or tibia microstructure (18 women were excluded). Among the 1379 Caucasian post-menopausal women included in the analysis, 470 had at least one prevalent fracture. Each participating center is hereafter arbitrary labelled “center A” through “center E”.

All fragility fractures associated with a trauma equivalent to a fall of standing height or less were recorded. Major fragility fractures included fracture of the forearm, humerus, hip and spine fractures.

Bone densitometry and microarchitecture

Areal BMD was acquired at the lumbar spine (L1–L4) and total hip by DXA (Hologic, Bedford, MA or GE Lunar, Madison, WI) and expressed as a T-score offset from expected peak bone mass as contained in the DXA scanners manufacturer’s database. The reference values were country-specific. Using the WHO classification ([18–20]), these women were classified as normal (T-score ≥ −1), osteopenic (−1 > T-score > −2.5), or osteoporotic (T-score ≤ − 2.5) based on the values of their aBMD measurements at the lumbar spine or total hip.

Volumetric density and bone microarchitecture were assessed at the distal radius and tibia by HR-pQCT (XtremeCT, Scanco Medical AG, Brüttisellen, Switzerland) according to the manufacturer’s standard in vivo acquisition protocol ([1, 21]). The measurement region was manually defined by the operator by placing a reference line at the endplate of the radius and tibia on a preliminary performed anteroposterior scout view. The first CT slice was 9.5 mm and 22.5 mm proximal to the reference line for the distal radius and distal tibia, respectively.

The following imaging settings were used in all centers: effective energy = 60 kVp, X-ray tube current = 900μA, integration time = 100ms, 108 projection radiographs on a 180-degree rotation. The 126 mm field of view was reconstructed on a 1536x1536 matrix, yielding 82 μm isotropic voxels.

Methods used to process the CT data have been previously described in detail ([21]). Briefly, a trained operator generates semi-automatic contours around the periosteal surface and the entire volume of interest is thereafter automatically separated into a cortical and trabecular region. The outcome variables used in our analyses included total area (Tt.Ar, mm^2, representing the average cross-sectional area of the bone), volumetric bone density (mg HA/cm^3) for total (Tt.BMD), trabecular (Tb.BMD), and cortical (Ct.BMD) compartments; cortical thickness (Ct.Th, μm); and trabecular number (Tb.N, mm^{-1}), thickness (Tb.Th, μm), separation (Tb.Sp, μm), and intra-individual distribution of separation (Tb.Sp.SD, μm)

Quality Assurance procedures for HR-pQCT measurement

In each center, the manufacturer's standard quality protocol was used to monitor device stability. This consisted of daily scans of a phantom containing rods of HA (densities of 0, 100, 200, 400, and 800 mg HA/cm^3) embedded in a soft-tissue equivalent resin (QRM GmbH, Möhrendorf, Germany). As part of the standard quality control procedure, the recommended tolerance was 1% of the highest density rod, i.e. within −8 and +8 mg HA/cm^3. Attenuation data were converted to equivalent hydroxyapatite (HA) densities. The quality of HR-pQCT scans was reviewed by an experienced operator in each center and scans with poor quality, as per the manufacturer visual grading of image quality, were excluded from the analyses.

HR-pQCT cross-calibration

A set of 4 anthropomorphic imaging phantoms, composed of 14 human cadaveric distal radius and 5 distal tibia, was measured in each center. Analysis of all phantom data was centralized in a single organizing center following the protocol detailed by Burghardt et al. ([17]). All parameters from the 5 HR-pQCT scanners were compared for all bone sections. For each parameter, the measured value of each center was normalized to the mean across all centers, and the mean normalized value over all radius or tibia bone sections was calculated. In each center, patient data were standardized by dividing their density and microstructural parameters by the center corresponding mean normalized value over all radius or tibia.

Statistical analysis

Characteristics are presented as means ± SD and percent difference between group means of women with and without fracture, unless otherwise stipulated, and compared by Student t-test or Wilcoxon signed rank test, depending on the distribution of the variables.

One-way analysis of variance by general linear models was used to identify age, height, weight and total hip T-score as between-center differences that would be used as covariates with center interactions. Comparisons were performed on standardized HR-pQCT density and microstructural parameters, where center was added as a covariate in generalized linear models assessing center, fracture status and fracture by center interactions. Comparisons

between women with and without fracture were performed using logistic regression for all types of fractures and for major fragility fracture. Odds ratios with 95% confidence intervals (OR [95 % CI]) were computed per SD decrease of density and structural parameters, unless otherwise specified. Benjamini-Hochberg procedure was used to control for the false discovery rate (FDR) ([22]). Area under the receiver operating characteristic (ROC) curve of volumetric density and structural parameters were compared with AUC of total hip T-score after adjustment for covariates. Analyses were independently repeated for peripheral fracture and for vertebral and hip fracture. In addition, we also conducted the analysis with radius (or tibia) total vBMD as covariate (instead of total hip T-score) to test whether peripheral trabecular architecture improves fracture discrimination beyond peripheral BMD.

A leave-one-out sensitivity analysis of centers was performed that provided similar data to the one presented (data not shown). For graphical visualization, the measured difference between fractured and non fractured subjects of each parameter after adjustment for covariates was plotted by center and for the overall population with 95% confidence interval.

In addition, women were categorized according to the WHO classification as normal, osteopenic, and osteoporotic. In the subgroup of osteopenic women, the associations between fracture and volumetric density and structural parameters were repeated as described above on the whole population.

All statistical analyses were performed using SAS 9.2, SPSS 18.0 software and/or MedCalc 15.2.2.

RESULTS

Population characteristics

Among the 1379 Caucasian post-menopausal women (66±9 yr), 470 (34%) had at least one prevalent fracture (194 forearm, 178 vertebral, 35 humerus, 20 hip, 83 lower leg, 46 ribs, 61 metatarsal, 35 metacarpal, 8 clavicle, 6 patella); 349 had a major fragility fracture, and 170 sustained several fractures. Each center recruited between 102 and 587 women, with a fracture prevalence ranging from 12% to 75% (Figure 1).

Two hundred and ninety two women: 161 (17.7%) without fracture and 131 (27.9%) with fracture received treatment affecting bone metabolism for 1 year or more at the time of (or within 6 months before) HR-pQCT acquisition ($p<0.001$, bisphosphonates: 41 / 77, hormone replacement therapy 68 / 31, selective estrogen receptor modulator: 14 / 11, corticosteroids: 6 / 3, thyroxine: 17 / 8, tibolone: 7 / 1, aromatase inhibitors: 8 / 0 respectively).

Volumetric BMD and microstructural data were missing for 20 radius and 15 tibia because of poor HR-pQCT quality scans.

Cross-calibration

The variability of volumetric density and structural parameters of phantoms across centers for radius bone sections is shown in Figure 2 and correction factors per parameter, site and center are summarized in Table S1.

Across centers, volumetric densities varied between −3.6% and 4.5% of the mean, Ct.Ar and Ct.Th varied within ± 2.1% of the mean and Tb.Ar varied within ± 1.3%. Trabecular parameters showed a higher variation across centers between −4.8% and 4.7% at the radius and between −7.5% and 8.2% at the tibia, with the exception of Tb.Sp.SD at the tibia spanning −8.9% and 15.9% of the mean.

Overall and within center difference between women with and without fracture

Overall and before any adjustment, women with fracture were older by an average 4 years, heavier (4.2%), had a higher BMI (3.1%) and lower total hip T-score (−0.3 SD) than women without fracture (all $p \leq 0.01$). Height and lumbar spine T-Score were not different between fractured and non fractured women (Table 1). Within centers, these anthropometric differences between fractured and non fractured women varied as indicated by the range shown in Table 1. Following analyses were therefore performed with age, height, weight, total hip T-score, center and center interactions as covariates.

As illustrated on Figure 3, at the distal radius, total and trabecular vBMD were significantly lower in fractured women in 3 out of 5 centers (by 8%–11% and 13%–15% respectively, $p<0.05$), while total and trabecular area did not differ between fractured and non–fractured women (except in 1 center for Tb.Ar). Cortical thickness, area and vBMD were lower in all centers but the difference reached the significance in respectively 3 out of 5 (Ct.Th −6% to −12%, Ct.Ar −6% to −11%, $p<0.05$) and 1 center for Ct.BMD (−3.5%, $p<0.05$). Trabecular number and thickness were significantly lower in 2 centers (by 8%–10%) and 1 center (−11%, $p<0.05$) respectively. Trabecular separation and distribution were significantly higher in 2 centers (17%, $p<0.05$) and 1 center (37%, $p<0.05$) respectively. Globally, similar results were found at the distal tibia.

When data from 5 centers were combined, however, women with fracture had significantly lower total, trabecular and cortical vBMD (by 2%–7%, $p<0.05$), fewer trabeculae (lower Tb.N by 4%–5%, $p<0.05$) and thinner cortices (lower Ct.Th by 6% and Ct.Ar by 5%, $p<0.05$) than women without fracture. Results were similar at the distal radius and tibia (Figure 3), except for total and trabecular area differences between fractured and non-fractured women at the radius.

When the analysis was restricted to major fragility fracture (n=349), differences between women with and without fracture were similar to differences observed with all fractures (Figure 3).

In multivariate logistic regression models including age, height, weight, total hip T-score, center and center interactions, each SD decrease of total, trabecular and cortical vBMD, trabecular number and thickness, cortical thickness and area, assessed either at the radius or tibia, were associated with a significantly increased likelihood of major fragility fracture. Moreover, each SD increase in trabecular area, separation and distribution (heterogeneity of the network, at the radius) were also associated with a significantly increased probability of major fragility fracture. The Odds Ratios ranged from 1.22 to 1.95 ($p<0.05$), and area under curves (AUC) ranged between 0.845 and 0.857 (Table 2). Each SD decrease of total hip and lumbar spine aBMD were associated with a significantly increased likelihood of major

fragility fracture: OR=1.96[1.61;2.39] and 1.51[1.32;1.72] respectively (before any adjustment, OR=1.58[1.38;1.81] and 1.03[0.94;1.13]).

At both sites (radius / tibia), AUC for total and trabecular vBMD (0.855 / 0.857 and 0.856 / 0.852), cortical area and thickness (0.849 / 0.848 and 0.850 / 0.848) and trabecular separation (0.847 / 0.846), with age, height, weight, total hip T-score, center and center interactions, were higher than AUC for total hip T-score with age, height, weight, center and center interactions (0.839[0.814;0.863]), $p<0.05$.

When the multivariate logistic regression analysis was restricted to vertebral and hip fracture (n=188), differences between women with and without fracture were similar to differences observed with all fracture or major fragility fracture, except for radius trabecular area, cortical vBMD and trabecular thickness and for trabecular number at the tibia. The Odds Ratios ranged from 1.24 to 2.10 ($p<0.05$ after FDR correction). In contrast, when the analysis was restricted to peripheral fracture (n=282), differences between women with and without fracture were similar to differences observed with vertebral and hip fracture only at the radius (after FDR correction). At the tibia, each SD decrease of total and trabecular vBMD, cortical area and thickness and trabecular number and thickness were associated with a significantly increased likelihood of peripheral fracture. After FDR correction, total and trabecular vBMD, and trabecular thickness remained significantly associated with fracture (Odds Ratios ranging from 1.27 to 1.61, $p<0.03$).

When the multivariate logistic regression analysis was performed with radius (or tibia) total vBMD as covariate (instead of total hip T-score), a SD increase in total and trabecular area were associated with a significantly decreased likelihood of major fragility fracture (at the radius: OR=0.69[0.55;0.87] and 0.63[0.49;0.83], $p<0.01$ after FDR correction; at the tibia: OR= 0.72[0.57;0.93] and 0.72 [0.55;0.93], $p<0.05$ after FDR correction) (Table 3). Moreover at the radius, each SD decrease of trabecular BMD and number were associated with a significantly increased likelihood of major fragility fracture (OR=1.60[1.25;2.06] and 1.42[1.17;1.73], $p<0.01$ after FDR correction). AUC ranged from 0.852 to 0.858 and did not meaningfully differ from AUC for total vBMD (radius: 0.852[0.829;0.875], tibia: 0.855[0.832;0.878]), when age, height, weight, center and center interactions were used as covariates.

Discrimination of osteopenic women with and without major fragility fracture

Based on the WHO classification, using the lowest of their aBMD measurements at the lumbar spine or total hip, 333 women had normal aBMD (24%), 679 were osteopenic (49%) and 367 were osteoporotic (27%). Among the 349 women with major fragility fracture, 67 were in the normal range of aBMD, 171 were in the osteopenic range and 111 were in the osteoporotic range with fracture rates respectively of 23%, 28% and 33%.

As half of the fractures occurred in women in the osteopenic range, analyses of the associations between fracture status and density or structural parameters were repeated in this subgroup. In multivariate logistic regression models including age, height, weight, total hip T-score, center and center interactions, each SD decrease of total and trabecular vBMD assessed at both sites (OR = 1.46 – 1.80, $p<0.03$), was associated with a significantly

increased risk of major fragility fracture. In addition, at the radius, each SD decrease of trabecular number (1.37[1.04;1.79]) was associated with a significantly increased risk of major fragility fracture. At the tibia, each SD decrease of cortical thickness (1.40[1.03;1.91]), cortical area (1.44[1.06;1.98]) and cortical vBMD (1.38[1.01;1.87]) were associated with a significantly increased risk of major fragility fracture. After FDR correction, only tibial total vBMD and trabecular vBMD at both sites remained significant.

AUC [95%CI] for tibial total vBMD and trabecular vBMD at both sites (~0.873 [0.843;0.903]) with age, height, weight, total hip T-score, center and center interactions, were higher than AUC for total hip T-score with age, height, weight, center and center interactions (0.866 [0.834;0.898]).

DISCUSSION

In this large multicenter study, including 470 fractured women among 1379 recruited women, we observed significant and consistent deficits in vBMD and microarchitecture independent of total hip T-score at both the distal radius and tibia in postmenopausal Caucasian women with fracture compared to women who never had a fracture. These results remained consistent when restricted to major fragility fractures (n=349), vertebral and hip fractures (n=188) and in the subset of women with osteopenia (229 fractures among 679 osteopenic women). In the subset of women with peripheral fracture (n=282), the impairment was mostly observed at the radius. Moreover, peripheral trabecular architecture modestly improved fracture discrimination beyond peripheral BMD (total vBMD measured by HR-pQCT at the radius or tibia).

So far, conflicting results have been reported between fractured and non fractured women. In a study comparing osteopenic postmenopausal women with (n=35) and without (n=78) prevalent fragility fracture, although spine and hip aBMD were similar, fractured women had lower total and trabecular density and more heterogeneous trabecular distribution ($p < 0.02$) at the radius compared with non fractured women, but no significant difference at the tibia ([1]). In an age-matched case-control study from the OFELY cohort (101 fractured and 101 non fractured postmenopausal women), vertebral and nonvertebral fragility fractures were associated with low volumetric BMD and architectural deterioration of trabecular and cortical bone at both the radius and tibia, partially independently of aBMD ([3]). However, no significant microstructure differences were observed at the distal radius in 36 women with vertebral fracture and 34 controls without osteoporotic fracture from the Rochester Epidemiology project ([7]). In another study, postmenopausal women with hip (n=62) or wrist (n=50) fracture had impaired trabecular and cortical compartments at the radius compared to controls (n=54); but only hip fracture subjects had compromised trabecular microstructure at the tibia, and cortical bone was more impaired in hip fracture subjects than in wrist fracture subjects compared to controls ([5]). In fractured premenopausal women with idiopathic osteoporosis (n=21), trabecular microstructure was impaired at the radius and tibia but cortical parameters were compromised only at the tibia compared to normal premenopausal women without fracture (n=27) ([10]). These studies usually enrolled between twenty and one hundred fractured women, so that most of them may have been under-powered to provide robust estimates.

In our study, it is reassuring that differences were consistent and of similar magnitude when considering all fractures or only the 4 major fragility fractures, even if the total number of fractures was reduced by 26%. Moreover, radius and tibia showed a similar pattern, even after adjustment for total hip T-score. Based on these observed differences between fractured and non fractured women, we were able to calculate the minimal sample sizes to discriminate fracture groups after consideration of age, height, weight and total hip T-score. For an alpha error level of 5% (95% CI) and a statistical power of 80% (beta error level = 20%), the minimal sample sizes per group to discriminate women with major osteoporotic fracture and women without fracture were: 204 and 163 women for total vBMD at the radius and tibia respectively, 202 and 240 women for trabecular vBMD, and 274 and 337 women for cortical thickness. Our study was indeed well powered to observe differences in total and trabecular vBMD as well as cortical thickness, with 470 fractures overall and 349 major fragility fractures. Higher sample sizes were required to discriminate fracture groups with cortical vBMD: 417 and 447 women or trabecular number: 266 and 568, at the radius and tibia respectively (α=5%, β=20%).

When the population was restricted to the osteopenic women, which reduced the number of fractures by two-fold, total and trabecular vBMD remained associated with fracture beyond total hip T-score. Based on the age, height and weight adjusted means and standard deviation of our fractured and non fractured osteopenic women, a sample size of 173 to 325 women per group (depending on the parameter used) would provide robust estimates of the differences observed for radius and tibia total and trabecular vBMD, with an alpha error level of 5% and a statistical power of 80%. With a less conservative statistical power of 50%, while keeping an alpha of 5%, between 76 and 142 women per groups would be needed, which is well within our number of osteopenic women with major fragility fracture (n=171) and osteopenic women without fracture (n=450). Discrimination of fracture in this subgroup of osteopenic women is of particular importance as more than half of all fractures occur in osteopenic women ([23–25]). When adjusting for radius or tibia total vBMD instead of total Hip BMD, only few parameters remained significant: overall geometry (cross-sectional area) and peripheral trabecular architecture (area at the radius and tibia; vBMD and number at the radius). However, since high correlations were reported between total vBMD, cortical thickness and trabecular parameters (in this study, r = 0.91 and 0.81 for Ct.Th at the radius and tibia, and $0.41 \leq |r| \leq 0.76$ for trabecular parameters at both sites), results from Table 3 should be interpreted with caution because of multicollinearity issues. Other statistical approaches (principal component analysis, cluster analysis…) should be investigated to further conclude on the superiority of one parameter to discriminate fracture beyond DXA aBMD or total vBMD measurements. Future research should also address whether the fracture discriminatory capacity of HR-pQCT is different among different categories of patients or if it offers additional discriminatory capacity over aBMD in a particular category of patients.

Bone density and microarchitecture were impaired in fractured women in all centers, but to a variable magnitude. This is likely to be related to the random variability resulting from the limited sample sizes. We cannot rule out, however, that these differences may vary between centers because of selection criteria, lifestyle, environmental and genetic factors, even if we included only Caucasian postmenopausal women to overcome some of these biases.

Differences in bone densitometry between countries and continents have been reported and led experts to recommend country specific-normality curves ([26–29]). Unfortunately we were not able to cross-calibrate DXA scanners. Moreover, fracture risk varies from one country to another ([30]). Difference in height can also have an impact on the measurement region of interest, especially at the distal tibia. Reassuringly, the leave-one-out sensitivity analysis of centers, performed by removing one center at a time, to see the real contribution of each center to the final analysis provided similar data that the global analysis presented (data not shown).

The comparison of patient data among different HR-pQCT scanners might be controversial because there is no commonly accepted cross-calibration procedure. With our present method - based on the normalization by the mean value of a set of phantoms scanned across all centers - we achieved comparability of HR-pQCT results. Improvement in the cross-calibration universality could be obtained with a better characterization of the phantoms microstructure, i.e. not dependent on the mean across all centers but rather from measurements with gold standard μCT systems. Further improvement might be obtained with a better characterization and control of non device-specific factors known to contribute to measurement variability, such as subject motion and operator biases in patient and reference line positioning ([31–36]). The role of the operator is critical for precision but is difficult to evaluate. Establishment of image quality grading scales has helped the operator in his decision making to proceed to the scan analysis or to perform another scan. Pialat et al. reported intra- and inter-reader agreement on image quality grading with a 5 grade scale, Cohen's Kappa score being respectively 0.57 for intra- and 0.68–0.74 for inter-agreement. The moderately high inter-reader disagreement highlights the subjective nature of the grading system, even if reassuringly almost all discrepancies were within 1 grade-level ([35]). Efforts to develop non-subjective and quantitative estimates of motion error are clearly needed ([33, 36]). Moreover, variability of the region of interest positioning following landmark identification on the scout view performed prior to the scan impacts bone measurements ([31, 32]).

Recently, Bonaretti et al. developed an acquisition interface of the HR-pQCT system to simulate the landmark identification by the operator ([37]). They evaluated the intra- and inter-operator variability of the positioning on bone density and microstructure parameters (intra: 7 operators, 15 images positioned 3 times in a random order and inter: 5 operators). They observed that positioning was highly reproducible at the tibia in both intra- and inter-operator configuration, precision (CV_{rms}) was <0.8% and <1.8% respectively. At the radius, positioning errors were significantly higher, resulting in a precision of bone parameters between 0.4–2.1% and 1.0–6.6% for intra- and inter-operator. Highest variability was measured for cortical thickness, with CVrms 1.4–6.5 fold higher than other parameters. Indeed, Ct.Th has been shown to have the highest variation within the region of interest, with an average thickness three times higher on the 20 most proximal slices than on the 20 most distal, with the standard evaluation method ([2, 31, 32]).

In addition, the image analysis technique may also play a role in variability ([13, 38, 39]) with the current standard being a semi-manual contouring. These procedures would further benefit from more rigorous multicenter training procedures and automation of scan

positioning and image quality control. Moreover, other microstructural and biomechanical parameters, such as cortical porosity, trabecular topology, stiffness or failure load that have been reported to be associated with fracture ([6, 40–44]), but were not evaluated in this study, might also be of interest to discriminate women with and without fracture.

In conclusion, the large sample size available from pooling across centers shows a significant and consistent pattern of deficits in vBMD and cortical and trabecular microarchitecture that is independent of total hip T-score in postmenopausal Caucasian women with prevalent fragility fracture. Osteopenic women with and without fracture were also discriminated by total and trabecular vBMD beyond total hip aBMD. We also observed significant heterogeneity in the estimate of these differences across centers. Future research will address the sources of this variability and develop procedural solutions that minimize its influence.

Supplementary Material

Refer to Web version on PubMed Central for supplementary material.

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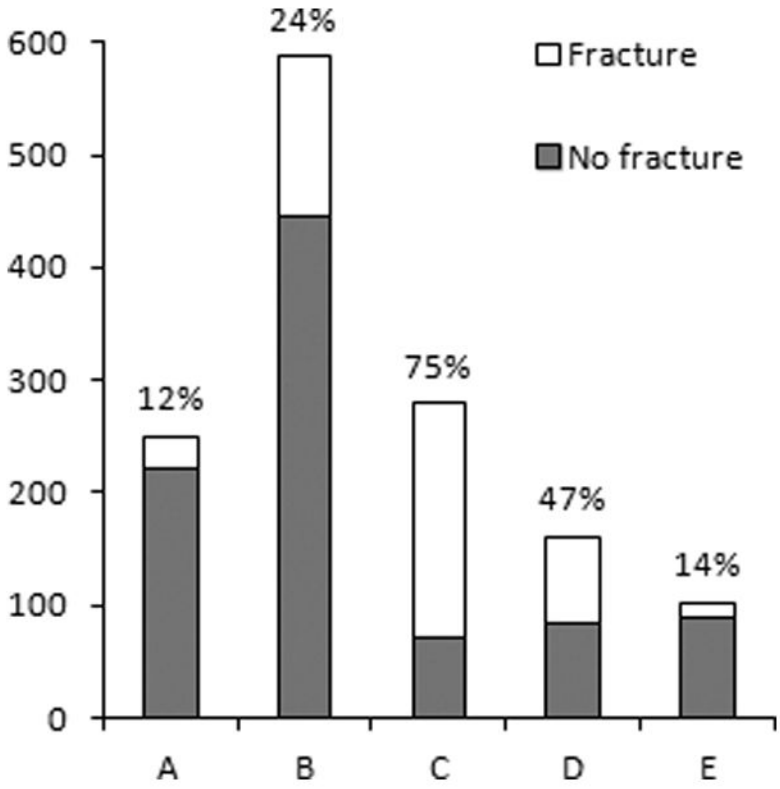

Figure 1.
Sample size by fracture status per center.

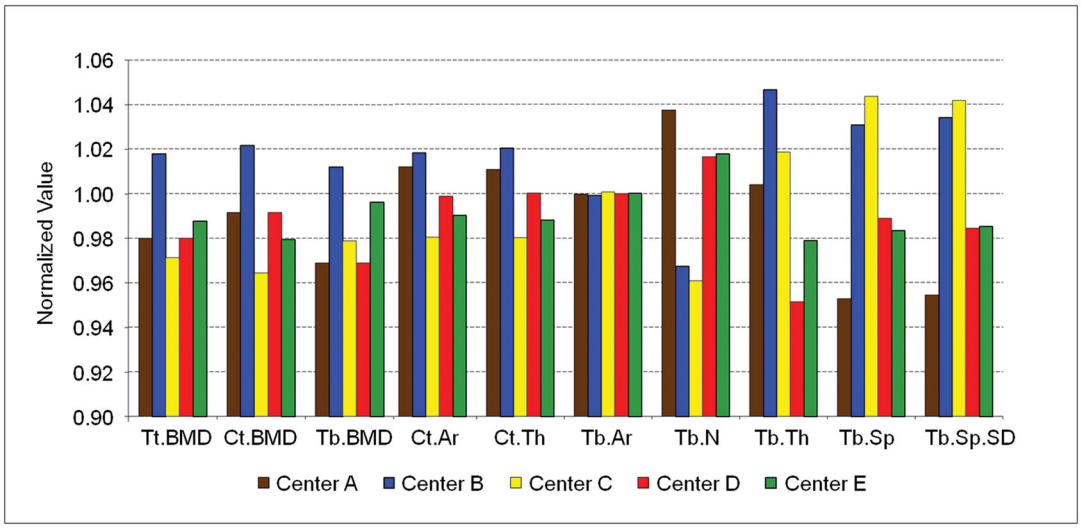

Figure 2.

Mean normalized densitometric and structural value of the radius anthropomorphic imaging phantoms per center.

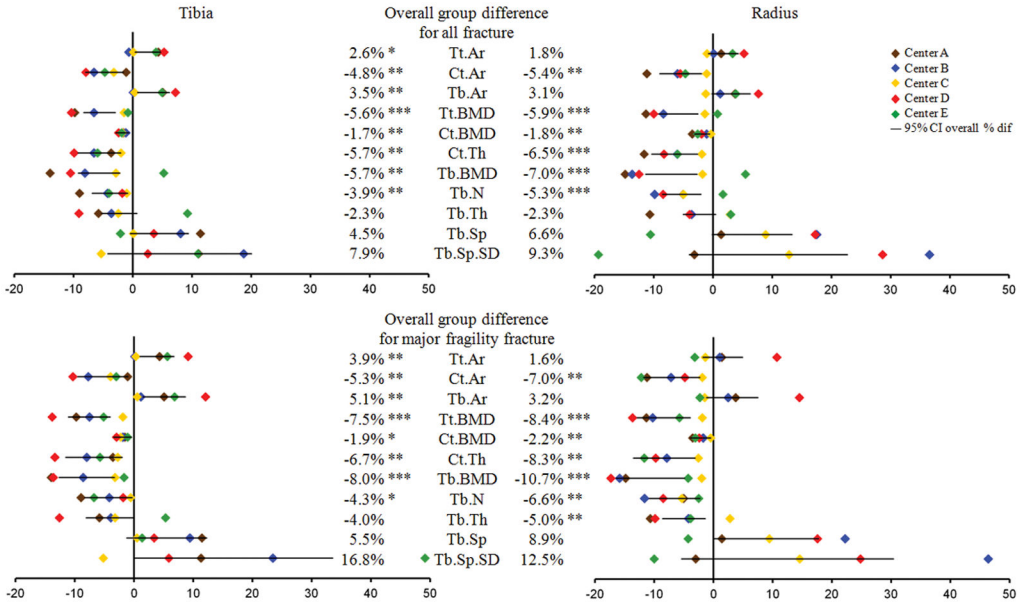

Figure 3. Overall and within center percentage difference between Caucasian women with and without fracture (upper panel) and restricted to major fragility fracture (lower panel)

The value of the overall group average percentage difference between the fracture and non-fracture women is shown by number and each line represents the 95% confidence limits surrounding this overall group difference. Each site is placed according to the average percentage difference between fracture and non-fracture women within the site.

Table 1

Characteristics of the population.

	Women without fracture (n=909)	Women with fracture (n=470)	Difference fracture vs.	Difference range within centers
Age (yrs)	65 ± 8	69 ± 9	6.4% **	0.7% ; 11.1%
Height (cm)	159 ± 7	160 ± 7	0.4%	−0.7% ; −0.2%
Weight (kg)	65 ± 12	68 ± 14	4.2% **	−3.3% ; 5.6%
BMI (kg/m^2)	25.8 ± 4.7	26.6 ± 5.3	3.1% *	−2.6% ; 6.2%
Total hip T-Score	−0.9 ± 1.0	−1.2 ± 1.0	−0.3 SD **	−0.8 SD ; 0.1 SD
Lumbar spine T-Score	−1.5 ± 1.3	−1.5 ± 1.4	0.0 SD	−0.8 SD ; −0.1 SD

* $p \leq 0.01$,

** $p \leq 0.001$

Table 2

Odds Ratio and Area Under Curve for major fragility fracture by SD decrease of the parameter

(otherwise stipulated), with age, height, weight, total hip T-score, center and center interactions as covariates.

	Radius		Tibia	
	OR [95%CI]	**AUC**	**OR [95%CI]**	**AUC**
Tt.Ar [a]	1.16 [0.96;1.40]	0.844 [0.820;0.868]	1.28 [1.05;1.56] *,+	0.846 [0.821;0.870]
Tb.Ar [a]	1.24 [1.03;1.50] *,+	0.845 [0.821;0.869]	1.33 [1.09;1.62] **,++	0.846 [0.822;0.870]
Ct.Ar	1.46 [1.18;1.80] ***,+++	0.849 [0.825;0.872] †	1.55 [1.25;1.92] ***,+++	0.848 [0.824;0.872] †
Tt.BMD	1.75 [1.41;2.18] ***,+++	0.855 [0.832;0.878] ††	1.95 [1.55;2.44] ***,+++	0.857 [0.833;0.880] †††
Ct.BMD	1.35 [1.09;1.67] **,++	0.847 [0.822;0.871]	1.47 [1.19;1.81] ***,+++	0.847 [0.823;0.871]
Ct.Th	1.50 [1.22;1.85] ***,+++	0.850 [0.826;0.873] †	1.54 [1.24;1.90] ***,+++	0.848 [0.824;0.872] †
Tb.BMD	1.74 [1.42;2.12] ***,+++	0.856 [0.833;0.879] ††	1.66 [1.36;2.03] ***,+++	0.852 [0.829;0.876] ††
Tb.N	1.55 [1.30;1.86] ***,+++	0.852 [0.828;0.875] †	1.24 [1.02;1.49] *,+	0.845 [0.821;0.870]
Tb.Th	1.33 [1.11;1.59] **,++	0.848 [0.824;0.872]	1.40 [1.18;1.66] ***,+++	0.847 [0.823;0.872]
Tb.Sp [a]	1.36 [1.15;1.61] ***,+++	0.847 [0.823;0.871] †	1.22 [1.03;1.45] *,+	0.846 [0.822;0.870] †
Tb.Sp.SD [a]	1.27 [1.08;1.48] **,++	0.846 [0.821;0.870]	1.23 [0.97;1.31]	0.845 [0.820;0.869]

[a] data are presented for each SD increase of the parameter

* p≤0.05,

** p≤0.01,

*** p≤0.001

\+ p≤0.05,

\++ p≤0.01,

\+++ p≤0.001 after FDR correction

† p≤0.05,

†† p≤0.01,

††† p≤0.001 compared to AUC of Total hip T-score with age, height, weight, center and center interactions as covariates (0.839 [0.814;0.863]).

Table 3

Odds Ratio and Area Under Curve for major fragility fracture by SD decrease of the parameter

(otherwise stipulated), with age, height, weight, total vBMD (radius or tibia), center and center interactions.

	Radius		Tibia	
	OR [95%CI]	**AUC**	**OR [95%CI]**	**AUC**
Tt.Ar [a]	0.69 [0.55;0.87] ** ++	0.856 [0.833;0.878]	0.72 [0.57;0.93] ** +	0.858 [0.835;0.881]
Tb.Ar [a]	0.63 [0.49;0.83] *** ++	0.856 [0.834;0.879]	0.72 [0.55;0.93] * +	0.858 [0.835;0.880]
Ct.Ar	1.00 [0.74;1.34]	0.852[0.829;0.875]	1.14 [0.87;1.48]	0.855 [0.832;0.878]
Ct.BMD	0.80 [0.59;1.08]	0.853 [0.830;0.876]	1.19 [0.94;1.50]	0.856 [0.832;0.879]
Ct.Th	0.78 [0.53;1.15]	0.852 [0.829;0.875]	0.98 [0.72;1.32]	0.855 [0.832;0.878]
Tb.BMD	1.60 [1.25;2.06] *** ++	0.856 [0.833;0.879]	1.19 [0.90;1.59]	0.856 [0.833;0.879]
Tb.N	1.42 [1.17;1.73] *** ++	0.854 [0.832;0.877]	0.99 [0.80;1.22]	0.855 [0.832;0.878]
Tb.Th	1.09 [0.89;1.33]	0.853 [0.830;0.876]	1.14 [0.95;1.36]	0.855 [0.832;0.878]
Tb.Sp [a]	1.22 [1.02;1.45] *	0.853 [0.830;0.876]	0.99 [0.82;1.19]	0.855 [0.832;0.878]
Tb.Sp.SD [a]	1.14 [0.97;1.33]	0.853 [0.830;0.875]	0.96 [0.82;1.13]	0.855 [0.832;0.878]

[a] data are presented for each SD increase of the parameter

* p≤0.05,

** p≤0.01,

*** p≤0.001

\+ p≤0.05,

\+\+ p≤0.01,

\+\+\+ p≤0.001 after FDR correction