2020 recommendations for osteoporosis treatment according to fracture risk from the Swiss Association against Osteoporosis (SVGO)

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Summary

Current guidelines from the Swiss Association against Osteoporosis (SVGO) dating from 2015 recommend therapy for men and women at increased fracture risk, specifically those with a vertebral or hip fracture; those with bone mineral density (BMD) T-score $< -2.5$ at spine or hip; and those with a high 10-year probability of major osteoporotic fracture as calculated by using FRAX. However no specific treatment recommendations have been made so far in our country to guide therapy according to the baseline level of risk. We now define four risk subgroup categories (imminent and very high, high, moderate, low) and propose an algorithm for osteoporosis therapy according to the level of fracture risk.

\textbf{Keywords:} osteoporosis, fragility fractures, bone mineral density, SERMs, bisphosphonates, teriparatide, denosumab, romosozumab

Introduction

In Switzerland, one woman in two and one man in five will sustain a fragility fracture after the age of 50. Hence the number of incident fragility fractures is at least 75,000 per year; 140,000 subjects have prevalent hip or vertebral fractures and 450,000 have osteoporosis (in 2010) \cite{1}. In turn, the acute complications of osteoporosis are a major cause of hospitalisations and the chronic complications, such as the loss of mobility and independence in daily living activities, increase the needs for secondary care and nursing homes. Yet primary and secondary prevention of fragility fractures remains insufficient, as it is estimated that less than 10\% of subjects with osteoporosis and only 20\% of subjects with low-trauma fractures receive anti-osteoporotic medications \cite{2}. Hence identification and treatment of subjects at high risk of fragility fractures remains critical.

Current guidelines from the Swiss Association against Osteoporosis (SVGO) dating from 2015 recommend therapy for men and women at increased fracture risk, specifically those with a vertebral or hip fracture; those with bone mineral density (BMD) T-score $< -2.5$ at spine or hip; and those with a high 10-year probability of major osteoporotic fractures calculated by using the fracture risk assessment tool FRAX. By high risk we mean at least equivalent to the 10-year risk of an individual of the same age and sex with a prevalent vertebral fracture, which in Switzerland corresponds to about 10\% by age 50 years and 30\% by age 72 years (fig. 1). In addition, patients receiving chronic glucocorticoid therapy, anti-aromatase therapy or androgen suppression therapy are also considered at high risk and recommended for osteoporosis treatment. More recently, SVGO also made recommendations regarding the duration and the sequence of osteoporosis therapy \cite{3}. In particular, it was recommended that high risk patients, including those older than 65 yrs and fallers remain treated until reaching a bone mineral density (BMD) at hip better than $-2.0$ T-score.

There are multiple classes of drugs available for the treatment of osteoporosis and fracture prevention, including:
Bone turnover markers, particularly carboxy terminal

In patients at risk, BMD should be evaluated at spine
evaluated carefully in patients at higher cardiovascular
paratide [8]. However, its benefits and risks should be
determined agents (teriparathide); and, very recently approved in
Switzerland, a new monoclonal antibody, romosozumab,
dual antiresorptive and anabolic effects. As stated in
the 2015 SVGO guidelines: “In general an anti-resorp-
tive (AR) is recommended as first line (without specifying whether and when it should be SERMs, bisphosphonates
or denosumab), whereas teriparatide (TPT) could be rec-
ommended as first line in case of severe osteoporosis (i.e.,
BMD ≤−2.5 + vertebral fracture).”

However, no specific treatment recommendations have
been made so far in our country to guide therapy according
to the baseline level of risk. Here we provide new guidance
to categorise patients at various levels of risk based on
their probability of a major osteoporotic fracture (rather
than hip fracture only, which accounts for only a fraction
of the former) and to choose the most appropriate first-line
therapy for each risk category.

New evidence regarding patients at very high
and/or imminent risk

Recent publications have provided new evidence regarding the
identification of very high risk patients and the efficacy
of certain treatments in this population. First, patients with
a recent major osteoporotic fracture (spine, hip, pelvis,
humerus or radius) are increasingly recognised as being at
“imminent risk”, since the relative risk of a second fracture is
increased several fold within the first 2 years after the
index fracture but declines thereafter, and 40% to 60% of
all recurrent fractures will occur within those 2 years [4].
According to some very recent Medicare data from the US,
after 65 years of age, 25% of patients with a vertebral frac-
ture and 15% or more of those with a hip or pelvis frac-
ture will refracture within 2 years, whereas 10% or more of
those with humerus or distal radius fractures will refracture
within 2 years [5].

An important consequence of identifying subjects with re-
cent fractures is the positive impact it has on the cost-bene-
fits of therapy. Indeed, by taking into account the imminent risk
of refracturing in these subjects, the number of sec-
secondary fractures potentially prevented by treatment would
be doubled compared with subjects with similar fractures but
in whom the recentness of the fracture has not been taken
into account [6]. Moreover, it has been estimated that in
these imminent-risk patients, parenteral therapy with deno-
sumab, teriparathide or romosozumab would prevent more
fractures than using an oral bisphosphonate [6].

Two recent major head-to-head trials have demonstrated the
greater anti-fracture efficacy of teriparatide and ro-
mosozumab compared with oral bisphosphonates (rise-
dronate and alendronate) in high-risk subjects defined by
severe and/or multiple vertebral fractures (VERO [7] and
ARCH [8], respectively). Notably, romosozumab also sub-
stantially increased BMD at spine and hip within 1 year and
significantly more so than bisphosphonates or teri-
paratide [8, 9]. However, its benefits and risks should be
evaluated carefully in patients at higher cardiovascular
risk, since romosozumab was associated with more car-
diovascular serious adverse events than alendronate in one
study [8].

Accordingly, the International Osteoporosis Foundation
(IOF) jointly with the European Society for the Clinical
and Economic Aspects of Osteoporosis (ESCEO) have re-
cently proposed an algorithm for the management of pa-
tients at low, high and very high risk of osteoporotic frac-
tures, in which they still recommend a potent anti-resorptive (bisphosphonate or denosumab) in high-
risk patients, but consideration of an anabolic agent (teri-
paratide, romosozumab) first in very high-risk patients
[10]. In women with a recent major osteoporotic fracture,
use of an anabolic drug for a short period (12–18 months)
followed by an anti-resorptive over a total duration of ther-
apy of 10 years would result in more fractures saved than
use of an anti-resorptive followed by an anabolic drug over
the same period [10].

Based on these new developments, we now delineate the
various risk categories and recommended treatments for
each level of risk in order to facilitate the management of
osteoporosis in Switzerland, notwithstanding the current
limitations for reimbursement of some drugs in our coun-
try.

Risk stratification

Risk stratification should take into consideration previ-
ous fragility fractures, BMD, age and other clinical risk
factors as encompassed in FRAX (table 1). Moreover,
the risk of falls should be taken into consideration, as
subjects with risk factors for falls (such as >1 fall in past
year, Parkinson’s disease, urinary incontinence, etc.)
may have a fracture risk that is nearly double that of in-
dividuals with similar bone risk profiles but without falls [11].

In patients at risk, BMD should be evaluated at spine
and hip using dual energy X-ray absorptiometry
(DXA). When possible, a vertebral fracture assessment
and trabecular bone score by DXA could also be per-
formed to further refine the risk evaluation.

Bone turnover markers, particularly carboxy terminal
crosslinked telopeptides of type 1 collagen (CTx) and
procollagen type 1 N-terminal propeptide (P1NP), are
not recommended for risk stratification. However they
may be useful to guide treatment decisions in some risk
categories (below) and to monitor treatment efficacy in
all categories.

Subjects should be considered at imminent risk (i.e.,
>10% fracture risk within 2 years) if they have suffered

Table 1: Clinical risk factors for fractures in FRAX.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Factor</th>
<th>Category</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
<td>Young</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sex</td>
<td>Female</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Body mass index</td>
<td>Normal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Previous fracture</td>
<td>Recent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parental hip fracture</td>
<td>Favour</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Current smoking</td>
<td>Non-smoker</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alcohol &gt;3 units/d</td>
<td>Low</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Glucocorticoids</td>
<td>Low</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rhumatoid arthritis</td>
<td>Low</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Secondary osteoporosis (type 1 diabetes, malabsorption, chronic liver disease, hypogonadism, untreated hyperthyroidism, adult osteogenesis imperfecta)</td>
<td>Low</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
a recent (<2 years) clinical vertebral or low-trauma hip fracture, or any recent major osteoporotic fracture (including humerus, radius, pelvis) after the age of 65.

- Subjects should be considered at very high risk when their 10-year probability of major osteoporotic fracture according to FRAX is at least 20% absolute risk above the intervention threshold at any age (fig. 1). This would correspond to a 10-year FRAX probability of about 50% after the age of 70, equivalent to an imminent risk of 10% within 2 years (above).

- For instance, a 55-year-old woman with a previous wrist fracture, body mass index (BMI) 20 kg/m², who smokes, whose mother had a hip fracture, and whose hip BMD is −2.7 T-score would reach the very high risk threshold for her age (FRAX probability 34%). Another example would be a 70-year-old woman with a previous vertebral fracture, on 5 mg/d prednisone for a chronic inflammatory disorder, hip BMD −3.1 T-score (FRAX probability 46%).

- Subjects with previous major osteoporotic fractures (>2 years) and/or FRAX probabilities above the intervention threshold but less than 20% above that limit (fig. 1) should be considered high risk, irrespective of their BMD level (since more than 50% of fragility fractures occur in subjects with BMD levels ≥−2.5 T-score).

- Subjects receiving chronic glucocorticoid, aromatase inhibitor or androgen suppression therapy should also be considered high risk if their BMD is <−1.5 T-score and/or FRAX probability above the intervention threshold (fig. 1).

- Subjects with BMD <−2.5 T-score but no previous fracture and a FRAX probability below the intervention threshold should be considered at moderate risk.

- Subjects with osteopenia (T-score >−2.5 and <−1.0) and no other risk factors should be considered at low risk.

**Treatment by risk category**

Despite numerous studies comparing the effects of various treatments on BMD changes, only a few trials, including the VERO and ARCH trials mentioned above, directly compared the anti-fracture efficacy of osteoporosis drugs in high-risk patients [7, 8, 12], and none has compared anabolics with the most potent anti-resorptives (zoledronate and denosumab). Moreover, a single trial specifically recruited patients with a recent hip fracture, hence at imminent risk, and demonstrated that a yearly infusion of zoledronate initiated within 3 months after the fracture reduced secondary clinical fractures by 32% and mortality by 25% compared with placebo (median follow-up 1.9 years) [13]. Post-hoc analyses of the FREEDOM trial also reported that denosumab significantly reduced vertebral and hip fractures in high risk subjects (>75 yrs, hip T-score ≤−3.0, previous fracture) [14]. Denosumab has also been shown to reduce fracture risk in other high-risk categories, namely in postmenopausal women with early breast cancer receiving an aromatase inhibitor [15], as well as in men with non-metastatic prostate cancer receiving androgen suppression therapy [16].

Treatment recommendations for the various risk categories are shown in figure 2 and explained below.

- In patients at imminent / very high risk with a vertebral fracture, teriparatide for 18–24 months is recommended (in absence of formal contraindications such as re-
cent cancer / radiation therapy to the skeleton), followed by an anti-resorptive (bisphosphonate or denosumab)

- In patients at imminent / very high risk with a hip fracture, zoledronate once yearly is recommended when renal function is not compromised (creatinine clearance >35 ml/min). Alternatively, consider denosumab.

- In all patients at imminent / very high risk, romosozumab is also recommended as first-line therapy for 1 year, followed by an anti-resorptive (bisphosphonate or denosumab), potentially excluding patients with recent cardiovascular events and/or at high cardiovascular risk

- In high-risk patients, including those on glucocorticoids, aromatase inhibitors or androgen suppression therapy, a potent anti-resorptive is recommended (note that denosumab is not approved for glucocorticoid-induced osteoporosis). Alternatively, consider teriparatide if there is a vertebral fracture or spine BMD <−3.5 T-score [17], but taking into consideration the contraindications to teriparatide in some cancer patients.

- In moderate-risk subjects who do not receive oestrogen replacement therapy, consider SERMS, eventually oral bisphosphonates if bone turnover markers such as CTx and P1NP are above the premenopausal threshold.

- In all the above categories, repeat DXA after 2 years and reevaluate fracture risk before deciding on pursuing treatment

- In low-risk subjects, recommend life style measures, vitamin D supplements (800–1000 IU/d) ± calcium (500–1000 mg/d) if necessary, and repeat DXA after 5–10 years or if clinical risk increases.

Discussion

These new recommendations on osteoporosis treatment differ from the previous SVG guidelines (2015) by further defining four risk categories, including a new one – imminent and very high risk. Furthermore, among the armamentarium of osteoporosis drugs available, newly enriched by a potent anabolic agent with dual anti-resorptive properties, romosozumab, we now delineate which drugs should be used to initiate therapy according to the fracture risk category. In defined patients at imminent / very high risk in particular, a more aggressive approach with bone forming agents or anabolics is now recommended as first-line therapy, although some reimbursement issues may still be present. By recommending specific classes of drugs according to the level of fracture risk, we hope to facilitate the decision making of all doctors involved in the management of osteoporosis and thereby to narrow the treatment gap for this common disease. Nevertheless, we acknowledge that the threshold for “very high risk” as defined here is somewhat arbitrary. We intentionally chose a threshold for very high risk that is quite elevated in order to keep the size of the targeted population relatively limited, in consideration of the potential risks and/or higher costs of anabolic agents. The recent development of teriparatide biosimilars may actually favour its use among imminent / very high risk subjects. To note that, using a lower “very high risk” threshold in the UK population, it has been estimated that only about 15% of post-menopausal women will fall into that category at any age [10]. We therefore expect that only 10% or less of post-menopausal women in Switzerland will fall into that category. Further studies are needed in Switzerland and elsewhere to evaluate whether such threshold captures a sufficient proportion of subjects effectively at very high risk, or on the contrary is too restrictive, which would call for adjusting our guidelines in the future.

Potential competing interests

KL has received a research grant from Amgen and was principal investigator in several multicentre clinical trials of Amgen US and MSD. SF has received research and/or consulting grants from Amgen, UCB, Agnusos, Allixirx, Gedeon Riβite and Galapagos.

References


