In vivo evaluation of MRgHIFU volumetric sonication using interleaved electronic-and-mechanical displacement of focus

L. Petrusca1,2, J. Ngo1, V. Auboiroux1,2, F. Cotton2,3, J-Y. Chapelon1, and R. Salomir1
1Inserm U 556, Lyon, France, 2University Lyon 1, Lyon, France, 3CHU Lyon Sud

Introduction: High Intensity Focused Ultrasound (HIFU) is a therapeutic approach coupling flexibility and non-invasive features. A successful therapy can be reached under MR guidance that offers excellent soft tissue contrast and online thermometry enabling thermal dose delivery control. Phased array technology significantly reduces the latency time for repositioning the focus whereas mechanical displacement of the focus does not generate steaming lobes. In order to evaluate the lesion formation and the potential interest of dual-modality (electronic-and-mechanical) interleaved displacement of the focus for volumetric sonication paradigms, we performed in vivo experiments on rabbit thigh using a prostate-dedicated endorectal phased array and a translation-rotation mechanical actuator.

Methods: The study was performed on a clinical 1.5T Philips (Achieva) scanner on the thigh of 4 healthy rabbits (F, race New Zealand, 3 to 3.5 kg, hair removed on thigh), under general anesthesia following an IEB-proofed in vivo. The method combined a phased-array HIFU transducer and a MR-compatible 3D positioning system. The HIFU device (Imasonic, France) consisted of 16 concentric circular rings placed on a truncated spherical cap (f=3 MHz, natural focus: 60mm), see Fig. 1a, designed for endorectal use. Degassed water was circulated inside a tip cooling balloon around the HIFU transducer. Electronic change of the focal depth was available in the range of 32mm to 69mm from the pole of the spherical cap and enabled rapid radial line-scan sonications. The LR and HF translations and the rotation around the B0 axis were implemented using a mechanical system. The stepper motors operated in the magnet fringe field, and were driven by an ESP300 Controller. The latter one operated outside the scanner room. A multi-channel RF generator (Image Guided Therapy, France, 16W/channel) provided an independent control of the signal amplitude and phase for each element. The HIFU beam direction was top-bottom. A water bag relying on the rabbit skin through ultrasonography gel enabled both mechanical decoupling of the transducer displacement from the skin, i.e. no induced tissue motion, and acoustic coupling for HIFU. Two orthogonal planes (axial and sagittal) were simultaneously monitored using fast MR-thermometry (PRFS method) and the temperature and thermal dose maps were displayed in real time. The spatial resolution for the thermometry images was 1x1x5mm3 with a temporal resolution of 2.5s. Short test sonications and MR thermometry were used to verify the focusing ability and the centering of the two acquisitions planes on the prescribed treatment zone. The rabbit thigh was sonicated using complex patterns of foci positions (1 or 2s / focus position, no waiting delay between shots excepting for the system latency), describing slices (Fig 1.b) or volumes (a stack of 7 parallel axial slices). The shape of the thermal lesions was examined 5 days later using MRI T2w sequence and Gd-T1w-TFE. Post-mortem histological analysis was performed on sonicated tissue.

Results: The average standard deviation in MR thermometry was 1.8ºC as determined from baseline acquisitions. Temperature maps (Fig. 2), thermal dose maps and MRI assessment of the lesion at D=5 (Fig. 3) indicated that dual-modality displacement of the focal point can induce homogenous lesions in a pre-defined zone. Post-operative examination of the rabbit thighs indicated no thermal lesion of the skin in any experiment. The T2w and Gd-T1w-TFE sequences indicated a distance between the edge of the lesion and the surface of approx. 4 mm for the case presented in Fig. 2b and Fig. 3. Histological analysis showed a distance of approx. 0.9 mm but here we need to include also the skin thickness (approximately 2 mm) so the near field safety distance as required from rectal wall in prostate treatment was respected.

Discussion: Electronic displacement of the focus (along the ultrasound propagation axis) interleaved with mechanical XZ translations and rotation around B0 is suggested to be a suitable modality to treat patient-specific size and shape of pathologic tissue. The phased-array electronic displacement of focus (0.1s latency) is faster than the mechanical motion of the HIFU device (1s latency). While electronic focusing (radial line scan) is necessary to speed up the procedure, one should consider as drawback the non-negligible risk for generating secondary lobes with full-steering in 3D. No artifacts were found to corrupt the MR acquisition during the mechanical trajectory, while mechanical displacement induces strictly no secondary lobes. Therefore the dual-modality volumetric sonication paradigm represents an interesting method to induce the desired shape of the lesion in prostate through the limited endorectal space, in a reasonable period of time and without side effects.