A new prediction model for ventricular arrhythmias in arrhythmogenic right ventricular cardiomyopathy
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Published in:
European Heart Journal

DOI:
10.1093/eurheartj/ehz103
10.1093/eurheartj/ehz103

IMPORTANT NOTE: You are advised to consult the publisher's version (publisher's PDF) if you wish to cite from it. Please check the document version below.

Document Version
Publisher's PDF, also known as Version of record

Publication date:
2019

Link to publication in University of Groningen/UMCG research database

Citation for published version (APA):

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A new prediction model for ventricular arrhythmias in arrhythmogenic right ventricular cardiomyopathy


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Received 2 August 2018; revised 21 November 2018; editorial decision 31 January 2019; accepted 1 March 2019

Aims
Arrhythmogenic right ventricular dysplasia cardiomyopathy (ARVC) is characterized by ventricular arrhythmias (VAs) and sudden cardiac death (SCD). We aimed to develop a model for individualized prediction of incident VA/SCD in ARVC patients.

Methods and results
Five hundred and twenty-eight patients with a definite diagnosis and no history of sustained VAs/SCD at baseline, aged 38.2 ± 15.5 years, 44.7% male, were enrolled from five registries in North America and Europe. Over 4.83 (interquartile range 2.44–9.33) years of follow-up, 146 (27.7%) experienced sustained VA, defined as SCD, aborted SCD, sustained ventricular tachycardia, or appropriate implantable cardioverter-defibrillator (ICD) therapy. A
prediction model estimating annual VA risk was developed using Cox regression with internal validation. Eight potential predictors were pre-specified: age, sex, cardiac syncope in the prior 6 months, non-sustained ventricular tachycardia, number of premature ventricular complexes in 24 h, number of leads with T-wave inversion, and right and left ventricular ejection fractions (LVEFs). All except LVEF were retained in the final model. The model accurately distinguished patients with and without events, with an optimism-corrected C-index of 0.77 [95% confidence interval (CI) 0.73–0.81] and minimal over-optimism [calibration slope of 0.93 (95% CI 0.92–0.95)]. By decision curve analysis, the clinical benefit of the model was superior to a current consensus-based ICD placement algorithm with a 20.6% reduction of ICD placements with the same proportion of protected patients (P < 0.001).

Conclusion
Using the largest cohort of patients with ARVC and no prior VA, a prediction model using readily available clinical parameters was devised to estimate VA risk and guide decisions regarding primary prevention ICDs (www.arvcrisk.com).

Keywords
Arrhythmogenic right ventricular cardiomyopathy • Implantable cardioverter-defibrillators • Sudden cardiac death • Ventricular arrhythmias

Introduction
Arrhythmogenic right ventricular dysplasia cardiomyopathy (ARVC) is an inherited cardiomyopathy characterized by progressive fibrofatty replacement of the myocardium which predisposes patients to ventricular arrhythmias (VAs) and sudden cardiac death (SCD). Once the diagnosis is established, a primary goal of management is prevention of SCD, for which implantable cardioverter-defibrillators (ICDs) are a common consideration. There is agreement that most ARVC patients with a prior history of sustained VA or resuscitated sudden cardiac arrest (SCA) benefit from secondary prevention ICDs. However, for the primary prevention population, there is no established risk stratification scheme.

Over the past two decades, multiple attempts have been made to identify factors associated with VA in this clinically challenging population. While these studies have significantly contributed to our understanding of clinical, demographic, and behavioural factors associated with arrhythmic risk, the relatively small patient populations provided insufficient statistical power to assess the independent predictive value of potentially correlated risk factors.

To overcome this important limitation, we assembled a large cohort of patients with ARVC from five registries (Johns Hopkins, Dutch, Nordic, Swiss, and Canadian) without a history of sustained VA or SCA at diagnosis. The study conforms to the Helsinki declaration and was approved by local ethics and/or institutional review boards.

Study outcomes
The primary study outcome was the first sustained VA following diagnosis by the TFC. Sustained VA was defined as a composite of the occurrence of SCD, SCA, spontaneous sustained ventricular tachycardia (VT) (VT lasting >30 s at >100 b.p.m. or with haemodynamic compromise requiring cardioversion), ventricular fibrillation/flutter (VF), or appropriate ICD intervention. The first episode of a rapid sustained VA (defined as SCD, SCA, VF, or VT >250 b.p.m.), heart transplantation, cardiovascular mortality, and all-cause mortality were also recorded.

Predictors
Potential predictors were pre-specified based on clinical experience and current literature on arrhythmic risk stratification in ARVC including: (i) a recent systematic review and meta-analysis and (ii) the International Task Force Consensus (ITFC) Consensus Statement for Treatment of ARVD/C and a recent analysis of the performance of its risk stratification algorithm.

Variables considered were sex, age, recent (<6 months) cardiac syncope, non-sustained VT (NSVT), number of premature ventricular complexes (PVCs) on 24-h Holter monitoring, extent of T-wave inversion (TWI) on anterior and inferior leads, right ventricular ejection fraction (RVEF), and left ventricular ejection fraction (LVEF). Each predictor variable was determined at the time of diagnosis, defined as 1 year before to 1 year after the date of diagnosis by TFC but always prior to occurrence of the primary outcome. Definitions of predictor variables are provided in Supplementary material online, Table S2 In Supplementary material online, Table S3, we describe the rationale for selecting each predictor, as well as the rationale for excluding other variables.

Data collection
Data were collected independently by each registry according to standard operating procedures (Supplementary material online, Table S4). Outcomes were adjudicated at each centre via review of electrocardiogram (ECG) tracings, ICD interrogation tracings, as well as medical and death records. ECGs were interpreted through an ECG core laboratory.
by two cardiologists—electrophysiologists (J.C.T. and R.T.) blinded to the rest of the data and outcomes. Genetic variants were adjudicated according to the American College of Medical Genetics and Genomics guidelines by consensus of specialists in cardiac genetics (B.M., J.D.H.J., J.P.v.T., and C.A.J.).

**Statistical analysis**

Analyses were performed using SAS software version 9.4 (SAS Institute, Cary, NC, USA) and RStudio version 1.1.414 (Boston, MA, USA). Categorical variables were summarized as frequencies (%) and compared using the χ² or the Fisher’s exact tests, as appropriate. Continuous variables were presented as mean ± standard deviation or median [interquartile range (IQR)], and compared using the independent sample t-test or the Mann–Whitney U test. Follow-up duration was calculated from the date of diagnosis to the date of reaching the endpoint or censoring, which was defined as death from any other cause, heart transplantation, or the most recent follow-up visit at which the endpoint could be ascertained. The overall probability of survival free from sustained VA was estimated using the Kaplan–Meier method.

**Missing data**

Potential bias from missing data was evaluated by comparing characteristics of patients with one or more missing predictor variables to patients with complete data. Missing quantitative values for RVEF and LVEF were imputed manually when qualitative assessment was present (as detailed in Supplementary material online, Table S4). Other missing data were assumed to be random and imputed using multiple imputation with chained equations.10 The multiple imputation model included all pre-specified predictors as well as proband status, QRS duration, right ventricular volume, ICD carrier status, together with the outcome, and a cumulative baseline hazard estimation.11 A total of 25 imputed datasets were generated, and the final inference estimations were combined using Rubin’s rules.12 A complete case analysis and an analysis without manual imputation of RVEF and LVEF were conducted as sensitivity analyses.

**Model development and validation**

The association between the pre-specified predictors and the primary outcome was assessed using Cox regression. Proportional-hazard assumptions were verified as well as linearity of the association for continuous predictors. The final model was fitted using stepwise backward selection based on Akaike’s Information Criterion.13 The discriminative performance of the model was measured using Harrell’s C-statistic. The model was validated using 200 bootstrap samples. The degree of optimism was estimated by the average calibration slope of the bootstrap samples.13 Agreement between predicted and observed outcomes was evaluated graphically using calibration plots that incorporated grouped Kaplan–Meier estimates and the continuous hazard regression function.14 Calibration analyses were repeated for patient subgroups including genotype and ICD status.

**Model presentation**

For an individual patient, the risk of sustained VA was calculated using the following equation:

\[
P(\text{VA at time } t) = 1 - S_0(t)^{\exp(\text{LP})}
\]

where \(S_0(t)\) is the baseline survival probability at time \(t\) (i.e. at 5 years), and \(\text{LP}\) (linear predictor) is the sum of the products of the predictors and associated coefficients for a given patient.

**Clinical utility**

To assess the implications of our model in clinical practice, we compared performance of our model to that of the consensus-based algorithm for ICD placement published in the ITFC Statement for Treatment of ARVC.1 First, we explored the clinical impact of potential thresholds for ICD implantation by evaluating the proportions of appropriate and inappropriate treatment at each of these thresholds. Second, we performed a decision curve analysis to evaluate the clinical benefit of our model. In this analysis, the clinical benefit was assessed by the ‘net benefit’; a weighted measure of the balance between appropriate and inappropriate ICD implantations.15 A value of 0 indicates no benefit, while higher values indicate greater benefit.

**Results**

**Study population**

The study population consisted of 528 patients with definite ARVC and no history of sustained VA or SCA at time of diagnosis. Almost half \((n = 236, 44.7\%)\) of the population was male with an average age at diagnosis of 38.2 ± 15.5 years. Probands \((n = 263, 49.8\%)\), the first affected individual in a family seeking medical attention for ARVC, and family members \((n = 265, 50.2\%)\) were equally represented. Two-thirds \((n = 340, 64.4\%)\) of patients had a pathogenic or likely pathogenic variant (e.g. mutation) in an ARVC-associated gene. Other clinical and demographic characteristics are summarized in Table 1. The study population had balanced representation from North America \((n = 259, 49.1\%)\) and Europe \((n = 269, 50.9\%)\). Characteristics of patients contributed by each registry are shown in Supplementary material online, Table S5.

Overall, 390 (73.8%) patients had complete data for the pre-specified predictors. Missing data occurred for six of the eight predictors: recent cardiac syncope \((n = 22, 4.2\%)\), NSVT \((n = 103, 19.5\%)\), PVC count \((n = 103, 19.5\%)\), sum of TWI in anterior and inferior leads \((n = 22, 4.2\%)\), RVEF \((n = 19, 3.6\%)\), and LVEF \((n = 13, 2.5\%)\).

**Outcomes**

During a median follow-up of 4.83 years (IQR 2.44–9.33 years), 146 (27.7%) patients experienced the composite outcome, with a corresponding annual event rate of 5.6% [95% confidence interval (CI) 4.7–6.6]. Figure 1 shows the cumulative survival free from first sustained VA. As shown in the figure, events occurred throughout follow-up, with a cumulative event-free survival at 5 years of 73.6% (95% CI 69.4–78.0%). The most common first sustained VA was appropriate ICD therapy \((n = 102, 70.0\%)\), followed by spontaneous sustained VT \((n = 35, 23.9\%)\), SCA \((n = 6, 4.1\%)\), and SCD \((n = 3, 2.0\%)\). Rapid sustained VAs (VT with cycle length <240 ms, SCA, or SCD) were experienced by 53 (10.0%) patients during follow-up at an annual event rate of 1.7% (95% CI 1.3–2.2). At last follow-up, 18 (3.4%) patients had died and 14 (2.7%) had undergone heart transplantation.

**Model development**

Table 1 shows baseline characteristics of patients with and without sustained VA during follow-up. Table 2 summarizes development of the risk prediction model. As shown in these tables, each pre-specified predictor had a significant \((P < 0.05)\) univariable linear or...
log-linear relationship with the primary outcome. All predictors were, therefore, fitted into a multivariable model, after which stepwise backward selection was performed leading to the removal of LVEF from the final model. As a sensitivity analysis, we repeated this process (i) for patients with complete data and (ii) without manual imputation for RVEF. As can be appreciated from Supplementary material online, Table S6, this resulted in inclusion of the same predictor variables (i.e. excluding LVEF) with only small changes to the coefficients in the resulting model.

The following formula allows for the calculation of the 5-year risk of sustained VA:

$$P(\text{VA at 5 years}) = 1 - 0.801^{\exp(LP)}$$

where $LP = 0.488^{\text{sex}} - 0.022^{\text{age}} + 0.657^{\text{history of recent cardiac syncope}} + 0.811^{\text{history of NSVT}} + 0.170^{\ln(24\text{h PVC count})} + 0.113^{\text{Sum of anterior and inferior leads with TWI}} - 0.025^{\text{RVEF}}$.

Supplementary material online, Table S7 provides the probability of survival ($S_0(t)$) at 1, 2, 3, and 4 years to facilitate calculating risk for shorter time durations.

Supplementary material online, Table S8 illustrates the use of this risk calculator in 3 patients from our cohort. An online application to calculate risk for an individual patient is available at: www.arvcrisk.com.

**Model validation**

The optimism-corrected C-statistic of the predictive model was 0.77 (95% CI 0.73–0.81). Internal validation with bootstrapping revealed a calibration slope of 0.93 (95% CI 0.92–0.95), reflecting a small degree of over-optimism. Figure 2 presents a graphical representation of calibration, showing good overall agreement between the predicted and observed 5-year risk. Calibration plots showing similarly good agreement for shorter follow-up durations can be found in Supplementary material online, Table S9.
material online, Figure S1. Additional calibration plots for patients stratified by ICD carrier status and genotype are presented in Supplementary material online, Figure S2. As can be appreciated from this figure, predicted and observed 5-year risk remained concordant in these patient subgroups.

Clinical utility
To assess the implications of our model in clinical practice, we explored the impact of potential 5-year VA risk thresholds for ICD implantation in our model vs. the ITFC consensus algorithm (i.e. ICD implantation in those with an ITFC Class I/IIa indication).1 This is laid out in Figure 3. As can be appreciated from the two last columns of Supplementary material online, Table S9, applying the ITFC algorithm would have resulted in treating 355 (67.2%) patients and protecting 131 (89.9%) of those who subsequently developed VA. In comparison, to provide the same level of protection (89.9%), our model would result in the implantation of 282 (53.4%) ICDs, thereby reducing the total number of ICD implants by 20.6% [(355–282)/355] (P<0.001).

![Figure 1](https://example.com/figure1.png)

**Figure 1** Cumulative survival free from sustained ventricular arrhythmia. Plotted is the cumulative event-free survival for any ventricular arrhythmia with 95% confidence intervals (shaded area). Dotted line represents cumulative 5-year survival.

![Table 2](https://example.com/table2.png)

**Table 2** Ventricular arrhythmia risk prediction model

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Univariable model</th>
<th>P-value</th>
<th>Multivariable (final model)</th>
<th>P-value</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>HR (95% CI)</td>
<td></td>
<td>HR (95% CI)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male sex</td>
<td>1.74 (1.26–2.42)</td>
<td>&lt;0.001</td>
<td>1.63 (1.17–2.29)</td>
<td>0.005</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age (per year increase)</td>
<td>0.98 (0.97–0.99)</td>
<td>0.001</td>
<td>0.98 (0.97–0.99)</td>
<td>&lt;0.001</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Recent cardiac syncope</td>
<td>2.57 (1.66–3.97)</td>
<td>&lt;0.001</td>
<td>1.93 (1.20–3.11)</td>
<td>0.007</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prior NSVT</td>
<td>3.15 (2.12–4.68)</td>
<td>&lt;0.001</td>
<td>2.25 (1.47–3.44)</td>
<td>&lt;0.001</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>24h PVC count (ln)a</td>
<td>1.32 (1.17–1.48)</td>
<td>&lt;0.001</td>
<td>1.19 (1.05–1.34)</td>
<td>0.013</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leads with TWI anterior + inferior</td>
<td>1.20 (1.12–1.29)</td>
<td>&lt;0.001</td>
<td>1.12 (1.02–1.23)</td>
<td>0.014</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RVEF (per % decrease)</td>
<td>1.05 (1.03–1.06)</td>
<td>&lt;0.001</td>
<td>1.03 (1.01–1.04)</td>
<td>0.002</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LVEF (per % decrease)</td>
<td>1.02 (1.01–1.04)</td>
<td>0.011</td>
<td>Not included in the final model</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

LVEF, left ventricular ejection fraction; NSVT, non-sustained ventricular tachycardia; PVC, premature ventricular complex; RVEF, right ventricular ejection fraction; TWI, T-wave inversion.

*aPVC count had a log-linear relationship.
We subsequently compared the clinical performance of our model to the ITFC algorithm using decision curve analysis. As shown in Figure 4, our proposed model was associated with the highest net benefit within the entire range of potential treatment thresholds for ICD placement. This suggests superiority in clinical practice regardless of implantation threshold.

Discussion

Main findings

We developed and internally validated the first prediction model to generate individualized risk estimates for sustained VA in patients with ARVC. This model accurately distinguished patients who had incident sustained VA during follow-up from those who did not using seven non-invasive parameters that are readily available to the clinician. Predicted and observed risks were concordant both in the overall population and in key patient subgroups. In addition, the model compared favourably to a clinically available treatment algorithm, suggesting greater utility in everyday clinical practice.

Prior studies

This work builds upon numerous efforts in the ARVC community directed towards optimization of arrhythmic risk stratification. Indeed, selection of pre-specified predictors was based on a meta-analysis that included 45 studies examining the association of clinical and demographic characteristics with VAs. Despite this wealth of data, a lack of systematically analysed results complicates their translation to clinical care. Interpretation of the results of prior studies has been significantly hampered by limited sample sizes and heterogeneous study populations. In addition, none of the prior studies were designed to derive a prediction model that can be applied to clinical care. The 2015 ITFC Statement for Treatment of ARVC was a major step forward in consolidating the literature and proposing an
algorithm for ICD placement. Nevertheless, the ITFC recommendations were based on expert opinion and provided only risk strata with a crude estimate of risk. Opportunities for improvement were subsequently raised. Therefore, to the present day, there is no uniformly accepted risk stratification algorithm for ARVC.

**Model development and validation**

In order to be widely applicable, a risk stratification algorithm should be derived from a broad population, simple, and easy to use. As such, we assembled the largest cohort to date of ARVC patients from multinational transatlantic registries, and measured seven easily available clinical parameters. Our model showed good discrimination between those with vs. without sustained VA (as indicated by the C-statistic), and good agreement between observed and predicted sustained VA risk (as determined by the calibration plots). In addition, sensitivity analyses revealed that the relationships between predictors and outcome were comparable in key patient subgroups.

**The need for accurate ventricular arrhythmia risk prediction in arrhythmogenic right ventricular dysplasia cardiomyopathy**

Our study quantifies the high rate of VA events in ARVC patients without a pre-existing history of sustained VA (5.6% per year). While this event rate is significantly higher than for other types of non-ischaemic cardiomyopathies, it is comparable to previous studies in primary prevention ARVC populations, which reported annual event rates of 2–10%. Faced with this high event rate, many clinicians would agree that the majority of patients with definite ARVC benefit from ICD placement. However, ICD placement has significant drawbacks in this usually young and active population, including a considerable risk of complications and inappropriate interventions.

**Appropriate patient selection is thus of paramount importance.**

**Clinical utility**

The greatest clinical utility of our model lies in the accurate individualized quantification of arrhythmic risk (Take home figure). By treating VA risk as a continuum instead of dividing patients into high-, intermediate-, and low-risk strata, we provide prognostic information that can aid clinical decision-making for prophylactic ICD placement. Importantly in this high-risk population, our model can help the clinician identify those who would fare well without an ICD. Of note, our study does not aim to prescribe ICD placement for a given patient. Instead, we seek to provide the clinician and patient with the necessary data to facilitate well-informed shared clinical decision-making.

While the acceptable risk threshold is undefined, our model performed better than the current consensus-based algorithm at any risk threshold. Importantly, our model results in a 20.6% reduction of ICD placement compared to the ITFC consensus algorithm, while protecting as many patients with VA events. Therefore, we believe that the model has the potential to set the standard for everyday clinical decision-making for primary prevention ICDs in patients with ARVC. To facilitate this, we have made our model available online as a ‘risk calculator’ on www.arvcrisk.com. Such a tool has had considerable clinical utility for arrhythmic risk prediction in hypertrophic cardiomyopathy. It is important to recognize that ARVC is a progressive condition. Thus, patients should be periodically re-stratified with right ventricular function assessment, ECG, and heart rhythm monitoring every 1–2 years as suggested in a recent expert consensus document. We provided risk estimates to facilitate shorter-term prediction and calibration plots establishing concordance between predicted and observed events over these shorter timeframes (Supplementary material online, Table S7 and Figure S1).

**Limitations and future directions**

Our study population was drawn from academic centres across Northern Europe and North America. Consistent with this, patients were predominantly Caucasian and pathogenic variants were primarily identified in PKP2. Results should consequently be extrapolated with caution to patients of other ethnic background or genotypes. Our ascertainment from tertiary care settings may have created a referral bias that could lead to overestimation of VA risk in a community-derived population. These limitations highlight the importance of external validation studies that include patients from community settings and with a diversity of ethnic backgrounds and genotypes. As in similar studies, we used a surrogate composite endpoint that included appropriate ICD therapy to infer risk of SCD. While most clinicians agree that ICD-treated VA represents a severe event, ICD therapies are an imperfect substitute for SCD.

To address these limitations, we stratified the population by prophylactic
ICD placement and demonstrated the model performed similarly well (Supplementary material online, Figure S2). There is certainly room for further iterations of the model by including other predictors. One of them is inducibility on programmed ventricular stimulation (PVS). The characteristics of the 214 (40.7%) patients who underwent PVS in our cohort with regards to the presence or absence of inducibility is presented in Supplementary material online, Table S10.

**Conclusion**

Based on the largest cohort to date of ARVC patients with no sustained VA history at diagnosis, we present a new prediction model to generate individualized estimates of the risk of incident VA. This model, based on readily available clinical parameters, performs better than the current consensus guideline and has the potential to set the standard for prophylactic ICD placement in ARVC.

**Supplementary material**

Supplementary material is available at European Heart Journal online.

**Acknowledgements**

The authors thank Rob Roudijk, MD and Freyja van Lint, MD for data collection. They thank the ARVC patients and families who have made this work possible.

**Funding**

This work was supported by the Canadian Heart Rhythm Society George Mines Traveling Fellowship to J.C.-T; the Montreal Heart Institute Foundation ‘Bal du Coeur’ bursary to J.C.-T; by a grant from the Fondation Leducq [grant number 16 CVD 02] to H.C.; the Dutch Heart Foundation [grant numbers 2015ST058 to A.S.J.Mt.R.; CVON2015-12 eDETECT, 2012-10 PREDICT, CVON PREDICT Young Talent Program to A.S.J.Mt.R.]; the Netherlands Organisation for Scientific Research [040.11.586 to CAJ]; the Netherlands Heart Institute [project 06901]; the Swiss National Science Foundation [320030_160327]; the UMC Utrecht 2017 Alexandre Suerman Stipend to M.B.; and the UMC Utrecht Fellowship Clinical Research Talent to A.S.J.Mt.R. This project has received support from the European Union’s Horizon 2020 research and innovation program under the ERA-NET Co-fund action no. 680969 (ERA-CVD DETECTIN-HF). The Johns Hopkins ARVD Program is supported by the Dr Francis P. Chiaramonte Private Foundation, the Leyla Erkan Family Fund for ARVD Research, the Dr Satish, Rupal, and Robin Shah ARVD Fund at Johns Hopkins, the Bogle Foundation, the Healing Hearts Foundation, the Campanella family, the Patrick J. Harrison Family, the Peter French Memorial Foundation, and the Wimending Endowments. The Zurich ARVC Program is supported by grants from the Georg und Bertha Schweizer-Winiker Foundation, the Baugarten Foundation, and the Swiss Heart Foundation. The Johns Hopkins ARVD Program and the Zurich ARVC Program are also supported by a joint grant from the Leonie-Wild Foundation. Drs R.T. and M.T. are supported by the Marvin and Philippa Carsey Chair of Medicine. F.W.A. is supported by UCL Hospitals NIHR Biomedical Research Centre.

**Conflict of interest:** H.C. is a consultant for Medtronic Inc. and St. Jude Medical/Abbott. H.C. receives research support from Boston Scientific Corp. C.T. and CAJ. receive salary support from this grant. CAJ. has received funding for an invited lecture from Abbott. H.T. receives research support from Abbott, A.A.M.W. received a personal fee from Audentes 2017. A.M.S. received lecture honoraria from Boston Scientific Corp. S.L.Z. receives salary support as an advisor to Siemens Healthcare, D.P.J. is a consultant for Pfizer, GSK, and Blade Therapeutics, and receives research support from NIH, Eidos Therapeutics, and Array Biopharma. The rest of the authors have no conflicts of interest.

**Take home figure** Prediction of sustained ventricular arrhythmia in arrhythmogenic right ventricular dysplasia/cardiomyopathy. ARVC, arrhythmogenic right ventricular dysplasia/cardiomyopathy; inv., inversion; PVC, premature ventricular complex; RVEF, right ventricular ejection fraction; VT, ventricular tachycardia.
References


