**Original Article** 



# FRAX Adjustment by Trabecular Bone Score with or Without Bone Mineral Density: The Manitoba BMD Registry

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# Abstract

Trabecular bone score (TBS), a texture measure derived from spine dual-energy x-ray absorptiometry (DXA) images, is a FRAX<sup>®</sup>-independent risk factor for fracture. The TBS adjustment to FRAX assumes the presence of femoral neck BMD in the calculation. However, there are many individuals in whom hip DXA cannot be acquired. Whether the TBS-adjustment would apply to FRAX probabilities calculated without BMD has not been studied. The current analysis was performed to evaluate major osteoporotic fracture (MOF) and hip fracture risk adjusted for FRAX with and without femoral neck BMD. The study cohort consisted of 71,209 individuals (89.8% female, mean age 64.0 years). During mean follow-up 8.7 years, 6743 (9.5%) individuals sustained one or more incident MOF, of which 2037 (2.9%) sustained a hip fracture. Lower TBS was significantly associated with increased fracture risk when adjusted for FRAX probabilities, with a slightly larger effect when BMD was not included. Inclusion of TBS in the risk calculation gave a small but significant increase in stratification for fracture probabilities estimated with and without BMD. Calibration plots showed very minor deviations from the line of identity, indicating overall good calibration. In conclusion, the existing equations for incorporating TBS in FRAX estimates of fracture probability work similarly when femoral neck BMD is not used in the calculation. This potentially extends the range of situations where TBS can be used clinically to those individuals in whom lumbar spine TBS is available but femoral neck BMD is not available.

**Keywords:** Osteoporosis; Fracture risk assessment; Dual-energy x-ray absorptiometry; Trabecular bone score; Bone mineral density.

# Introduction

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\*Corresponding author at: Department of Medicine (C5121) 409 Tache Avenue, Winnipeg, Manitoba R2H 2A6, Canada. E-mail: bleslie@sbgh.mb.ca Dual-energy x-ray absorptiometry (DXA) is widely used in clinical practice for measurement of bone mineral density (BMD) in order to diagnose osteoporosis, determine need for treatment and monitor for change over time (1,2). The femoral neck is the reference site for osteoporosis diagnosis and for estimating 10-year probability of major osteoporotic fracture (MOF; composite of hip, clinical spine, distal forearm, proximal humerus) and 10year probability of hip fracture with the FRAX<sup>®</sup> tool (3), (4). The FRAX tool considers multiple clinical risk factors and optionally BMD at the femoral neck, and is widely used in clinical practice (5-9).

More recently, lumbar spine trabecular bone score (TBS), a grey-level texture measure derived from spine dual-energy x-ray absorptiometry (DXA) images, has been shown to be a FRAX-independent risk factor for fracture (10). A TBS-adjusted FRAX score, which can be computed through the FRAX website and through software on the DXA instrument, incrementally improves fracture prediction compared with the conventional FRAX score (11,12). The use of TBS-adjusted FRAX for guiding patient management is supported by guidelines from several organizations (13-15). The derived TBS adjustment assumes availability femoral neck BMD in the calculation since spine DXA required for TBS would usually be performed in conjunction with hip DXA. However, there is an increasing number of older individuals in whom hip DXA cannot be acquired due to severe osteoarthritis, bilateral joint replacements, fractures or other conditions. Lumbar spine TBS may still be available in such individuals, as TBS is relatively unaffected by degenerative changes (16, 17).

Whether the TBS-adjustment applied to FRAX calculated without BMD would enhance fracture prediction has not been studied. Since TBS and BMD are only modestly correlated (6.7-10.7% explained variance (18)), it was hypothesized that the existing TBS adjustment for FRAX with BMD would likely also apply to FRAX without BMD. The current analysis was performed to evaluate the effect of TBS and performance of the TBS adjustment on MOF and hip fracture risk adjusted for FRAX with and without femoral neck BMD. This was assessed in the routine clinical practice setting using a large clinical registry that includes all DXA tests for the Province of Manitoba, Canada.

#### Methods

#### Study population

The study cohort consisted of all individuals age 40 years or older at the time of baseline spine and hip DXA assessment (designated the index date) through the Manitoba BMD Program. We excluded individuals without healthcare coverage in Manitoba for assessment of fracture outcomes, or when body mass index (BMI) was outside of the manufacture recommended range (15-37 kg/m<sup>2</sup>). Since FRAX with BMD is the reference standard for fracture probability assessment, we also excluded cases where femoral neck BMD could not be measured (N=1,051). The study was approved by the Research Ethics Board of the University of Manitoba and the Health Information Privacy Committee of Manitoba Health.

#### Bone densitometry and trabecular bone score

In Canada, health services including DXA testing are provided to nearly all residents through a single public health care system (19). DXA testing through the Manitoba Density Program has been managed as an integrated program (20). The Manitoba Density Program maintains a database of all DXA results that can be linked with other population-based databases through an anonymous personal identifier. The associated database exceeds 99% in terms of completeness and accuracy (21). All DXA scans were performed with a narrow fan-beam DXA configuration (Prodigy before November 2012, iDXA from November 2012 onwards, GE Healthcare, Madison, WI, USA) and analyzed in accordance with manufacturer recommendations. All DXA images were assessed by International Society for Clinical Densitometry (ISCD) certified physicians. Lumbar spine TBS measurements (L1-L4 without vertebral body exclusions) were retrospectively performed in the Bone Disease Unit at the University Hospital of Lausanne, Switzerland (TBS iNsight Software, Version 3.03, Medimaps Group, Geneva, Switzerland), using anonymized spine DXA files to ensure blinding of the Swiss investigators to all clinical parameters and outcomes. No TBS phantom was available for densitometer cross-calibration given the retrospective study design.

#### Fracture risk estimation

Ten-year probabilities of MOF and hip fracture were calculated using the standalone desktop version of the fracture risk assessment tool with and without femoral neck BMD, Canadian version (FRAX® Desktop Multi-Patient Entry, version 3.7) (22,23). This FRAX tool has been calibrated using nationwide hip fracture and mortality data (23). Predictions agree closely with observed fracture risk in this population (24,25). Briefly, age, BMI, femoral neck BMD and other data required for calculating fracture risk with FRAX were assessed from on-site measurements (including height and weight), and other necessary information collected directly from subjects through the intake questionnaire at the time of each DXA scan (26). Questionnaire information was supplemented with population-based healthcare data (hospital discharge abstracts, medical claims diagnoses, provincewide retail pharmacy database) as recently described, thereby ensuring complete information for all subjects (27). In addition to conventional FRAX probabilities, we also recalculated MOF and hip fracture probabilities after adjusting for TBS, using previously published equations as implemented through the FRAX website (12).

#### Fracture outcomes

Manitoba Health records were assessed for the presence of fracture diagnostic codes to March 31, 2018 through a combination of hospital discharge abstracts (diagnoses and procedures coded using the International Classification of Diseases, Ninth Revision, Clinical Modification [ICD-9-CM] prior to 2004 and International Classification of Diseases, Tenth Revision, Canadian Enhancements [ICD-10-CA] thereafter) and physician billing claims (coded using ICD-9-CM). Analysis was based upon incident hip, clinical vertebral, forearm, and humerus fracture diagnostic codes (collectively designated MOF) that did not appear in association with high trauma codes using previously validated algorithms (28,29). We required that hip and forearm fractures codes be associated with site-specific fracture reduction, fixation or casting codes to enhance specificity for an acute fracture event. To minimize potential overcounting of incident fractures, we conservatively required that there be no hospitalization or physician visit(s) with the same fracture type in the six months preceding an incident fracture diagnosis.

# Statistical analyses

Statistical analyses were performed with IBM SPSS for Windows (Version 28). Descriptive statistics for demographic and baseline characteristics are presented as mean  $\pm$  SD for continuous variables or number (%) for categorical variables. In Cox proportional hazards models we estimated hazard ratios (HR) with 95% confidence intervals (CI) per SD decrease in TBS adjusted for FRAX probabilities with and without BMD (FRAX probabilities log-transformed due to a skewed distribution). The proportional hazards assumption was confirmed. Area underneath the curve (AUC) for incident fracture risk stratification was estimated from the conventional FRAX probabilities without TBS, and then for the TBS-adjusted FRAX probabilities. The incremental change in AUC before versus after applying the TBS adjustment was calculated, and significance was tested using the Hanley-McNeil method given the correlated measures (30). We also derived calibration slopes for FRAX with and without BMD, before and after applying the TBS adjustment, using risk deciles.

#### Results

Table 1 summarizes the baseline study population characteristics. The study cohort consisted of 71,209

 Table 1

 Study population characteristics (N=71,209).

Characteristic	
Age, years	$64.0 \pm 10.7$
Sex male	7292 (10.2)
Race/ethnicity non-White	2506 (3.5)
Diabetes	7208 (10.1)
BMI, kg/m <sup>2</sup>	$26.4 \pm 4.4$
Trabecular bone score L1-L4, unitless	$1.257\pm0.121$
FRAX with BMD, MOF %	$10.0\pm7.0$
TBS-adjusted FRAX with BMD, MOF %	$10.9\pm7.3$
FRAX without BMD, MOF %	$11.0\pm8.2$
TBS-adjusted FRAX without BMD.	$11.7\pm8.2$
MOF %	
FRAX with BMD, HIP %	$2.3 \pm 3.8$
TBS-adjusted FRAX with BMD, HIP %	$2.5 \pm 3.9$
FRAX without BMD, HIP %	$3.1 \pm 4.9$
TBS-adjusted FRAX without BMD.	$3.3 \pm 4.7$
HIP %	
Observation time, years	$8.7 \pm 5.2$
Incident MOF	6743 (9.5)
Incident hip fracture	2037 (2.9)
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Data are Mean  $\pm$  SD or N (percent). BMI, body mass index. MOF, major osteoporotic fracture.

individuals, mean age 64.0 years (SD 10.7), predominantly White females, but with 7292 (10.2%) males, 2506 (3.5%) non-White individuals and 7208 (10.1%) with diabetes. Mean TBS was 1.257 (SD 0.121). During follow-up (mean 8.7 years), 6743 (9.5%) individuals sustained one or more incident MOF, of which 2037 (2.9%) sustained a hip fracture.

As seen in Table 2, lower TBS was significantly associated with increased fracture risk when adjusted for FRAX probabilities, with a slightly stronger association when BMD was not included. For incident MOF the HR per SD decrease in TBS was 1.23 (95% CI 1.20-1.26) without BMD and 1.17 (95% CI 1.14-1.20) with BMD. For incident hip fracture the HR per SD decrease in TBS was slightly greater at 1.26 (95% CI 1.21-1.32) without BMD, and only 1.08 (95% CI 1.03-1.13) with BMD.

Table 2
FRAX-adjusted hazard ratios (HR, 95% CI) per SD decrease in spine trabecular bone score (TBS) for incident major
osteoporotic fracture (MOF) and incident hip fracture (HIP).

Adjusted for:	MOF HR (95% CI) per SD decrease in TBS	HIP HR (95% CI) per SD decrease in TBS
FRAX with BMD	1.17 (1.14-1.20)	1.08 (1.03-1.13)
FRAX without BMD	1.23 (1.20-1.26)	1.26 (1.21-1.32)

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	AUC (95% CI) For incident MOF	$\Delta AUC$ , FRAX without vs with TBS	p-value, FRAX without vs with TBS	
FRAX with BMD, MOF	0.664 (0.658-0.670)	NA	NA	
TBS-adjusted FRAX with BMD, MOF	0.673 (0.667-0.679)	0.009	< 0.001	
FRAX without BMD, MOF	0.639 (0.631-0.647)	NA	NA	
TBS-adjusted FRAX without BMD, MOF	0.654 (0.646-0.662)	0.015	< 0.001	
	AUC (95% CI) For incident HIP	$\Delta$ AUC, FRAX without vs with TBS	p-value, FRAX without vs with TBS	
FRAX with BMD, HIP	0.792 (0.784-0.800)	NA	NA	
TBS-adjusted FRAX with BMD, HIP	0.794 (0.786-0.802)	0.002	0.017	
FRAX without BMD, HIP	0.766 (0.756-0.776)	NA	NA	
TBS-adjusted FRAX without BMD, HIP	0.774 (0.764-0.784)	0.008	< 0.001	

 Table 3

 Incremental change in area under the curve (AUC, 95% CI) for incident major osteoporotic fracture (MOF) and incident hip fracture (HIP) for FRAX before versus after applying the spine trabecular bone score (TBS) adjustment.

AUC for incident fracture risk stratification is summarized in Table 3. AUCs were slightly greater for FRAX with versus without BMD. The inclusion of TBS in the risk calculation gave a small but statistically significant incremental increase in risk stratification for MOF risk estimated with BMD (+0.009), and slightly greater for risk estimated without BMD (+0.015). The incremental improvement in hip fracture risk stratification for FRAX with BMD was small (+0.002) but larger without BMD (+0.008). Incremental change in AUC stratified by sex, age, ethnicity and diabetes status is provided in Supplmenetal Table 1.

Calibration plots in Fig. 1 showed very minor deviations from the line of identity, indicating overall good calibration. For incident MOF, calibration slopes ranged from 0.92 (unadjusted FRAX with BMD) to 0.88 (TBSadjusted FRAX without BMD). For incident hip fracture, calibration slopes ranged from 1.09 (unadjusted FRAX with BMD) to 1.01 (unadjusted FRAX without and TBSadjusted FRAX without BMD).

# Discussion

We found that lumbar spine TBS improved major osteoporotic fracture and hip fracture prediction when adjusted for FRAX probabilities. Moreover, when the method developed for TBS-adjusting FRAX probabilities with BMD was applied to FRAX probabilities without BMD it gave a slightly greater improvement in fracture risk stratification while maintaining good calibration.

These findings are not unexpected. The inclusion of BMD in FRAX probabilities is known to improve risk prediction compared with scores estimated from clinical risk factors alone (31). Since TBS shows a low degree of correlation with BMD measurements (10), an equation for adjusting FRAX probabilities that includes BMD

should be similar to an equation derived without BMD. Of course, it remains possible that such an equation could be further optimized, but that was not the aim of the current analysis.

Strengths of this study include a large well-characterized cohort and longitudinal assessment of incident fractures using validated data sources and definitions (28,29). Limitations are also acknowledged. Only a single DXA manufacturer was assessed, although the TBS-adjustment to FRAX has been validated in a meta-analysis that included other manufactures (11). Fracture outcomes were assessed from administrative health care data rather than direct x-ray review, but definitions used have been validated against x-rays (28). Those with bilateral hip replacements will be at low risk for typical hip fractures but remain at risk for periprosthetic femoral fractures (32); it is uncertain how this would impact absolute risk estimation. The current TBS algorithm uses BMI as a proxy for the effect of tissue thickness; the FRAX adjustment may change when an updated algorithm that incorporates tissue thickness directly in the TBS measurement becomes available (33). The additional cost versus incremental benefit of adding TBS needs to be considered in future analyses. Finally, this study was limited to a single FRAX tool for Canada and a population predominantly comprised of White females. This warrants further validation in other populations, ideally with greater non-White and male representation, although to date most data suggest that TBS similarly predicts fractures in non-White populations and males (11,34).

In conclusion, existing equations for incorporating TBS in fracture probability estimates with FRAX works similarly well when femoral neck BMD is not used in the calculation. This potentially extends the range of situations where TBS can be used clinically to individuals in whom lumbar spine TBS is available but femoral neck BMD is not available, and requires only



**Fig. 1.** Calibration plots by decile for predicted (X-axis) versus observed (Y-axis, 95% CI bars) 10-year probability of major osteoporotic fracture (MOF, upper panel) and hip fracture probability (HIP, lower panel). Solid circles are for FRAX before and open circles are for FRAX after applying the trabecular bone score (TBS) adjustment. Line of identity in solid grey.

minor modifications to the FRAX website and/or TBS software.

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# Disclosures

William Leslie, Helena Johansson: No conflicts of interest.

Neil Binkley: Nothing to declare for the context of this paper; research funding from Radius; consultant Amgen.

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John A. Kanis: Architect of FRAX. Nothing to declare for the context of this paper.

Didier Hans: Co-ownership in the TBS patent. Stock options or royalties: Med-Imaps. Research grants: Amgen, Agnovos, GE Healthcare.

### Roles

Authors' roles: conception, design, data analysis, drafting the article (WDL), interpretation of data (All Authors); critically revising the article for important intellectual content (All Authors); final approval of the version to be published (All Authors); and agreement to be accountable for all aspects of the work (All Authors). WDL had full access to all the data in the study and takes the responsibility for the integrity of the data and the accuracy of the data analysis.

# **Data Availability Statement**

Data sharing is not permitted under the Researcher Agreement with Manitoba Health and Seniors Care (MHASC). However, researchers may apply for data access through the Health Research Ethics Board for the University of Manitoba and the Health Information and Privacy Committee of MHASC.

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#### **Supplementary materials**

Supplementary material associated with this article can be found in the online version at doi:10.1016/j. jocd.2023.101378.

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