Heart Rate Variability Characteristics Required for Simulation of Interval Sequences

FE Smith, EJ Bowers, P Langley, J Allen, A Murray

Medical Physics, Freeman Hospital, Newcastle upon Tyne, UK

Abstract

Fifty sequences of PhysioNet R-to-R interval data, covering periods of between 20 and 24 hours, were classified into real or simulated groups. The RR interval characteristics were investigated in both the time domain and frequency domain. Eleven characteristics were analysed, and the range of measurements for each was studied for outliers from the main distribution. In the time domain, a restricted pattern of RR interval distributions classified 4 sequences as abnormal, and a reduced RR variability produced 18 classifications, with an overlap of 8, giving a total of 14/50 as abnormal. In the frequency domain, abnormally restricted very low frequency characteristics produced 26 classifications as abnormal with 10 overlaps giving a total of 16. The low frequency to high frequency ratio classified 4 as abnormal, but three of these were already detected by abnormal low frequency characteristics, giving a total of 17 classified in the frequency domain. Of the 17 classified in the frequency domain and of the 14 in the time domain there was an overlap of 9, resulting in 22 abnormal classifications, and suggesting that these were simulated. When PhysioNet assessed this classification a correct grouping of 100% was achieved on a single entry (reference 20020426.082234).

1. Introduction

The heart rate variability (HRV) signal non-invasively measures beat-to-beat alterations in heart rate, providing information about autonomic control of the cardiovascular system.

HRV is affected by both neural and hormonal inputs, at time intervals ranging from less than 1 second to 24 hours. Changes in HRV can relate to particular pathologies. Variability is known to decrease with age and among people who have medical conditions such as coronary heart disease, hypertension and diabetes mellitus. One of the main reasons for measuring HRV arises from its apparent ability to predict survival after myocardial infarction.[1,2] Despite current understanding of the mechanism of HRV the complex interdependencies of beat-to-beat variations at different time scales make it difficult to detect physiologically determined changes.

The aim of this study was to classify sequences of RR intervals as real or simulated by investigating the characteristics of heart rate variability, enabling simulators of beat-to-beat heart rate to be improved.

2. Method

2.1. Data

Fifty sequences of beat-to-beat intervals covering periods of between 20 and 24 hours were studied. They were made available from PhysioNet. Information provided by PhysioNet indicated that approximately half of the interval sequences were from real recordings of normal subjects and the remainder from automated simulators.

2.2. Time domain analysis

The 50 sequences of RR interval data were plotted, with inter-beat (RR) intervals on the y-axis and a time scale, in hours, on the x-axis. Figure 1 shows examples of beat-to-beat RR interval sequences from the PhysioNet data.

The 50 RR interval sequences were assessed in the time domain from six RR variability characteristics. SD_addr (standard deviation of differences between adjacent RR intervals), SD_r (standard deviation of the averages of RR intervals in all 5-minute segments of the entire recording), SD_rindex (mean of the standard deviations of all 5-minute segments of the entire recording) and RR_highcount (number of pairs of adjacent RR intervals differing by more than 50 ms in the entire recording).[3] Restricted patterns of RR interval distributions were investigated from the characteristics, RR_highcount (number of RR intervals > 0.8 s) and RR_lowcount (number of RR intervals < 0.3 s).
The range of measurements for each characteristic in the time-domain was studied for outliers from the main distribution. If the distribution showed no values that could be classed as outliers, the extreme 4 were classed as abnormal.

2.3. Frequency domain analysis

In the frequency domain a power spectral analysis was performed on the 50 sequences using a Fast Fourier Transform (FFT) in the beat domain.

Spectral analysis of the beat-to-beat data transformed the signal from time to frequency on the x-axis, by representing the signal as a combination of sine and cosine waves, with different amplitudes and frequencies.
VLF1/VLF2, (VLF1+VLF2)/VLF3, VLF/LF, LF/HF and VLF<br>width (width of the power spectrum at half maximum).

The range of measurements for each characteristic in the frequency domain was studied for outliers from the main distribution using the same selection criteria as for the time domain analysis.

3. Results

Table 1 represents the classification results for the time domain and frequency domain analysis.

Table 1. Classification results for the time domain and frequency domain analysis.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Domain</th>
<th>Characteristic</th>
<th>Normal range</th>
<th>Number of abnormal recordings</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Time</td>
<td>SD_Arr</td>
<td>14 - 107 ms</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>SD_RR</td>
<td>72 - 231 ms</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>SD_RR_index</td>
<td>31 - 111 ms</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>RR_lowcount</td>
<td>424 - 20484</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>RR_highcount</td>
<td>0 – 23</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>3968 - 127172</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Frequency</td>
<td>VLF1/VLF2</td>
<td>6 - 54</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(VLF1+VLF2)/VLF3</td>
<td>1 - 106</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>VLF/LF</td>
<td>0.1 - 5</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>VLF_width</td>
<td>0.001 - 0.0025 beat(^{-1})</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>LF/HF</td>
<td>0.2 - 1.5</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In the time domain, a restricted pattern of RR interval distributions, RR\_highcount and RR\_lowcount classified 4 sequences as abnormal, and a reduced RR variability, SD\_ARR, SD\_RR, SD\_RR\_index and RR\_lowcount classified 18, with an overlap of 8, giving a total of 14/50 as abnormal. In the frequency domain, the abnormally restricted very low frequency characteristics (VLF1/VLF2, (VLF1+VLF2)/VLF3, VLF/LF, VLF\_width) classified 26 as abnormal with 10 overlaps, giving a total of 16. The low frequency to high frequency ratio (LF/HF) classified 4 as abnormal, but 3 of these were detected by abnormal low frequency characteristics, giving a total of 17 classified in the frequency domain.

Of the 14 classified in the time domain and the 17 classified in the frequency domain there was an overlap of 9, resulting in 22 abnormal classifications, suggesting that these were simulated. When PhysioNet assessed this classification a correct grouping of 100% was achieved on a single entry (reference 20020426.082234). It was of note that the measurements for each of the characteristics...
assessed as abnormal tended to occur in pairs of strikingly similar values for the simulators, in agreement with the fact that two sequences for each simulator were included. Figure 3 shows examples of the pairs of values obtained from the simulated RR interval data for 3 of the characteristics investigated.

4. Discussion and conclusions

This study has used the characteristics of heart rate variability in order to classify 50 RR sequences, from PhysioNet, as either real or simulated. We achieved a classification accuracy of 100%, using time and frequency domain analysis to investigate unusual RR interval distribution and variability characteristics and skewed frequency distributions. Our investigation has shown that simulators need to have improvements in RR interval ranges, increased heart rate variability, and better very low frequency characteristics.

Acknowledgements
FES and PL are supported by the Engineering and Physical Sciences Research Council (EPSRC). EJB is supported by the special trustees of Newcastle upon Tyne Hospitals NHS Trust.

References

Address for correspondence.
Fiona E Smith
Regional Medical Physics Department
Freeman Hospital
High Heaton
Newcastle upon Tyne
NE7 7DN
UK
f.e.smith@ncl.ac.uk