

# Should the dosage of propofol be higher and independent of immunosuppressive therapy in adult cystic fibrosis patients undergoing sedation during flexible video bronchoscopy?

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**Abstract. – OBJECTIVE:** Flexible video bronchoscopy (FVB) performed under sedation is a useful procedure in adults with cystic fibrosis (CF). Propofol dosage for CF is poorly described, although it is of high importance for professionals. The study aimed to assess whether propofol dosage should be higher in adults CF undergoing sedation during FVB.

**PATIENTS AND METHODS:** 50 adult CF and non-CF patients undergoing sedation during FVB were included. Clinical features of studied patients were assessed. In CF group spirometry, liver enzymes, inflammatory biomarkers, albumin, protein concentration, WBC were estimated. Propofol and fentanyl dosage was calculated. Multiple regression model was performed.

**RESULTS:** CF patients were characterized by a lower mean value of body weight and lower mean requirement of total propofol (135 mg in CF vs. 145 mg in non-CF). Calculated propofol dose per kg of body weight was significantly higher in CF (2.43 mg/kg vs. 2.04 mg/kg) and did not depend on the bronchopulmonary disease stage. Propofol dose per kg of body weight was predicted by CF status (CF vs. non-CF), sex, and age.

**CONCLUSIONS:** Adult CF patients not receiving immunosuppressive therapy require higher propofol dose per kg of body weight compared to non-CF, independently on bronchopulmonary disease stage showing a narrow therapeutic window for propofol in CF group.

*Key Words:*

CF, Bronchoscopy, Anesthetics, Sedation, Propofol.

## Introduction

Cystic fibrosis (CF) is an autosomal recessive disease-causing mutational defect of the CF

transmembrane conductance regulator (CFTR) protein leading to multi-organ dysfunction such as bronchiectasis and chronic bronchopulmonary disease, chronic sinusitis, pancreatic insufficiency, and hepatobiliary disease<sup>1,2</sup>. One of the medical procedures useful for microbiological evaluation, collapse, hemoptysis, etc. in CF patients is flexible bronchoscopy (FB)<sup>3</sup>. This procedure may be performed without sedation. However, the use of pharmacological sedatives and anxiolytics improves the tolerance of the procedure and reduces patients' discomfort<sup>4-6</sup>. Sedation with propofol in comparison to midazolam had similar efficacy and safety<sup>7</sup>, but the quicker onset of action and patients' recovery leading to early discharge<sup>6</sup>. Propofol is a lipophilic drug that is mainly eliminated by hepatic glucuronidation<sup>6,8-10</sup>. Although liver dysfunction may occur in CF patients<sup>1</sup>, there is consistent evidence showing that CF population has intensified hepatic glucuronidation of drugs<sup>11</sup>, mainly *via* the propofol metabolic pathway<sup>10,12,13</sup>. Nevertheless, the exact propofol dosage in CF patients undergoing FB is unknown, especially without immunosuppressive therapy. It is of high importance for bronchoscopists and anesthesiologists to know if adult CF patients require higher doses of propofol to achieve the same level of sedation as healthy adults. This knowledge may improve the safety of this procedure and patients' comfort.

Therefore, the aim of this study was to assess whether the propofol dosage should be higher and independent of immunosuppressive therapy in adult cystic fibrosis patients undergoing sedation during flexible video bronchoscopy.

## Patients and Methods

### Study Design

This is an observational cross-sectional study that was conducted in accordance with Helsinki Declaration. The study protocol was approved by the Bioethical Committee at Poznan University of Medical Science (No: 1077/19). Written informed consent was obtained from all individual participants included in the study. Patients were recruited in 2019 at the Department of Pulmonology, Allergology and Pulmonary Oncology, Poznan University of Medical Sciences (Poland). All enrolled patients underwent routine flexible video bronchoscopy for diagnostic purposes in the Bronchoscopy Laboratory, being the university unit that followed all procedures related to good laboratory and diagnostic practice. All endoscopies were recorded in the institution's endoscopy documentation system (ENDOBASE 13.0, Olympus Corporation, 2013, Hamburg, Germany).

### Study Population

Fifty adult CF patients not receiving immunosuppressive therapy were included in the study according to the following inclusion criteria: age over 18, CF diagnosed in childhood in accordance with The *European Cystic Fibrosis Society* guidelines published by Castellani et al<sup>1</sup>. The indication for the FVB in CF group of patients was microbiological evaluation<sup>3</sup>. The control group (non-CF patients) consisted of 50 generally healthy individuals without any pulmonary, liver, kidney, and cardiac disorders, who suffered from prolonged cough as the main indication for FVB. The exclusion criteria were as follows immunosuppressive therapy, bronchial biopsy during FVB due to prolonged procedure and thus a higher dose of anesthetics intake, respiratory failure required oxygen therapy before the FVB. Active drug or alcohol abuse, legal incompetence, and limited legal competence were additional exclusion criteria.

### Methods

The body weight was assessed with an approximation of 0.1 kg (Seca digital scale 763; Seca, Hamburg, Germany). This measurement was used to calculate the propofol dosage per unit of body weight (kg).

Flexible video bronchoscopy was performed by a trained pulmonologist/bronchoscopist and assisted by a specially trained health-care professional team consisting of the experienced anesthesiologist, endoscopic and anesthesiologic

nurse. The procedures were performed in accordance with the applicable guidelines, including indications and contraindications<sup>4,5,14</sup>. The examination was carried out in the supine position after intravenous premedication with fentanyl followed by sedation with propofol, which was administered as bolus injections until the *Richmond Agitation-Sedation Scale* of 3 was achieved<sup>15</sup>. This means that the patients did not react to the voice and did not open their eyes after physical stimulation, had spontaneous ventilatory ability and maintained cardiac function<sup>15</sup>. The facial expression, pupils, and body movement were observed to achieve adequate sedation. All patients received oxygen 2 l/min (LPM) via a nasal cannula. Patients were monitored throughout the procedure with a continuous electrocardiograph (ECG), oxygen saturation, and repeated noninvasive blood pressure measurements. The selected parameters such as saturation, systolic (SBP) and diastolic blood pressure (DBP) measured 5 minutes before and immediately after bronchoscopy were registered in the database. The time of the procedure and the information about complications such as hypoxemia ( $SpO_2 < 90\%$ ), hypotension:  $SBP < 80$  mmHg or  $DBP < 40$  mmHg, arrhythmias, hemorrhage, as well as the total propofol and fentanyl dosages, were recorded in the database.

In addition, laboratory tests and spirometry were performed in CF patients due to the possible influence of liver dysfunction, inflammation status and the severity of the disease (represented by forced expiratory volume in one second -  $FEV_1$ ) on the propofol dosage used during the procedure. Blood samples were taken from patients following overnight fasting. The biochemical assessment was performed in a certified laboratory according to standardized procedures and good laboratory practice<sup>16</sup>. The concentrations of the inflammation markers such as high sensitive C-reactive protein (hsCRP) and white blood cells (WBC), and biochemical liver markers: the activity of aspartate aminotransferase (AST), alanine aminotransferase (ALT) and gamma-glutamyl transpeptidase (GGT), concentration of albumin and total protein (TP) were measured with the use of enzymatic methods (Roche Diagnostics Corp., Indianapolis, IN, USA). In addition, an international normalized ratio (INR) was calculated to assess liver function indirectly.

The spirometry was performed according to the current American Thoracic Society/European Respiratory Society guidelines<sup>17</sup>. The  $FEV_1$  as % predicted was presented according to the Global

Lung Function Initiative (GLI) references<sup>18</sup>. This parameter was chosen because it is a significant predictor of lung function decline, and both respiratory morbidity and mortality in CF patients<sup>19</sup>. The blood pressure (BP) measurements were performed according to the guidelines of the European Society of Hypertension<sup>20</sup> with the use of a digital electronic tensiometer (Omron Corp., Kyoto, Japan). The continuous ECG and the patient's oxygen saturation (SpO<sub>2</sub>) were assessed using a digital electronic tensiometer (IntelliVue X3 patient monitor Philips 2018, Böblingen, Germany).

### Statistical Analysis

The data were expressed as mean and standard deviation. The normality of the distribution was checked by the Shapiro-Wilk test. Mann-Whitney test was used to analyze the differences between variables in the control and study group and Wilcoxon test to describe the differences before and after medical intervention. Multiple regression model was performed to predict the propofol dosage based on the value of other variables. A *p*-value <0.05 defined statistically significant differences). All calculations were performed with the use of Statistica 10 software (TIBICO Software INC., Palo Alto, CA, USA).

## Results

One hundred patients were enrolled into the study from inpatient and outpatient clinic. The CF group consisted of fifty patients and non-CF group also from fifty patients. The basic characteristics of the study population are presented in Table I.

The CF group of patients was younger and characterized by a lower mean value of body weight

and lower mean requirement of propofol dose in total. However, taking into account the propofol dose calculated per kg of body weight, the higher intake was observed in CF group than in non-CF group. The propofol dose in total and calculated per kg of body weight was not associated with FEV<sub>1</sub> % predicted in CF group. The fentanyl dose used in both groups was at a similar level.

The clinical characteristic of CF patients showed a slightly higher WBC count and hsCRP concentration compared to the recommended value of the Clinical and Laboratory Standards Institute (CLSI)<sup>19</sup>. No increase in liver enzymes activity and INR level was observed in CF group of patients. However, an approx. of 44% of CF developed hypoalbuminemia and only 0,01% of CF patients hypoproteinemia. The FEV<sub>1</sub> % predicted results showed that the population of CF differed in the severity of the bronchopulmonary disease. The detailed data are presented in Table II.

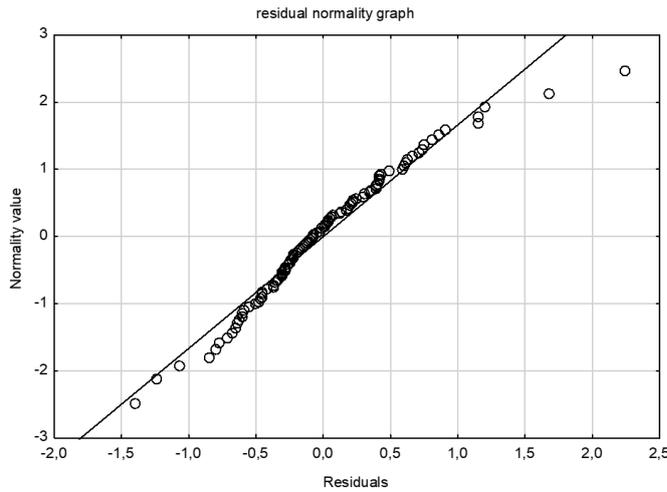
The time of procedure was similar for both groups and ranged from 10 to 15 minutes. The statistically significant changes over the FVB were observed in SBP and SpO<sub>2</sub> for both groups, but DBP only in non-CF patients. The changes in saturation and BP in CF and non-CF patients are presented in Table III. There were no complications in the entire study group, both during and after FVB.

To predict the propofol dosage based on the values of other variables, we performed two multiple regression models for the entire study population and only for CF group. In the first model, we identified that propofol dose per kg of body weight is predicted by CF status (CF vs. non-CF), sex, and age. In the second model, we identified that propofol dose per kg of body weight in CF group is predicted by age only (Table IV). Both models were well fitted (Figures 1 and 2). Propo-

**Table I.** Clinical characteristics of cystic fibrosis patients (n=50) and non-cystic fibrosis patients (n=50) undergoing flexible video bronchoscopy.

Analyzed variable	CF (n=50)		Non-CF (n=50)		<i>p</i> -value
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	
Age (years)	28.6	8.33	33.6	8.6	0.0045
Sex (% of men)	40	-	42	-	-
Body weight (kg)	56.6	9.84	72.7	19.7	<0.0001
Propofol dose (mg)	135	38.1	145	48.3	0.3859
Propofol dose per kg body weight (mg/kg)	2.43	0.69	2.04	0.58	0.0014
Fentanyl dose (mg)	0.08	0.03	0.07	0.03	0.7185

Abbreviations: CF, cystic fibrosis; Non-CF, non-cystic fibrosis.



**Figure 1.** Multiple regression model for propofol dose per kg of body weight in the whole study population.

fol dose per kg of body weight correlations with age both for the whole study population and for CF- group only, were presented in Figures 3 and 4, respectively.

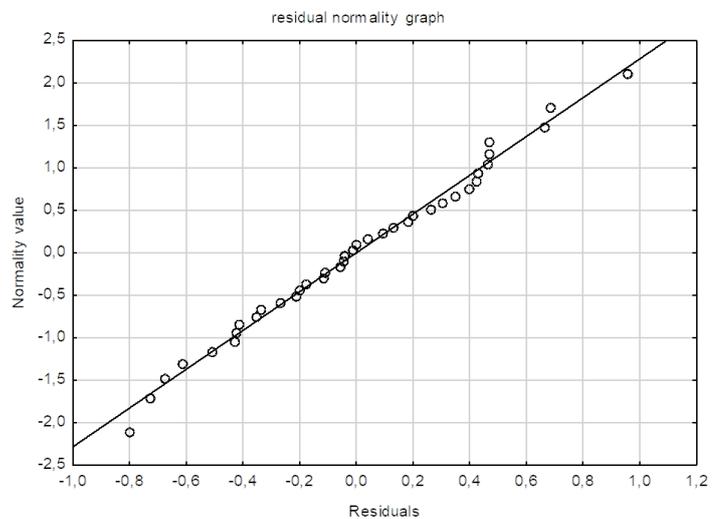
### Discussion

The current study is the first to the knowledge of researchers, which presents the sedative drugs (propofol and fentanyl) requirements during flexible video bronchoscopy in adult CF patients with no history of lung transplantation. It was shown that CF patients needed a higher propofol dose per kilogram of body weight compared to non-CF patients, to achieve the same level of sedation during the FVB. Furthermore, the propofol dose was not dependent on FEV1 % pred., liver enzymes activity, protein and albumin concentration, and INR level in the CF group. This may indicate that the intensified hepatic glucuronida-

**Table II.** Baseline clinical characteristic of cystic fibrosis group of patients (n=50).

Analyzed variable	CF (n=50)	
	Mean	SD
WBC (billion cells/L)	9.48	3.49
hsCRP (mg/L)	12.02	2.32
ALT (U/L)	27.02	14.97
ASP (U/L)	19.63	6.97
GGT (U/L)	22.59	10.41
INR	1.093	0.076
Total protein (g/L)	75.69	8.52
Albumin (g/L)	34.75	5.13
FEV1 % pred	44.11	21.02

Abbreviations: ALT, alanine aminotransferase; AST, aspartate aminotransferase; CF, cystic fibrosis; FEV1, forced expiratory volume in 1 second; GGT, gamma-glutamyl transpeptidase; hsCRP, high sensitive C-reactive protein; INR, international normalised ratio = prothrombintest / prothrombincontrol)ISI; non-CF, non-cystic fibrosis; TP, total protein; WBC, white blood cells.



**Figure 2.** Multiple regression model for propofol dose per kg of body weight in cystic fibrosis (CF) group.

**Table III.** Changes in saturation and blood pressure in cystic fibrosis patients (n=50) and non-cystic fibrosis patients (n=50) undergoing flexible video bronchoscopy.

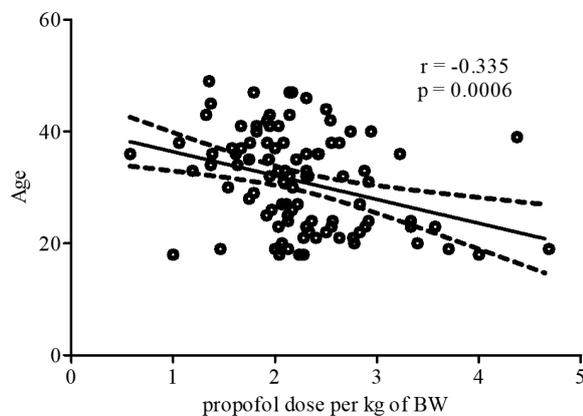
Analyzed variable	CF (n=50)			Non-CF (n=50)		
	Mean ± SD before	Mean ± SD after	p-value	Mean ± SD before	Mean ± SD after	p-value
SBP (mmHg)	122.38±10.72	118.94±9.43	0.0078	126.68±10.72	118.86±10.02	<0.0001
DBP (mmHg)	75.18±9.09	74.44±8.72	0.4892	81.72±12.19	72.48±10.31	<0.0001
SpO <sub>2</sub> (%)	94.44±2.90	96.22±2.74	<0.0001	96.29±2.22	97.22±1.73	0.0031

Abbreviations: DBP, diastolic blood pressure; CF, cystic fibrosis; non-CF, non-cystic fibrosis; SBP, systolic blood pressure; SpO<sub>2</sub>, peripheral capillary oxygen saturation.

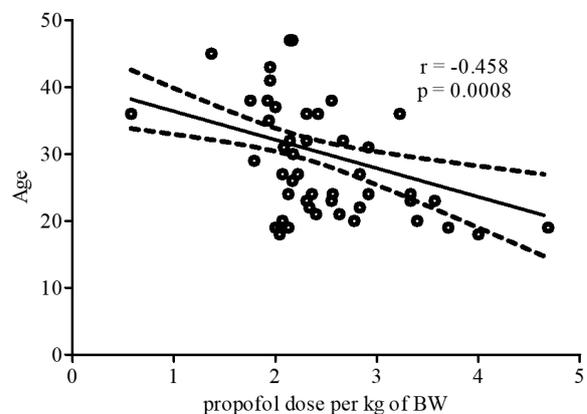
tion and in this pathway increased drug clearance, is the main factor responsible for this phenomenon in this group. The interesting result of our study is also the fact that the dosage of propofol and thus the length of the FVB did not depend on the severity of the bronchopulmonary disease. The stage of CF bronchopulmonary disease may influence on the shortened time of the procedure and the shallower sedation, and thus limiting the doses of anesthetics used. The clinical magnitude of this study highlights the importance of knowledge regarding the use of anesthetics by anesthesiologists and bronchoscopists caring adult CF patients during FVB with the use of a higher dose of propofol over sedation and on the other hand, showing the use of propofol and fentanyl as a safe in this group of patients.

Flexible fiberoptic bronchoscopy (FFB) and FVB are the gold standard in direct visualization of the airways, allowing many diagnostic and therapeutic interventions, including for CF patients<sup>1,3,6,21,22</sup>. With the widespread use, the

evolution of diagnostic options, and longer procedures, more and more sedatives are used. On the other hand, sedation during flexible bronchoscopy (FB) improves patient comfort during this procedure<sup>4-6</sup>. The most common anesthetics used during FB include benzodiazepines like midazolam, opioids like fentanyl, as well as propofol and ketamine<sup>6</sup>. There are only a few reports of the use of anesthetics during the FB in adult CF patients, which affect only lung transplant recipients<sup>23,24</sup>. The obtained data by Chhajed et al<sup>23</sup> and Ho et al<sup>24</sup> groups are in line with the results presented in the current study. The midazolam and fentanyl doses administered to CF lung transplant recipients were higher compared to those with other diseases during the FFB. Nevertheless, the propofol was used during 17 procedures only in 7 CF patients because of the inability to achieve optimal sedation despite high doses of midazolam and fentanyl. Therefore, Chhajed et al<sup>23</sup> were unable to compare the dose of propofol depending on the diagnosis. Ho et al<sup>24</sup> suggested that



**Figure 3.** The correlation between propofol dose per kg of body weight (BW) and age in the whole study population.



**Figure 4.** The correlation between propofol dose per kg of body weight (BW) and age in cystic fibrosis (CF) group.

**Table IV.** Multiple regression models for the whole study population and CF group only.

Study population (n=100)	
Factor	p-value
CF vs. non-CF	0.0134
Sex (% of men)	0.0077
Age (years)	0.0202
Procedure time (minutes)	0.5195
SBP before (mmHg)	0.9205
DBP before (mmHg)	0.6897
SpO <sub>2</sub> (%)	0.3577
Fentanyl dose (mg)	0.4066
CF group of patients (n=50)	
FEV <sub>1</sub> % pred	0.7315
Procedure time (minutes)	0.7916
SBP before (mmHg)	0.2374
DBP before (mmHg)	0.2268
SpO <sub>2</sub> (%)	0.1177
WBC (billion cells/L)	0.2812
CRP (mg/L)	0.5237
ALT (U/L)	0.2669
AST (U/L)	0.6554
GGT (U/L)	0.6286
INR	0.5770
Albumin (g/L)	0.7083
Age (years)	0.0199
Fentanyl dose (mg)	0.4511
Sex (% of men)	0.6214

Model statistics: R= 0.4913, R<sup>2</sup>= 0.2413, F=3.6194, p<0.0010.

Abbreviations: ALT, alanine aminotransferase; AST, aspartate aminotransferase; CF, cystic fibrosis; DBP, diastolic blood pressure; FEV<sub>1</sub>, forced expiratory volume in 1 second; GGT, gamma-glutamyl transpeptidase; hsCRP, high sensitive C-reactive protein; INR, international normalized ratio = prothrombintest /prothrombincontrol)ISI; non-CF, non-cystic fibrosis; SBP, systolic blood pressure; SpO<sub>2</sub>, peripheral capillary oxygen saturation; TP, total protein; WBC, white blood cells.

CF lung transplant recipients required a higher dosage of propofol for sedation during FFB compared to their non-CF counterparts which stays in contrary to the currently obtained data. It has to be mentioned that fentanyl is lipid soluble, has a high first pass metabolism and also has a high volume of distribution and increased demand in this group of patients may also be expected<sup>25</sup>. The mechanism of another result and the same fentanyl dose requirement in adult CF patients is not clear. The difference in the current study was the lack of immunosuppressive treatment in the adult CF group<sup>26</sup>. Propofol has a rapid onset and short duration due to a quick penetration through the blood-brain barrier and distribution to and from

the central nervous system, followed by redistribution to inactive tissue depots such as muscles and fat<sup>26,27</sup>. The pharmacokinetic variability is in the order of 70%<sup>27</sup>. Differences in cardiac output, hepatic perfusion, protein binding, and enzyme activity are responsible for these interindividual differences<sup>6,27</sup>. The pharmacodynamic variability is much larger. Some patients may already lose consciousness at a target concentration of 1 mg/L, whereas others need 4-5 mg/L to achieve a similar effect. The factors responsible for this process are not quite clear<sup>13,23,27,28</sup>. The main pathway responsible for propofol elimination is liver glucuronidation and phase I metabolism by cytochrome P450 (CYP-450)<sup>10,12</sup>. Lungs, kidneys and brain have been suspected as possible extrahepatic sites of propofol metabolism<sup>12</sup>. CF is a systemic disease that concerns many organs such as lungs, sinuses, liver, pancreas which are involved in drugs absorption, metabolism and elimination. For this reason, some medications disposition may vary between CF and non-CF group<sup>29</sup>.

Based on the current literature, the main route responsible for propofol clearance is the hepatic glucuronidation – phase II drugs metabolism<sup>6,10,28,30</sup>. Furthermore, phase I metabolism by cytochrome P450 may also be involved in propofol elimination, predominantly by CYP2B6, and to a lesser extent by ex. CYP 2C9, 1A2, 2C18, 2C19, 2A6 and 2C8<sup>28,31,32</sup>. Both liver biotransformation phases may be increased in CF patients. In this population, abnormal functions of oxidases and P450, CYP2C8, CYP2C9, and CYP3A4 cytochromes are observed<sup>24,32</sup>. This data may partially explain our study results. The increased liver glucuronidation process in CF patients may be responsible for the higher propofol dose in comparison to non-CF patients during FB sedation. The clinical features of CF patients enrolled in our study may support this hypothesis. The whole estimated group presented a normal range of liver aminotransferases and normal INR level, which indicates that the study group did not have liver dysfunction and highlights that other factors should be responsible for this phenomenon.

As mentioned above, lungs and kidneys may also be involved in the propofol clearance. The bronchopulmonary disorder in CF patients is one of the essential features responsible for this disease progression and patients' deaths because of respiratory failure<sup>1,2</sup>. On the other hand, lungs are suspected as one of the organs which take part in propofol elimination<sup>33,34</sup>. Dawidowicz et al<sup>35</sup> reported higher propofol concentration in blood from the right atri-

um than from radial and pulmonary artery oxidative metabolism of propofol during propofol infusion. In contrast, He et al<sup>36</sup> presented that the lungs do not seem to be site contributing to propofol extrahepatic metabolism in humans. In the available literature, there is no more data on propofol elimination by lungs, especially depending on FEV1% predicted value. Our study is the first that concerns this aspect. The adult CF patients enrolled in our study presented the various stages of bronchopulmonary disease based on FEV1% predicted, ranging from 19.7 to 88.4%.

Another way to explain the obtained data in the current study is the uridine diphosphate glucuronosyl-transferase (UGT) isoforms that are expressed likewise in the kidneys, which may take part into propofol glucuronidation and its metabolism<sup>12,37-39</sup>. Enhance glomerular filtration rate, reduced tubular reabsorption, extend tubular secretion have been indicated of accelerated kidney drug metabolism in CF patients<sup>29,40</sup>. This mechanism to a lesser extent, however, may affect the need for higher doses of drugs in CF population.

The CF patients enrolled in our study were younger and presented lower body weight compared to non-CF group similar to the study by Chhajed et al<sup>23</sup>. The lower body weight in CF group is frequently associated with bronchopulmonary disease, its exacerbation and pancreatic insufficiency. This status often leads to malnutrition and changes in body composition<sup>1,41,42</sup>. Prandota et al<sup>29</sup> explained the dose of drugs differences between CF population and healthy controls depending on body weight. He emphasized that the differences in total blood volumes between patients with CF and healthy young adults “were less pronounced when indexed by height and compared to the respective values in normal children and adolescents.” Furthermore, in CF children, the difference in the blood volume calculated as a percent of the weight in grams was highly significant compared to age-matched non-CF<sup>29</sup>. There are no studies on the pharmacokinetics of distribution and metabolism of propofol in adult patients with CF. It seems that we can only indirectly explain the higher demand for propofol in this group of patients.

During FB, all undergoing patients have to be monitored. Statistically significant changes regarding SBP, DBP, and SpO<sub>2</sub> during the FVB may be associated with propofol effect<sup>43</sup>. On the other hand, the improvement of oxygenation after the procedure in both groups may be related to good control of oxygen therapy. Additionally, the

important information resulting from this study is the lack of significant side effects of propofol sedation and complications during and after FVB, regardless of the bronchopulmonary stage of the CF. It could refer to bronchoscopist’s and anesthesiologist’s experience in the procedure performing and anesthetic drugs giving in this kind of sedation. These data suggest that FVB performed in sedation with propofol and fentanyl is a safe procedure in CF patients.

This study has several limitations. First, the propofol was administered as bolus injections until the Richmond Agitation-Sedation Scale of 3 was achieved, which could affect our results. We may suspect that the use of intravenous pump with greater precision could allow to determine the dose necessary to achieve the appropriate sedation. Second, we did not measure the fentanyl and propofol concentration in the blood during the procedure, therefore pharmacokinetics of the fentanyl and propofol in the CF group could not be assessed. This prospective, observational study performed in the clinical setting in so specific group of patients may contribute to further research that will allow to draw casual conclusions.

## Conclusions

The findings of this study showed that adult cystic fibrosis patients undergoing flexible video bronchoscopy need higher doses of propofol per kg of body weight. Moreover, it was indicated that the cystic fibrosis diagnosis does not influence the fentanyl dosage during this procedure. Propofol has a very narrow therapeutic window, and an increased dose may lead to excessive sedation. Therefore, current study reveals very important information for the bronchoscopist and anesthesiologist for optimal use of sedative drugs in adult CF-patients.

## Conflict of Interest

The Authors declare that they have no conflict of interest.

## Author Contributions

Conceptualization, B.B.-L., Data curation, B.B.-L., M.S.-M.; Formal analysis, M.M.; Investigation, B.B.-L., M.G.; Methodology, B.B.-L., M.S.-M.; Project administration, B.B.-L.; Resources, T.P.; Supervision, T.P., H.B.-G.; Validation, M.G.; Visualization, M.M., M.G.; Writing-original draft, B.B.-L., M.M.-S.; Writing-review and editing, B.B.-L., M.S.-M. and T.P. All authors have read and agreed to the published version of the manuscript.

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