Measurement of QT Interval and Duration of the QRS Complex at Different ECG Sampling Rates

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Abstract

The precise measurement of QT interval and QRS complex duration is important to characterize the electrical cardiac activity of the surface ECG. Variations of these intervals were evaluated when ECG sampling rate changes. The ECG recordings used in this study (n = 78) were obtained from a combination of pharmacological blockage and postural changes. The ECG recordings were originally sampled at 500 Hz, and then were down-sampled by intervals of 25 Hz until the minimum sampling rate of 75 Hz. In all cases the down-sampling was implemented using cubic spline interpolation. The QRS complex duration, RR and QT intervals for each subject, condition and sampling rate were measured. The QT interval was corrected using two different techniques: Bazzett and individualized QT corrections. The effect of the sampling rate was modeled with an exponential decay function, which was used later to measure where the exponential reaches an asymptotic value (at 5τ). The 5τ value for uncorrected QT was at 290 Hz, corrected QT with Bazzett was at 303 Hz, and corrected QT with Individual method was at 253 Hz, finally QRS complex duration was at 297 Hz. An overestimation of the QT interval and QRS complex duration was observed when decreasing the sampling rate below 300 Hz.

1. Introduction

The surface ECG analysis is widely used for the diagnostic of cardiac diseases. The ECG is a noninvasive technique that allows the visualization of the heart’s electrical activity. The changes in duration of the QT interval are related to certain pathologies, and with the effects of diverse drugs. On the other hand, the duration of QRS complex also gives information about the status of the myocardial conduction system. All this rise the necessity of making precise measurements of these intervals of the ECG [1] [2].

The measurements on the ECG are mostly defined by the characteristic extrema, amplitudes, wave morphologies and intervals of time between extrema points (Figure 1).

Figure 1. Definition of RR, QT and QRS complex in an ECG beat.

In the present study the QT interval and duration of the QRS complex were measured when the autonomic nervous system was blocked with a combination of drugs and postural changes.

Administration of atropine and propranolol was used to block sympathetic and vagal systems respectively, while subjects were in standing and supine position. This pharmacological and postural combination is useful to explore the QT interval correction techniques within a wide range of HR variations [3].

An incorrect choice of the sampling rate (Fs) may introduce errors when the fiducial points of the ECG are measured, and therefore the intervals or segments between
The aim of the present study was to investigate the effects of the sampling rate in the measurement of QT interval and of QRS complex duration.

2. Methods

2.1. Experimental protocol

The database used in this work proceed from a previous work [3] where the regulation mechanism of the autonomic nervous system was studied. Electrocardiogram recordings were made on 13 adult subjects (age between 19 and 39, median 21 years). Those recordings were made during autonomic nervous system blockade by using pharmacological (atropine, propranolol) and postural (supine, standing) combinations.

The ECG recordings were made of the following way: a) all subjects were measured in supine control position (SUC) then they were moved to the standing control position (STC) and measured after 5 minutes for hemodynamic equilibration; b) then all subjects were returned to the supine position and given either atropine (0.03 mg/kg, n=7) or propranolol (0.2 mg/kg, n=6) reaching SUA and SUP condition respectively, both groups were measured after 10 minutes for equilibration; c) then all subjects were moved to the standing position, and after 5 minutes for hemodynamic equilibration STA and STP conditions were reached and measured respectively; and d) finally subjects in SUA and STA were supplied propranolol, and subjects in SUP and STP were supplied atropine, in both cases this subjects reached total autonomic blockade (SUB and STB), and measured after 5 minutes. The database used in this work contains a total of 78 ECG recordings of 7 minutes each [3] [4].

2.2. Acquisition and signal processing

The ECG recordings were sampled originally at a frequency of 500 Hz, then were down-sampled in steps of 25 Hz until a minimum frequency of 75 Hz, therefore we obtained additional recordings at $F_s$ of 475, 450, 425, 400, 375, 350, 325, 300, 275, 250, 225, 200, 175, 150, 125, 100 and 75 Hz.

In all cases, before changing the sampling frequency (resampling) an anti-alias filter was applied, defining the band of pass frequency ($F_{\text{pass}}$), and a cutoff frequency ($F_{\text{stop}}$) equal to half of the sampling rate. The specifications of the anti-alias filter were the following: a) equiripple FIR filter with a stop band of 40 dB, b) bandpass ripple of 1 dB, and c) $F_{\text{pass}} = 80\% \ F_{\text{stop}}$. The resampling was implemented with a cubic spline interpolation method [5].

The measurements of extrema points were made automatically with a program developed in R language [6]. The automatic measurement of the QT interval and the QRS complex, was preceded by the detection of the following extrema points: Q wave ($Q$), S wave ($S$) and end of T wave ($T_e$). The detection algorithm managed the presence of both monophasic and biphasic T waves, and either $PQ$ or TP segments may be used as the isoelectric baseline.

To ensure that the algorithms were applied correctly according to the T wave morphology and isoelectric baseline, a qualified observer classified the ECG recordings, performing a randomly inspection of two minutes for each ECG recording.

Once the detection of all the extrema points were completed, the QT interval and QRS complex were calculated. Only the heart beats with proper signal to noise ratio (SNR) and $RR[i] > 450 \text{ msec}$ (equal to a $HR < 133 \text{ bpm}$) and $RR[i] > 0.75 * RR[i-1]$ were take it into account.

Since some ECG recordings had high frequency noise, they were smoothed with a moving average filter (low pass, cutoff frequency of 10 Hz, and 17 taps). This filter was designed to preserve the $T$ and $P$ waves [7]. Isoelectric baseline movement was removed from the ECG after interpolating this movement with cubic spline method [5]. This procedure was repeated for all $F_i$.

Finally, the QT interval was corrected ($QT_c$) by two correction methods: Bazzett ($QT_{c.B}$) [8] and Individual ($QT_{c.I}$) [9]. Bazzett’s correction uses the following parabolic expression:

$$QT_c = \frac{QT}{RR^\alpha} \text{ with } \alpha = 0.5 \quad (1)$$

In the Bazzett’s correction formula RR is in seconds, and $\alpha$ is fixed at 0.5. In the case of Individual correction the $\alpha$ value is calculated for each recording using a correlation model between $QT$ and $RR$. This method uses the $\alpha$ value which correspond to the minimum value of the coefficient of determination ($r^2$) between $QT$ and $RR$. The figure 2 shows the diagram of the individual QT correction.

![Figure 2. Diagram of the individual QT correction.](image-url)
2.3. Modelization of sampling frequency changes

The effect of the sampling rate was modeled with an exponential decay function:

\[ Y(F_s) = y_0 + a . e^{-F_s/\tau} \] (2)

From this model, the minimum sampling rate was calculated. At this frequency the exponential function reaches the asymptotic value, this value is reached at a frequency of approximately five times \( \tau \) (5\( \tau \)).

2.4. Statistical analysis

Analysis of variance (ANOVA) test were made for all variables under study, followed by a Bonferroni’s post-hoc for multiple tests correction. All the statistical analysis were performed using the R language [6].

3. Results

The results are expressed as mean ± standard deviation. This value was obtained averaging the mean values for each ECG recording. Table 1 summarizes the results.

The RR was statistically significant different in SUA (\( P < 0.05 \)) and SUB (\( P < 0.001 \)) respect to control. On the other hand, differences statistically significant were found in STA (\( P < 0.05 \)), STP (\( P < 0.005 \)) and STB (\( P = 0.033 \)) respect to control. The figures 3, 4, 5 and 6 show uncorrected mean \( QT \), mean \( QT_{cB} \) by Bazzett and mean \( QT_{cI} \) by Individual correction. The exponential model is represented in solid lines. Mean value and standard deviation at both sides. The dashed lines correspond to the horizontal asymptotes, and each point corresponds to the mean of the variable under study. Vertical lines represent the standard error of each mean.

The 5\( \tau \) frequency was at 290 Hz for \( QT \), at 303 Hz for \( QT_{cB} \), at 253 Hz for \( QT_{cI} \), and at 297 Hz for \( QRS \).

The measurement at 500 and 75 Hz was 408 and 423 ms for \( QT \), 469 and 485 ms for \( QT_{cB} \), 447 and 453 ms for \( QT_{cI} \), and finally 116 to 132 ms for \( QRS \) complex duration.

4. Discussion

The present study used a database where a wide variation range of RR and QT intervals were obtained using combinations of pharmacological and postural procedures. The recordings in this database allowed the analysis of RR and QT intervals in a full range of physiological situations, therefore it was possible to appreciate the effect of two QT interval correction methods. Finally, it was verified that sampling rate affects the measurements of QT interval and duration of QRS complex, in both cases these variables were overestimated at ECG sampling rates below 300 Hz.

Acknowledgements

Authors thanks to AECI (Agencia Española de Cooperación Internacional) for the grant of the program "Proyectos Conjuntos de Investigación (PCI) - IBEROAMÉRICA 2004". The present study was developed under the collaboration program between the Universidad Tecnológica Nacional, Argentina, and Universidad
Table 1. Supine position, results in milliseconds as Mean ± Standard Deviation.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Control</th>
<th>Atropine</th>
<th>Propranolol</th>
<th>Both</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>RR_M Su</td>
<td>878.9±112.0</td>
<td>604.4±139.2†</td>
<td>1038.7±144.8‡</td>
<td>655.4±62.7‡</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RR_M St</td>
<td>738.8±96.3</td>
<td>502.4±56.9†</td>
<td>912.2±88.1†</td>
<td>645.3±50.1*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RR_SD Su</td>
<td>76.3±28.1</td>
<td>19±26.2</td>
<td>84.2±55.2</td>
<td>11.5±7.7†</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RR_SD St</td>
<td>72.4±37.9</td>
<td>15±9.1</td>
<td>67.2±54.3</td>
<td>11.8±4.2*</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* (P < 0.05); † (P < 0.005); ‡ (P < 0.0005)

Figure 5. Mean QTcI model against $F_s$.

Figure 6. Mean QRS complex model against $F_s$.

Authors thank to Microsoft Research, Redmond WA, USA, for the donation of software and hardware where this study was performed.

References


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