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► **To cite this version:**

Laurent Frenzel, Olivier Decaux, Margaret Macro, Karim Belhadj-Merzoug, Salomon Manier, et al.. Venous thromboembolism prophylaxis and multiple myeloma patients in real-life: Results of a large survey and clinical guidance recommendations from the IFM group. *Thrombosis Research*, 2024, *Thrombosis Research*, 233, pp.153-164. 10.1016/j.thromres.2023.11.021 . hal-04423951

HAL Id: hal-04423951

<https://hal.science/hal-04423951>

Submitted on 18 Apr 2024

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Venous thromboembolism prophylaxis and multiple myeloma patients in real-life: results of a large survey and clinical guidance recommendations from the IFM group

Runnig title: IFM guidances for thromboprophylaxis in multiple myeloma

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Words count = text : 4884 ; Abstract : 227 ; Figures = 5 ; Tables = 3 ; References = 58

Keywords: Prophylaxis, venous thromboembolism, multiple myeloma, direct oral anticoagulants, immunomodulatory drugs

Highlights:

Venous thromboembolism pharmacological prophylaxis should be considered for all patients treated with immunomodulatory drugs in combination with dexamethasone despite low level of evidence in a well-structured approach

Abstract:

Venous thromboembolism (VTE) remains a critical issue in the management of patients with multiple myeloma (MM), particularly when immunomodulatory drugs (IMiDs) combined with dexamethasone therapy are being prescribed as first-line and relapse therapy. One possible explanation for the persistent high rates of VTE, is the use of inappropriate thromboprophylaxis strategies for patients starting antimyeloma treatment. To tackle the issue, the *Intergroupe francophone du myélome* (IFM) offered convenient guidance for VTE thromboprophylaxis in MM patients initiating systemic therapy. This guidance is mainly supported by the results of a large survey on the clinical habits regarding VTE of physicians who are substantially involved in daily care of MM patients. VTE prophylaxis should be considered for all patients treated with IMiDs in combination with dexamethasone, in the absence of significant comorbidities, such as renal failure or bleeding risk. Anticoagulant should be preferred to antiplatelet agents for thromboprophylaxis. Despite the absence of large randomized controlled trials comparing those attitudes / options, available data on direct oral anticoagulants, which are already used in daily management of MM patients, are consistent with their potential usefulness for VTE prophylaxis in such patients. However, in order to implement a personalized continuous improvement strategy, clinicians must to be organized to collect all the data regarding this management. In other situations, thromboprophylaxis should be evaluated by using risk models and after careful evaluation of the risk/benefit ratio.

Introduction

Multiple myeloma (MM) is associated with a high incidence of venous thromboembolic events (VTE), such as deep vein thrombosis (DVT) or pulmonary embolism (PE). A large study including millions of United States (US) veterans hospitalized at least once from October 1, 1980, to September 30, 1996, showed that the risk of developing DVT was nine-fold higher in MM patients compared with the entire study population¹. A Swedish population-based study confirmed that MM patients display an increased risk of VTE compared with controls, especially during the first year after diagnosis². Although the underlying mechanisms of VTE in MM are far from being understood, IMiD-based treatments in combination with dexamethasone were shown to be strongly associated with a higher risk of VTE³. As a result, in 2008, the International Myeloma Working Group (IMWG) proposed consensus-based guidelines for thromboprophylaxis in patients initiating IMiD-based drugs⁴. According to the thrombotic risk assessments proposed at that time, the IMWG suggested using aspirin (ASA) in low-risk patients, and using low-molecular-weight heparin (LMWH) in high-risk patients. However, the MM treatment landscape has evolved considerably since 2010, including the use of IMiD-based drugs, more frequently with triplet or quadruplet regimens, from first line therapy to late relapse. Recently, a post-hoc analysis of the randomized phase 2 GRIFFIN trial reported that VTE remains a critical complication in this patient population⁵. Indeed, the VTE incidence observed in the safety population of the GRIFFIN study was significantly higher (approximately 13%) under lenalidomide/bortezomib/dexamethasone (RVd) +/- daratumumab (D), despite thromboprophylaxis

with ≥ 162 mg ASA daily according to the IMWG guidelines. Such a high incidence could be explained by the long duration of IMiD-based treatments and a suboptimal thromboprophylaxis, as well⁶.

Because VTE can lead to MM treatment discontinuation, increased risk of anticoagulant-related bleeding, and long-term VTE complications, thereby negatively impacting patient prognosis, real-life management of VTE risks is critical to physicians' daily practice. While risk assessment models have been successively developed to stratify the risk of VTE and facilitate the decision-making process regarding appropriate thromboprophylaxis, routine practice remains challenging. Choice and duration of thromboprophylaxis, patient comorbidities such as renal failure or thrombocytopenia, and local practices are factors that may explain the trends toward using suboptimal thromboprophylaxis regimen. In addition, the emergence of new anticoagulant drugs such as direct oral anticoagulants (DOACs) call into question their use in MM thromboprophylaxis, especially in the absence of results from comparative studies.

To address those queries, the Intergroupe francophone du myélome (IFM) has elaborated guidance for thromboprophylaxis in MM patients, which are based on updated published data and the results of a large survey conducted among clinicians working in all IFM centers in France and Belgium regarding their thromboprophylaxis practices.

Results of the IFM survey

An anonymous internet survey was distributed through a google form link and sent by email to registered practitioners at IFM centers in France and Belgium between December 2021 and June 2022. The survey tool was approved by an internal review board within the IFM group, including MM and vascular medicine specialists. The survey was a 15-item questionnaire regarding the use of thromboprophylaxis in MM, which covered the following topics:

- 1) How do you assess the benefit of implementing thromboprophylaxis in a MM patient who requires specific treatments?
- 2) What do you consider to be relevant evaluation criteria or tools for stratifying the risk of VTE?
- 3) If thromboprophylaxis is indicated, in which cases and for how long do you recommend it? (*IMiD-based versus non-IMiD-based treatment*)
- 4) If you plan to start a treatment combining IMiD and dexamethasone, which one of the following thromboprophylaxis regimens do you prefer (creatinine clearance [CrCl] >30 mL/min)? (LMWH, vitamin K antagonist [VKA], DOACs, aspirin [ASA], etc.)
- 5) What are your prescribing habits when ASA thromboprophylaxis is started? Or when LMWH thromboprophylaxis is started (CrCl >30 mL/min)? Or if VKA thromboprophylaxis can be started? Or when DOAC thromboprophylaxis is started (CrCl >30 mL/min)?
- 6) What are your limitations/fears regarding the use of LMWH for prophylaxis? Same question regarding VKA or DOACs for prophylaxis?
- 7) Do you consider this issue as critical in the care of your MM patients?
- 8) Do you manage the choice of treatment yourself or do you call upon a colleague specialized in vascular medicine or hemostasis?

Responses were analyzed using descriptive and frequency statistics.

A total of 86 respondents agreed to participate and completed the core survey. Demographics of the respondents are shown in Table 1. Overall, 86% (N=72) of respondents were working in the

public health system and 92 % (N=76) of them were considered as senior practitioners between 30 and 70 years old.

All but one respondent considered thromboprophylaxis to be relevant in MM patient care (Table 2). In general, the choice of drug for thromboprophylaxis seemed to depend on the clinical context. Fifteen (17.4%) respondents reported to always manage thromboprophylaxis by themselves, while others indicated that the decision regarding the choice of drug for thromboprophylaxis was based on consultant recommendation, especially in cases of prior VTE (26.7%), severe hemorrhage (30.2%), or concomitant antiplatelet drugs (20.9%). In these specific cases, practitioners would prefer to call upon a colleague specialized in vascular disease, though they could directly start treatment, in the absence of any specific risks in terms of comorbidities. Most participants reported that they preferred analyzing thromboembolism risk factors before prescribing any drug regardless of treatment line if an IMiD-dexamethasone-based therapy had been chosen (53.5%). Clinical situations, comorbidities, history of patients, and MM disease characteristics have been largely employed by clinicians as relevant risk analysis criteria to assess the risk of VTE, whereas very few of them seemed to apply a specific score (14%) or complementary assessments (3.5%).

Regarding the duration of thromboprophylaxis, more than two-thirds (70.9%) of clinicians participating to the survey indicated that they continue to use thromboprophylaxis until the end of IMiDs in first-line therapy or in relapsing situations. Only one-third did not prescribe thromboprophylaxis when a non IMiD-based treatment had been chosen (Figure 1).

We then asked participants about their preferred antithrombotic drugs in some frequent real-life situations (Figure 2). Interestingly, thromboprophylaxis with DOACs was likely the preferred option, followed by LMWH therapy and ASA alone, or after switching from parenteral treatment, irrespective of the patient age or concomitant VTE risk factors. In case of concomitant antiplatelet drugs, supervision by a cardiologist was more frequently chosen. Most patients with dual antiplatelet therapy did not receive additional anticoagulation therapy. As carfilzomib treatment can increase the incidence of vascular events⁷, anticoagulation therapy was preferentially given under systematic cardiac supervision.

Finally, we focused on dose management and administration schedule for each of the mostly used thromboprophylaxis agents by practitioners (Figure 3). Interestingly, 15% of clinicians indicated that they never prescribe ASA. Most clinicians using ASA prescribed a 75mg daily dose. In contrast with other countries, 80% of clinicians never proposed a VKA as thromboprophylaxis in MM patients. Two-thirds of clinicians usually prescribed enoxaparin 0.4mL daily, whereas one-third prescribed less than 175IU/Kg tinzaparin per day. Finally, regarding DOACs, 78% practitioners preferred prescribing 2.5mg apixaban twice daily, and 18% 10mg rivaroxaban daily. Only 13% of practitioners never considered DOACs for thromboprophylaxis. The answers concerning the limits or fears of using either DOAC or LMWH were quite different (Figure 4). LMWH limitations included the subcutaneous route of administration with subsequent difficulties encountered in patients after a long treatment, as well as their use in patients with severe renal failure. For DOACs, there were concerns about the lack of approval for MM patients, bleeding risks, absence of antidote, or renal impairment.

Comprehensive analysis of the survey

The survey addressed several critical aspects, such as the assessment of thromboprophylaxis benefits, risk stratification for venous thromboembolism (VTE), drug choices, prescription habits, and the role of specialists in vascular medicine and hemostasis. The survey's findings highlight the relevance of thromboprophylaxis in MM patient care, with nearly all respondents recognizing its importance. The choice of thromboprophylaxis drugs was often context-dependent, reflecting the complex nature of MM treatment. While some practitioners managed thromboprophylaxis themselves, others sought consultant recommendations, particularly in cases involving prior VTE, severe bleeding, or concomitant use of antiplatelet drugs. In specific situations, practitioners preferred involving colleagues with expertise in vascular disease, although they were capable of initiating treatment independently in the absence of specific comorbidity-related risks. Risk analysis criteria, such as clinical context, comorbidities, patient history, and MM disease characteristics, played a prominent role in assessing VTE risk. Interestingly, the majority of respondents preferred analyzing thromboembolism risk factors before prescribing any drug, especially when adopting an IMiD-dexamethasone-based therapy.

Regarding the duration of thromboprophylaxis, the survey revealed that over two-thirds of clinicians continued its use until the end of IMiD-based therapy in first-line or relapsing scenarios. However, approximately one-third of respondents did not prescribe thromboprophylaxis when opting for non-IMiD-based treatments.

When considering antithrombotic drugs in real-life situations, DOACs emerged as a preferred option, followed by LMWH therapy and ASA, regardless of patient age or concomitant VTE risk factors. Cardiologist supervision was frequently chosen when antiplatelet drugs were involved, and most patients on dual antiplatelet therapy did not receive additional anticoagulation. Notably, the survey suggested a preference for systematic cardiac supervision when using carfilzomib, which can increase the incidence of vascular events.

Dose management and administration schedules varied for different thromboprophylaxis agents. Some clinicians did not prescribe ASA, while those who did often opted for a daily dose of 75mg. In contrast to other countries, VKAs were infrequently proposed as thromboprophylaxis for MM patients. LMWH choices included enoxaparin and tinzaparin, with variations in dosing. DOAC preferences were evident, with apixaban and rivaroxaban being common choices, while a small percentage of practitioners did not consider DOACs due to concerns such as approval status, bleeding risks, lack of antidotes, and renal impairment.

IFM clinical guidance for venous thromboprophylaxis in multiple myeloma patients

The guidance recommendations are proposed to provide guidance in decision-making and implement optimal thromboprophylaxis in MM patients in a real-world setting (Figure 5). A practical algorithm based on easy decision steps, and enabling a prompt determination of the best course of action for any given patient based on her-his clinical scenario is an urgent need for practitioners involved in MM patient care. To develop these guidances (figure 5), a committee from the Intergroupe Français du Myélome (IFM) was assembled, comprising a team of experts in clinical medicine, clinical research, and healthcare services specializing in the fields of myeloma and thrombotic disease. All committee members are credited as authors of this work. The committee systematically reviewed the available evidence related to each clinical question and allocated writing tasks for each respective section. Further refinement of the guidance was achieved through

conferences and email correspondence. A total of three iterative rounds were undertaken, involving the core group initially, followed by hemostatic experts, and ultimately, myeloma experts. Each committee member contributed to drafting the guidance, which was subsequently circulated for review by the entire panel.

IMiD-dexamethasone therapy is key in decision-making for thromboprophylaxis: state of the art

The choice of IMiD-dexamethasone-based therapy is a key step in the decision making for initiating thromboprophylaxis based on published data and real-world experience. Indeed, several studies have demonstrated that the risk of VTE is higher (up to 25%) with IMiD drugs, especially when used in combination with dexamethasone⁸⁻¹¹. Moreover, the risk of VTE associated with IMiD in combination with dexamethasone was higher than with dexamethasone alone,¹² being directly correlated with the dexamethasone doses used¹³. In contrast, thalidomide or lenalidomide in monotherapy was not associated with any increase in VTE risk compared with the baseline VTE risk in MM patients¹⁵. Other therapies including alkylants, proteasome inhibitors, or monoclonal antibodies, without an IMiD-dexamethasone combination, did not cause any significant increase in VTE risk¹⁶⁻¹⁸. In addition, different route of administration of carfilzomib in combination with dexamethasone were shown to be unlikely to correlate with an increase in the risk of VTE¹⁹. However, carfilzomib in combination with both lenalidomide and dexamethasone clearly resulted in a higher VTE rate compared with the lenalidomide-bortezomib and dexamethasone combination (16.1% vs. 4.8%) when used without any pharmacological prophylaxis for VTE²⁰. In most cases, IMiD-dexamethasone therapy is chosen either in the induction or relapse setting. In a recent study, univariable and multivariable analyses showed that 12% out of 672 newly-diagnosed MM patients who received a triplet or quadruplet lenalidomide-based induction therapy were diagnosed with a VTE within the first year of treatment²¹. Most of them were treated with aspirin as thromboprophylaxis regimen. This point highlights the urgent need of prescribing more effective thromboprophylaxis alternative to aspirin to reduce the risk of VTE. According to the IFM survey, most physicians already systematically propose thromboprophylaxis when prescribing an IMiD-dexamethasone combination until the end of treatment regardless of the therapy line. However, up to one-third of practitioners never use thromboprophylaxis in the absence of an IMiD-dexamethasone combination (Table 2 and Figure 1).

VTE risk assessment in multiple myeloma: should we use risk prediction models?

Risk assessment models to stratify the risk of VTE in cancer patients are increasingly used since the publication of the Khorana score in 2008²². However, we can question the poor discriminative ability of this score to predict VTE in hematology malignancies, especially in MM. A recent study demonstrated that the Khorana score performed poorly in predicting VTE in a cohort of 2870 MM patients²³. Among the currently available scores for VTE risk prediction in patients with MM, **four** have been externally validated, comprising the IMWG²⁴, SAVED²⁵, IMPEDE VTE²⁶ and PRISM models²⁷ (Table 3). In each score, the use of IMiD-dexamethasone based therapy is associated with an at least intermediate or high risk of VTE. According to our algorithm, a pharmacological prophylaxis of VTE is thus highly recommended in MM patients initiating IMiD-dexamethasone based therapy who do not exhibit renal impairment or bleeding risk factors. VTE risk should be assessed in all other situations to evaluate the need of thromboprophylaxis. Both patient- and disease-related risk factors must be genuinely assessed to evaluate the overall risk of VTE. Indeed, recent studies have highlighted some disease-related VTE risk factors, such as abnormal metaphase cytogenetics with the Prism Score²⁷ or “hyperviscosity” with serum gamma globulin levels >27g/L²⁸. Furthermore, the survey analysis of

physicians' habits revealed that almost two-thirds of them carry out VTE risk analysis, with most of them considering disease- and patient-related risks factors to be most relevant for VTE risk assessment (Table 2). In contrast, very few practitioners were likely to employ any validated model, including the SAVED, IMPEVE VTE, or IMWG scores, in their daily practice.

Clinical situations to consider prior to thromboprophylaxis treatments

According to our algorithm (figure 5), when initiating thromboprophylaxis is required (IMiD-dexamethasone therapy or presence of relevant risk factors), several comorbidities potentially associated with a higher risk of anticoagulant overdosing or bleeding events must be considered before thromboprophylaxis initiation. According to our survey (Figures 2 and 4) and clinical experience, in addition to published data, there are two common situations that may directly impact initiation and maintenance of thromboprophylaxis drugs in MM patients, including renal impairment and bleeding risks (especially in cases of thrombocytopenia or dual antiplatelet therapy).

Up to one-third of MM patients have renal impairment which requires dose adjustments of anticoagulant therapy, especially LMWH and DOACs. In patients with a CrCl of at least 30mL/min, no drug adjustment is required. Conversely, neither LMWH nor DOACs should be used in cases of CrCl below 15mL/min. Only unfractionated heparin (UFH) should be proposed for thromboprophylaxis at a dose of 0.2mL twice daily administered subcutaneously in these patients. Of note, clinicians are increasingly inclined to prescribe LMWH and DOAC in patients with severe renal impairment with a CrCl below 15mL/min, along with anti-factor Xa activity monitoring or dose reduction. Nevertheless, there is currently no approval for this indication, especially considering its prophylactic use²⁹⁻³⁰. For patients with a CrCl between 15 and 30mL/min, either LMWH or apixaban could be used at prophylactic doses, with an active surveillance of bleeding risk, especially in the presence of other associated risk factors for bleeding³¹.

The risk of bleeding has been poorly evaluated in MM patients. A recent publication attempted to evaluate the bleeding rates in a real-world computed analysis of nearly 1300 MM patients receiving therapeutic anticoagulation therapy³². As a result, the cumulative incidence of bleeding was less than 5%, depending on the anticoagulant drug, and was higher with VKA than with LMWH or DOAC, as in other cancer patients receiving therapeutic anticoagulant therapy. Comorbidities associated with an increased bleeding risk included age, Charlson comorbidities index, the concomitant use of antiplatelet drugs (aspirin being not considered), diabetes, and renal disease. According to our survey, most clinicians needed a thorough supervision in cases of simultaneous use of antiplatelet and anticoagulant prophylaxis agents, although an association of these two drug types is unlikely to increased bleeding rates. Even on using DOACs³³, patients with dual antiplatelet drugs must be thoroughly evaluated before adding any anticoagulant therapy, especially if other risk factors coexist³⁴. Age alone should not be considered as an exclusion criterion for initiating thromboprophylaxis. Based on our survey, age did not influence the choice of drug. More importantly, age itself was considered as a VTE risk factor, and a careful evaluation of benefits and risks is warranted in frail patients before initiating a prophylactic anticoagulation therapy.

In clinical practice, the management of anticoagulant therapy in case of thrombocytopenia is a common issue in patients with hematological malignancies. As individual platelet counts are poor predictors of bleeding risks, no clear recommendations pertaining the use of anticoagulation therapy in relation with platelet counts have been given so far. Usually, therapeutic anticoagulation in the presence of platelet counts $<50 \times 10^9/L$ is a condition that requires specific care due to thrombocytopenia-related bleeding risk³⁵. Given that prophylactic anticoagulation is associated with

a lower bleeding risk compared to therapeutic anticoagulation, as it is close to single antiplatelet therapy risk, a platelet count of $>30 \times 10^9/L$ should be considered a reasonable cut-off for initiating or continuing an anticoagulant prophylactic regimen with a prophylactic anticoagulation³⁶.

Why should aspirin not be considered as a valuable option for thromboprophylaxis in MM?

Results from clinical trials comparing different options for thromboprophylaxis in MM patients are sparse. A recent Cochrane review systematically reviewed the available evidence on the efficacy and safety of aspirin, DOAC, LMWH, VKA to prevent VTE in MM patients³⁷. A total of 1015 citations from 11 articles were identified with only four randomized clinical trials enrolling 1042 MM patients. No significant differences were reported in terms of bleeding risks among aspirin, LMWH, or DOAC upon a prophylactic use. Furthermore, data from the observational prospective MELISSE study generated the same conclusion about adapted thromboprophylaxis regimens³⁸. In this study, VTEs were observed in 7% patients on aspirin and only 3% on LMWH prophylaxis. Only two randomized studies compared 100mg aspirin once daily (OD) versus 0.4mL enoxaparin once daily with or without warfarin. They did not demonstrate any significant differences between groups³⁹⁻⁴⁰. However, after 6-month follow-up, the VTE rate was about 4.5% in the aspirin group versus 2.7% in the LMWH group for patients treated with thalidomide; yet, this VTE rate in both groups was 2.2% versus 1.2%, respectively, for patients undergoing a lenalidomide-based treatment. Moreover, 1.7 % of patients in the ASA group were diagnosed with a pulmonary embolism compared with none in the LMWH group⁴⁰. More recently, two observational studies have proposed ASA and DOAC as VTE prophylaxis in MM patients^{20,41}. In newly-diagnosed MM patients treated with carfilzomib-lenalidomide-dexamethasone (KRd) regimen, the VTE rate exceeded 16% in the ASA (81 or 160 mg OD) group compared with only 4.8% in the rivaroxaban (10mg OD) group ($p=0.0067$)²⁰. For relapsed patients treated with IMiD-based drugs, VTE was reported in 4% of patients receiving 75mg aspirin OD, whereas no VTE was observed in patients receiving 2.5 mg apixaban twice daily (BID) for thromboprophylaxis⁴¹.

Moreover, the superiority of anticoagulants in preventing VTE has been demonstrated in other situations than MM. In a large randomized trial involving patients requiring extended thromboprophylaxis after a prior VTE, rivaroxaban treatment (10 or 20mg OD) was associated with a significantly lower rate of recurrent VTE compared with aspirin therapy (100mg OD), without any significant increase in bleeding rates, particularly on 10mg rivaroxaban⁴².

DOACs are likely preferred for preventing thromboembolic complications in MM patients

According to the survey, DOACs were more commonly prescribed by practitioners as anticoagulant agents than LMWH (Figure 2). The mostly chosen doses were 2.5mg BID apixaban followed by 10mg OD rivaroxaban (Figure 3). The recommendations for using apixaban 2.5 mg twice daily or rivaroxaban 10 mg daily are, of course, empirical due to limited available evidence. However, they are based on published data in a manner similar to the recommendations for aspirin or low molecular weight heparins (LMWHs). Similarly, if LMWH was recommended as anticoagulant agent, 0.4mL OD enoxaparin was mostly suggested after <175 UI/Kg OD tinzaparin. Several dosing regimens involving tinzaparin have been suggested for prophylaxis, with daily fixed doses ranging from 4500 to 12000 UI⁴³. Nevertheless, in the analysis of the IFM2009/DFCI study, the prophylactic dose of tinzaparin employed was 4500 IU per day²⁸, and another recent study in oncology substantiates the efficacy of this dosage for primary prophylaxis⁴⁴.

However, DOACs are currently not approved for the treatment and prevention of VTE in MM. This point has been highlighted by clinicians as a limitation to DOAC prescriptions, though being clearly surpassed by the difficulties inherent to subcutaneous injection requirements of LMWH prophylaxis (Figure 4). The French and Belgian trend in using DOACs as anticoagulant agents in MM has been recently confirmed in several studies^{32,45}. Furthermore, the use of DOACs at a low dose for primary VTE prevention is considered off-label, it may not be covered by reimbursement in many healthcare systems.

To date, no large, randomized study in MM has compared efficacy and safety of either LMWH and standard of care versus DOAC as thromboprophylaxis in MM patients. The Caravaggio study was designed to compare apixaban versus dalteparin (LMWH) in cancer patients with acute VTE⁴⁶, with up to 9% of these patients having a hematological malignancy. Apixaban met the non-inferiority efficacy endpoint in the curative VTE treatment versus LMWH regimen, without any increase in major bleedings. In ambulatory cancer patients at intermediate to high risk of VTE according to the Khorana score, two large randomized clinical trials compared DOAC versus placebo for VTE prevention⁴⁷⁻⁴⁸. Both 10mg OD rivaroxaban⁴⁷ and 2.5mg BID apixaban⁴⁸ demonstrated significant benefits in terms of VTE prevention without any increased major bleeding risks, except for gastric cancer patients.

Several non-randomized studies provided data on the efficacy and safety of DOACs as thromboprophylaxis for MM patients treated with IMiD-dexamethasone in first-line therapies or relapses⁴⁹⁻⁵¹. All of them proposed 2.5mg BID apixaban as anticoagulant, suggesting its efficacy in VTE prevention with very low or no events during thromboprophylaxis in MM patients, regardless the use of thalidomide, lenalidomide, or pomalidomide as IMiDs. Moreover, a very low major bleeding rate was reported, with some minor bleeds identified without any consequence under MM treatments. Although antidote non-availability could be considered as a limitation by some clinicians (Figure 4), since unscheduled surgeries or traumatic events could be more complicated to manage with DOACs compared with LMWH when using prophylactic doses. However prophylactic DOAC doses are unlikely concerned when considering the quick need of an antidote activity.

Discussion

We have herein proposed a guidance framework for thromboprophylaxis in MM patients based on an updated review of available data, expert opinions, and, most importantly, real-world practice of physicians involved in MM care (figure 5). VTE continue to be a crucial issue in this setting, the IMiD-dexamethasone strategy being currently among the most commonly used in both first-line therapy and relapse. With a daratumumab-RVd (Lenalidomide (R) + bortezomib (V) + dexamethasone (D)) treatment as induction and consolidation for transplant-eligible patients followed by lenalidomide as maintenance therapy, more than 90% of patients achieved a complete response in the Griffin trial⁵. Nevertheless, the efficacy endpoint was not met because of a high VTE rate (10%). In most cases, aspirin was used for thromboprophylaxis, whereas several patients exhibiting a VTE never received any thromboprophylaxis.

Simplified algorithms are urgently needed in view in order to optimize thromboprophylaxis. In cases where anticoagulation prophylaxis was quite mandatory, the VTE rate was lower than that observed in the Griffin trial, as seen in the IFM2009/DFCI trial with RVd induction, with less than 5,5% VTEs (Grade 3-4) in both arms⁵². In the IFM2013-04 study, only 1.8% of patients were diagnosed with a VTE (Grade 3-4) in the cyclophosphamide (VCD) or thalidomide (VTD) groups, in spite of thalidomide-dexamethasone being the induction regimen for newly-diagnosed MM patients⁵³. In

both studies, LMWH was the mostly used thromboprophylaxis strategy, consisting of 0.4mg enoxaparin daily or less than 175IU/Kg tinzaparin, as proposed by clinicians (Figure 3). However, according to the survey, the burden of daily subcutaneous injections was clearly shown to be the major limiting factor for patients, especially upon using continuous regimens for years on end until progression (Figure 4). In addition to the subcutaneous injection burden, the long-term use of LMWHs can potentially lead to significant side effects, such as osteoporosis and the risk of heparin-induced thrombocytopenia (HIT). These side effects can be particularly detrimental to the management of myeloma patients who already have preexisting bone fragility and are undergoing treatments that induce cytopenias.

Although DOACs are not approved for MM patients, their use at prophylactic doses appears very comfortable for patients, without any significant safety concerns, while being highly efficient in preventing VTE, as based on the results of the most recent studies⁴⁶⁻⁴⁹. Randomized studies comparing DOACs with LMWH could be interesting for MM patients in first-line therapy or relapse settings, though ethic issues could limit patient (receiving either daily subcutaneous injections or oral drugs) participation. Developing new targets in thromboprophylaxis like factor XI (FXI) monoclonal antibody could be even more challenging in view of a new MM randomized trial, comparing patients receiving an intravenous injection twice monthly, such as abelacimab, with those treated with daily oral DOACs⁵⁴. Another issue with using DOACs is their likely interaction with MM drugs. In this context, an ancillary study was proposed based on the IFM2020-05 / BENEFIT trial questioning the pharmacokinetics of 2.5mg BID apixan employed in non-transplant eligible newly-diagnosed patients receiving isatuximab, lenalidomide, and dexamethasone in both arms, with or without bortezomib. While this study is still ongoing, final analyses of apixaban pharmacokinetics and safety reports should be made available within the next months.

As primary VTE thromboprophylaxis has been largely discussed, questions about treatment of acute VTE appear to be less controversial. In general, acute VTE therapy has been well-established in cancer patients,⁵⁵ consisting of a progressive use of DOACs versus LMWH based on the results of large randomized controlled trials⁴⁴. The same trend was observed for acute VTE therapy upon MM care, with a special focus on bleeding risk factors⁵⁶. However, acute VTE therapy in patients already on ongoing anticoagulant prophylaxis is a hazardous situation, which requires further discussions involving vascular experts with respect to changing the anticoagulation drug or using a metal device as vena cava filter.

In addition, an arterial thromboembolic risk has been described in some MM trials, which was, however, less relevant than VTE⁴³. While IMiD use and classical cardiovascular risk factors are linked to this issue, this risk appears to be quite low in the MM population, with an incidence ranging from 1.3 to 2.4%, as observed in the myeloma XI trial⁵⁷. While no evidence of arterial thromboprophylaxis has been found in MM cohorts, both LMWH and DOACs were associated with a decrease in arterial events in cancer treated populations^{45,58}. However, no preventive measures for arterial thromboembolic risk are provided in this guidance and would require future evaluation.

Finally, following this guidance (figure 5), the majority of patient could be protected against any VTE with a favorable safety risk assessment. However, there may probably persist a very small minority of MM patients that might experience a VTE, even if this guidance has been correctly applied. Actually, these “very high-risk” patients are very tricky to spot, and no clear definition is currently available, neither from different risk assessment models nor from guidelines³⁷. Moreover, no available data support any specific therapeutic approach for these very high-risk patients, especially with respect to therapeutic doses of LMWH or DOAC. In response, continuing to provide

specific registers and clinical studies is mandatory to better identify individual VTE risk factors and optimize the anticoagulation options for these patients.

In conclusion, initiating a new treatment for MM patients is highly time-consuming for each physician in routine clinical practice. Choosing the best drug association and treatment duration for each patient, anticipating the side-effects, starting antibiotics prophylaxis and bone-related disease drugs, considering patient's preferences, and scheduling biological tests and hospitalizations, as well, are essential acts required by practitioners. Adding a holistic reflection on managing VTE thromboprophylaxis is clearly unnecessary, bearing the risks of underestimated and undertreated patients. These real-life adapted guidance recommendations (Figure 5) are built to help physicians adapt their daily care of MM patients in need of appropriate treatments. The most common context pertaining to IMiD-dexamethasone therapies consists in the initiation of anticoagulant prophylaxis with either LMWH or DOAC using prophylactic doses, provided that no comorbidities exist, including severe renal impairment, thrombocytopenia, or antiplatelet drug requirement. In less complicated situations, risk/benefit assessments are required to evaluate the VTE risk score using appropriate tools and an adapted anticoagulant strategy, such as decreasing doses or switching to other drugs.

	Responses % (N=84)
<u>Practice settings</u>	
University hospital	44% (37)
Regional public hospital	41.7% (35)
Hybrid public/private hospital	4.8% (4)
Others	9.5% (8)
<u>Practice experience</u>	
Professor	8.3% (7)
Hospital practitioner	83.3% (70)
Fellow in hematology	7.31% (7)
Medicine resident	1.1% (1)
<u>Age</u>	
Between 25 and 40 years	40.5% (34)
Between 41 and 55 years	35.7% (30)
Between 56 and 70 years	22.6% (19)
Over 70 years	1.2% (1)

Table 1. Demographic data of the survey respondents

	Responses % (N=86)
<u>Do you consider thromboprophylaxis to be important in patient care?</u>	
Yes	98.8% (85)
No	1.2% (1)
<u>Do you manage the choice of treatment yourself or do you call upon a colleague specialized in vascular medicine or hemostasis?</u>	
Always by myself	17.4% (15)
Never by myself	19.8% (17)
Ask advice only if renal failure	16.3% (14)
Ask advice only if history of thromboembolic events	26.7% (23)
Ask advice only if history of severe hemorrhage	30.2% (26)
Ask advice only if patient has been already treated with an antiplatelet therapy	20.9% (18)
<u>How do you assess the benefit of implementing thromboprophylaxis in a multiple myeloma patient requiring specific treatments?</u>	
No interest	0% (0)
Only at times in first-line therapy	0% (0)
Whatever the line of treatment	70 % (61)
Whatever the class of treatment	12.8% (11)
Only in case of IMiDs-dexamethasone treatments	53.5% (46)
Without using any thromboembolism risk factor analysis	3.5% (3)
After using a thromboembolism risk factor analysis	62.8% (54)
<u>What do you consider relevant as evaluation criteria or tools for the analysis of venous thromboembolism risks?</u>	
Criteria related directly to the myeloma disease (hyperviscosity, high R-ISS score, high risk cytogenetics, etc.)	70.9% (61)
Criteria related to an adjuvant symptomatic treatment (EPO, G-CSF, etc.)	54.7% (47)
Criteria without any relation to myeloma disease (thrombophilia, obesity, history of thrombosis, etc.)	89.5% (77)
High-risk situations of thromboembolism (immobilization, surgery, infection, etc.)	90.7% (78)
Based on IMWG guidelines	15.1% (13)
Based on use of VTE risk models (Khorana, IMPEDE VTE, Palumbo score, etc.)	14% (12)
Based on complementary assessments (D-dimer dosing, systematic venous Doppler ultrasound, etc.)	3.5% (3)

Table 2: Analysis of usual consideration and practice before initiating thromboprophylaxis for MM patients. R-ISS=Revised multiple myeloma international staging system (R-ISS); EPO=Erythropoietin; G-CSF= Granulocyte-colony stimulating factor.

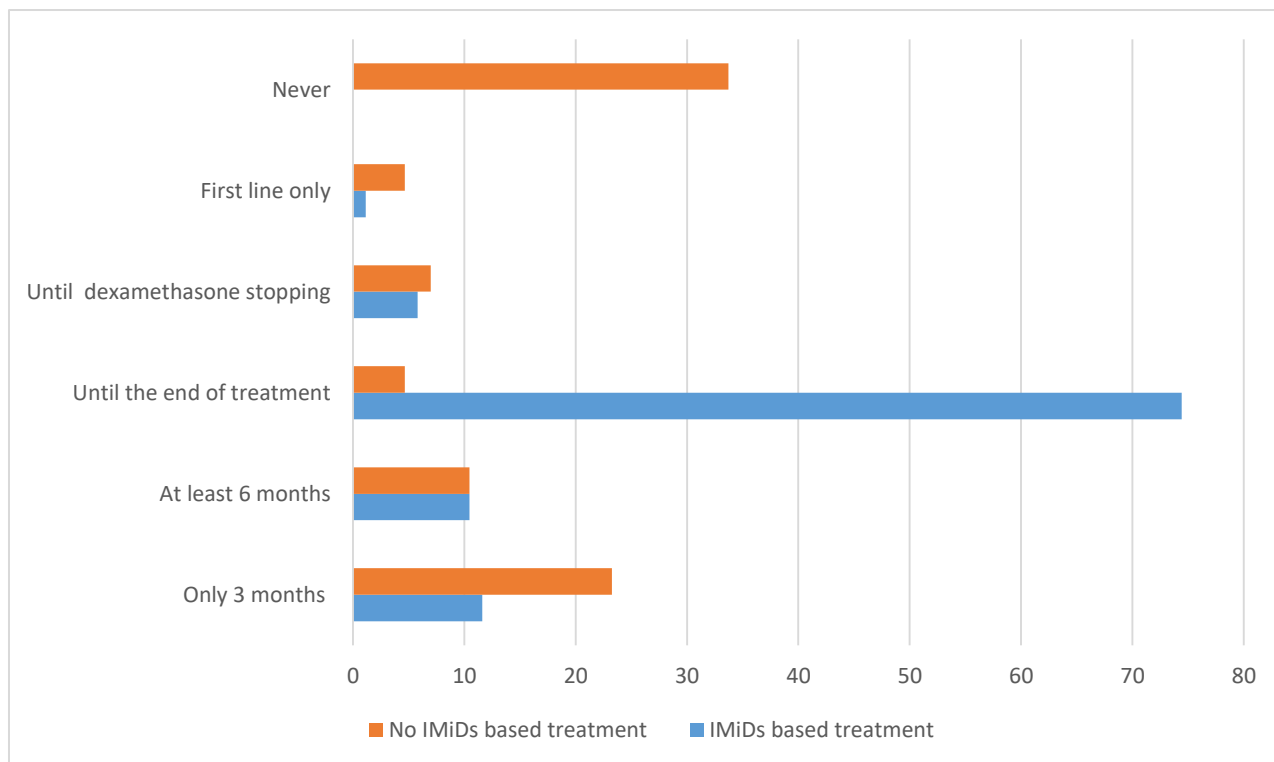


Figure 1: Management of thromboprophylaxis duration and indications with or without IMiD-based treatments (% of respondents)

IMiDs= immunomodulatory drugs

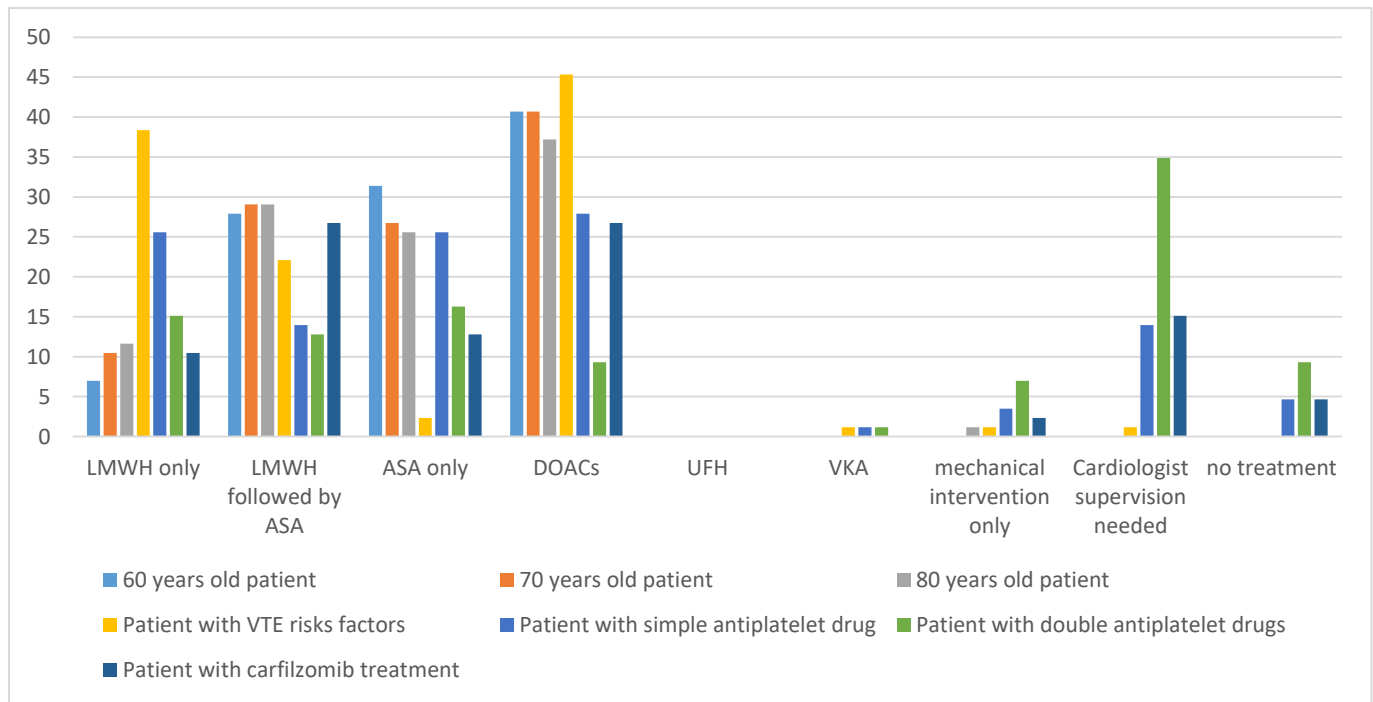


Figure 2: Common clinical situations and thromboprophylaxis habits from survey participants (% of respondents).

LMWH: Low-molecular-weight heparin; ASA: Aspirin; DOACs: Direct-acting oral anticoagulants; UFH: Unfractionated heparin; VKA: Vitamin K antagonist

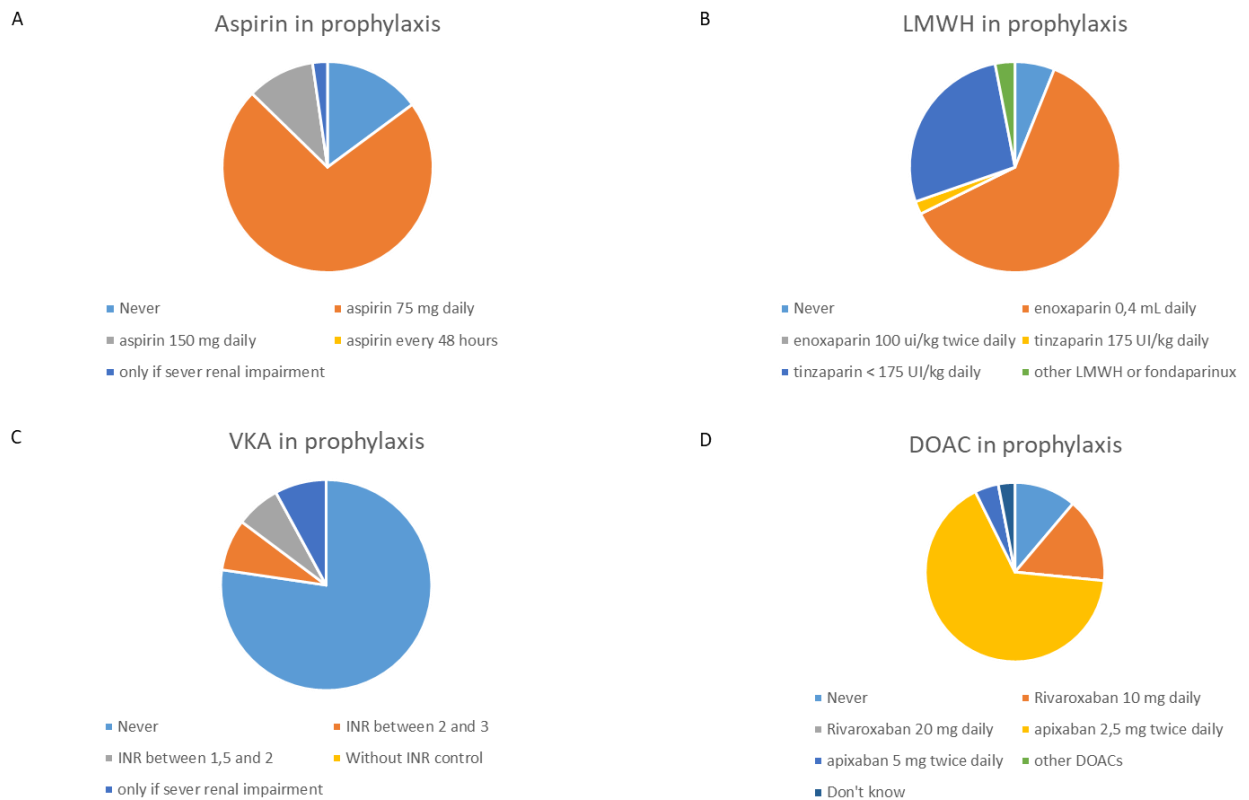


Figure 3: Doses and scheduled management of each mostly used thromboprophylaxis regimen in multiple myeloma patients by physician with aspirin (A), LMWH (B), VKA (C) and DOAC (D). (% of respondents)

LMWH: Low-molecular-weight heparin; ASA: Aspirin; DOACs: Direct-acting oral anticoagulants; UFH: Unfractionated heparin; VKA: Vitamin K antagonist

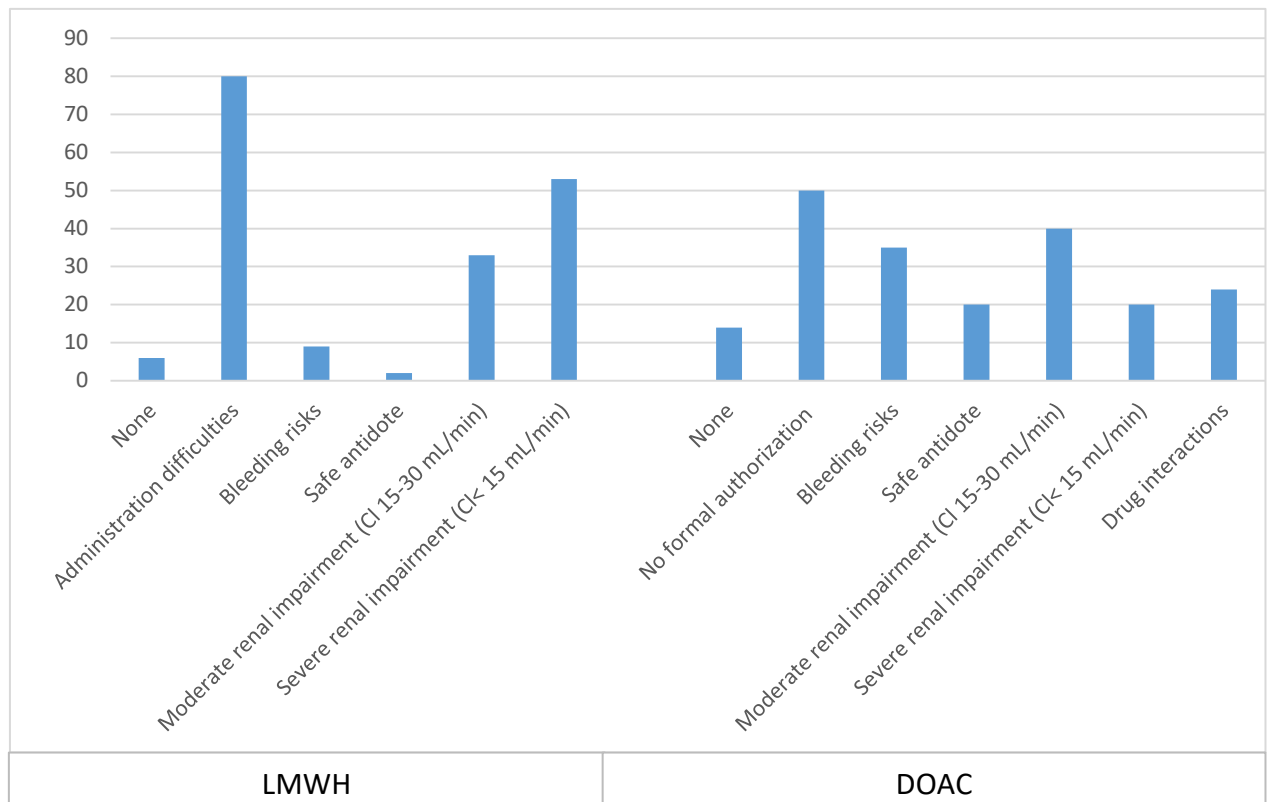


Figure 4: Limits and fears of LMWH or DOAC thromboprophylaxis for myeloma patients (% of respondents)

LMWH: Low-molecular weight heparin; DOACs: Direct-acting oral anticoagulants

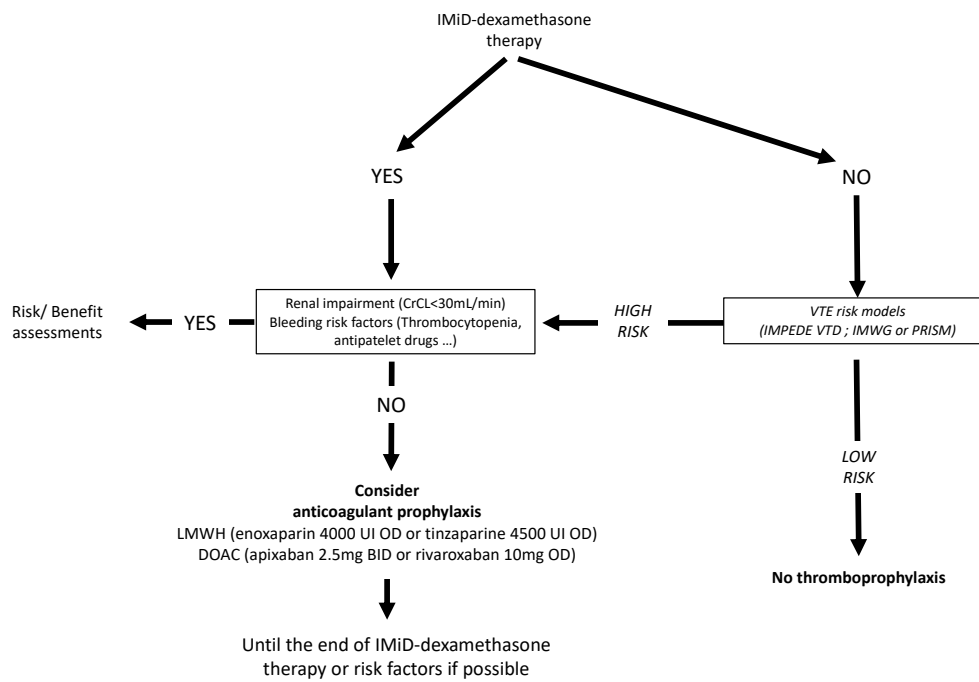


Figure 5: Algorithm of thromboprophylaxis initiation for MM patients undergoing antimyeloma treatments. **The dosages of DOACs or LMWHs are based on empirical data due to the limited available evidence.**

LMWH: Low-molecular-weight heparin; VTE: venous thromboembolic events; DOACs: Direct-acting oral anticoagulants ; IMiD= immunomodulatory imide drug.

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Declaration of interests

All The authors declare that they have no known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have appeared to influence the work reported in this paper.

Highlights

1. Proposed guidance for thromboprophylaxis in MM.
2. VTE remains a significant issue in MM care.
3. Long-term LMWH use has notable side effects.
4. DOACs offer comfort, efficacy, but need studies.
5. Holistic VTE management approach is essential.