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Dose-Response Relationship between Obstructive Sleep Apnea Therapy Adherence and Healthcare Utilization

Atul Malhotra, MD¹, Kimberly L Sterling, PharmD², Peter A Cistulli, MD³, Jean-Louis Pépin, MD⁴, Jiaming Chen, MS², Caleb Woodford, BMath⁵, Naomi Alpert, MS², Suyog More, MS⁵, Carlos M Nunez, MD², Adam V Benjafield, PhD⁶ on behalf of the medXcloud group

¹University of California San Diego, La Jolla, CA, USA

²ResMed Science Center, San Diego, CA, USA

³Charles Perkins Centre and Faculty of Medicine and Health, University of Sydney, Sydney, Australia

⁴Institut National de la Santé et de la Recherche Médicale (INSERM) U 1300, HP2 Laboratory (Hypoxia: Pathophysiology), Grenoble Alpes University, Grenoble, France

⁵ResMed Science Center, Halifax, Canada

⁶ResMed Science Center, Sydney, Australia

Corresponding author: Prof. Atul Malhotra, 9300 Campus Point Dr, #7381, La Jolla, CA 92037, USA. Tel: (858) 657- 7130; Email: amalhotra@ucsd.edu

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Abstract

Rationale: Clear definition of optimal positive airway pressure therapy usage in patients with obstructive sleep apnea is not possible due to scarce data on the relationship between usage hours and major clinical outcomes.

Objective: To investigate the dose-response relationship between positive airway pressure usage and healthcare resource utilization, and determine the minimum device usage required for benefit.

Methods: A linked data set combined de-identified payer-sourced administrative medical/pharmacy claims data from >100 US health plans and individual patient positive airway pressure usage data. Eligible adults (age ≥ 18 years) had a new obstructive sleep apnea diagnosis between June 2014 and April 2018. All received positive airway pressure therapy (AirSense™ 10; ResMed) with claims data for ≥ 1 year before, and 2 years after, device setup. Healthcare resource utilization was determined based on the number of all-cause hospitalizations and emergency room visits over 3, 12 and 24 months after positive airway pressure initiation.

Results: Data from 179,188 patients showed a clear dose-response relationship between daily positive airway pressure usage and healthcare utilization. Minimum device usage required for benefit was 1–3 h/night. There was a statistically significant decrease in hospitalizations and ER visits at all time points (all $p < 0.0001$) with increasing PAP usage. Each additional h/night of usage decreased hospitalizations/emergency room visits by 5–10%/5–7%.

Conclusions: These data provide compelling evidence for a dose-response relationship between positive airway pressure usage and healthcare utilization, with benefits seen even when usage is as low as 1-2 h/night.

Obstructive sleep apnea (OSA) is thought to affect up to 1 billion people worldwide and has major neurocognitive and cardiometabolic sequelae (1-3). Continuous positive airway pressure (CPAP) is the first-line treatment for OSA (4), but its effectiveness is limited by variability in adherence to treatment. Alternative therapies for OSA exist, but are also affected by variable adherence and incomplete efficacy. Several strategies have been utilized to try and improve CPAP adherence, including heated humidification, patient engagement tools, mask resupply programs, expiratory pressure relief strategies, intensive support, and others (5-7). However, optimizing CPAP usage in clinical practice is challenging. Moreover, optimal CPAP usage remains unclear because the dose-response relationship between usage hours and major clinical outcomes has not been adequately studied (8).

The United States Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS) defines CPAP compliance as device usage for 4 h/night on ≥ 4 nights/week during a 30-day period in the first 90 days of therapy. However, although these thresholds are relatively arbitrary, they have been adopted by many parties around the world as metrics of adequate adherence to CPAP therapy. At present, there is insufficient evidence to guide the optimal amount of CPAP usage, particularly when one considers that the optimal duration of device usage may vary depending on the outcome of interest. For example, the hours of CPAP usage needed to lower blood pressure might differ from the hours of CPAP usage needed to improve clinical symptoms. Furthermore, there is debate about whether improvements during CPAP therapy show a threshold effect (e.g. occurring when usage is >4 h/night) or a dose-response effect (i.e. “more is better”). Although some data suggest that patient-reported outcomes may improve with

increased CPAP usage (8-12), studies have generally been small and have not assessed important objective outcomes (e.g. risk of hospitalization and/or emergency room [ER] visits).

Technological improvements have facilitated the assessment of large-scale positive airway pressure (PAP) usage based on big data or real world data analytic approaches. Using recently developed techniques, we can now assess how PAP usage predicts clinical outcomes on a large scale in a Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act (HIPAA)-compliant manner. Therefore, this study investigated the dose-response relationship between PAP usage and healthcare resource utilization and determined the minimum PAP usage required to see a benefit. In addition, we sought to test the hypothesis that a dose-response curve would be present whereby increasing usage of CPAP would yield improved health outcomes rather than there being a threshold above which hours of CPAP usage become irrelevant.

Methods

Study Design and Data Sources

This study was conducted using a linked data set that combined de-identified payer-sourced administrative medical and pharmacy claims data from >100 US health plans (Inovalon Insights LLC, Bowie, MD) and individual patient PAP usage data from cloud-connected devices (via AirView™; ResMed Corp., San Diego, CA). Objective PAP data collected in AirView™ includes treatment usage, clinical therapy metrics, and residual respiratory events(13-15). This allowed the assessment of the effect of increased PAP usage on healthcare resource utilization. The databases were linked through a tokenized process and the resulting matched database

underwent HIPAA expert determination to ensure patient privacy compliance. The study design was reviewed by an Institutional Review Board (IRB; Advarra, ref: Pro0004005) and deemed exempt from IRB oversight.

Study Participants

Patients ≥ 18 with a new OSA diagnosis (ICD-9-CM 327.23; ICD-10-CM G47.33) within 60 days of a sleep test, between June 2014 and April 2018 were eligible for inclusion in the study. All included patients received PAP therapy using an AirSense™ 10 device (ResMed Corp.) with claims data for ≥ 1 year before the first sleep test, and 2 years after device setup. Those who did not have insurance enrollment for the full 3-year study period were excluded. Patients with evidence of PAP resupply, use of ventilation modes, pregnancy, end-stage renal disease, dialysis use, central sleep apnea or nocturnal hypoventilation in the year before device set-up were excluded.

Outcomes and Predictors

Primary outcomes were number of all-cause hospitalizations and ER visits within 3, 12, and 24 months after PAP initiation. The primary predictor of interest was average hours (h)/night of PAP use over 3, 12, and 24 months (defined as the total hours used per number of days in each study time period). Average PAP usage was categorized into ten 1-hour increments (from <1 to ≥ 9 h/night).

Covariates of interest included patient demographics (age at setup, payer, sex, and obesity), comorbidities (including hypertension, hyperlipidemia, gastroesophageal reflux

disease (GERD), type 2 diabetes, anxiety, depression, psychotic disorders, other mood disorders, asthma, COPD, pneumonia, cancer, coronary artery disease, cerebrovascular disease, atrial fibrillation and other arrhythmias, and heart failure; defined based on diagnoses present in the claims in the year before PAP setup), and prior year healthcare resource use (all-cause inpatient hospitalization and ER visits). Among the subset of patients undergoing statin (16), antihypertensive, or long acting β_2 agonist (LABA) bronchodilator therapy (≥ 1 claim for a given medication within 180-360 days before PAP setup), adherence to medication was defined as a proxy for healthy behaviors. Patients with a proportion of days covered (PDC) $\geq 80\%$ for a given therapy were classified as adherent. All covariates were selected based on their potential to confound the relationship between PAP usage and healthcare resource use outcomes. Patients with greater comorbidity burden are likely to have a harder time using their devices consistently, and to have greater resource use over time, as are those with greater healthcare resource use in the year prior to PAP setup. Those with other healthy behaviors are likely to have both more consistent PAP use and better outcomes.

Statistical Analysis

Outcomes at each time point were modeled separately to assess the effects of increased PAP usage over different time frames. The numbers of all-cause hospitalizations and ER visits were capped at the larger of 2 or the 99.5 percentile for each outcome and modeled using negative binomial regression. A single risk score for each patient was defined based on the coefficients of all potential confounders and was used as a covariate in subsequent risk-adjusted models. Crude and risk-standardized rates (17), based on the uncapped values (per 1000 people) of

annualized healthcare resource utilization values, with 95% confidence intervals (CI) were calculated using the 'epitools' package in R (18), and were plotted against nightly hours of PAP usage.

Based on previously-used methodology (19), both the minimum threshold to confer a significant benefit, and the incremental benefit with increased use were assessed using risk-adjusted negative binomial regression models, based on the capped values. The minimum threshold was determined by identifying the first usage category that differed significantly ($p < 0.05$) from the reference of < 1 h/night. Incremental benefit was modeled with PAP usage as a continuous variable. The predicted event rate was derived from the model (total predicted events/number of patients) and reported per 1000 people. The exponentiated coefficient for hours of PAP usage gave the incidence rate ratio (IRR) with 95% CI, which was expressed as the percent reduction ($1 - \text{IRR}$) in the number of outcomes with each additional hour of PAP use. The percent reduction was applied to the overall predicted event rate in order to report an absolute reduction in the predicted number of events per 1000 people.

Sensitivity analyses for 12-month hospitalization and ER visits were conducted among those undergoing statin, antihypertensive, or LABA therapy. Adherence to these maintenance medications was included as an additional covariate, to assess the potential for healthy user confounding. All analyses were conducted using Python (version 3.6.10) and R (version 3.6.1).

Results

Study Population

There were 204,445 patients who had PAP device setup during the study inclusion period, with claims data covering the period from at least 1 year before sleep test to 2 years after the device setup claims date; of these, 179,188 met all other study inclusion criteria and were included in the analysis (Figure 1). The average age was 52.5 years, there were more males than females in the sample, more than half of all patients were obese, comorbidities (especially hypertension) were common, and most patients had commercial insurance (Table 1).

Device Usage

The proportion of patients with <1 h/night PAP usage increased as follow-up time increased (Figure 2). Across all three follow-up visits, usage of 3–7 h/night was most common and no more than 5% of patients had usage \geq 8 h/night in any time period (Figure 2).

Risk Factors for Hospitalizations and ER visits

For hospitalizations and ER visits across all time points, resource utilization in the year prior to PAP setup was a major significant predictor of increased events after PAP initiation. Other significant predictors of hospitalizations and ER visits included older age, Medicaid insurance, female gender, and presence of comorbidities.

Minimum Usage and Incremental Benefit Between PAP Usage and Healthcare Resource

Utilization

At 3, 12 and 24 months after PAP device setup, healthcare utilization decreased with increasing nightly PAP usage up until 8 h/night (Figure 3A, Figure 4A). There was a slight increase in event rates when PAP usage was ≥ 8 h/night, but event rates remained below those with <1 h/night PAP usage. When standardized to the risk score distribution of the overall sample, this increase was mitigated for both hospitalizations (Figure 3B) and ER visits (Figure 4B).

Capped values for hospitalizations were 2, 3, 5, and for ER visits were 3, 8, 14 for 3, 12, and 24 months, respectively. After risk-adjustment, the threshold for minimum hours of PAP usage to derive a significant benefit was no more than 3-4 h/night for all outcomes and time points. The lowest threshold was 1-2 h/night to prevent ER visits at all three time points (Table 2). There was a statistically significant decrease in hospitalizations and ER visits at all time points (all $p < 0.0001$) with increasing PAP usage. There was a 5.1–9.7% reduction in predicted event rates with each additional 1 h/night of PAP usage. This corresponded to a range of predicted absolute reductions of 3 to 11 hospitalizations and 9 to 48 ER visits per 1000 patients with each additional hour of PAP usage (Table 2).

Healthy User Effect

Statins, antihypertensives, and LABAs were prescribed to 21%, 33%, and 3% of the cohort and 67%, 78%, and 28% were adherent to these therapies, respectively. Results were similar for all sensitivity analyses including adherence to maintenance medication as a covariate. After

adjusting for medication adherence, there remained a statistically significant relationship between increased PAP usage and decreased 12-month healthcare resource utilization.

Discussion

Our new findings add to the literature in several important ways. The results showed a consistent dose-response relationship between PAP usage hours and all-cause hospitalizations and ER visits over 2 years' follow-up. The magnitude of the effect of PAP therapy was clinically important (Table 2). For every additional hour of PAP usage up to 9 h/night there was a 5.4–9.7% decrease in hospitalizations and a 5.1–7.4% decrease in ER visits. These benefits were observed even when PAP usage was 1–3 h/night, which is below the traditionally defined minimum usage threshold of 4 h/night. Based on current CMS compliance criteria, such patients would have therapy withdrawn despite the potential clinical benefits of low-level PAP usage in the first 90 days of treatment that was documented in this study.

Our data showed an apparent attenuation of the positive effects of PAP therapy on healthcare resource utilization when device usage was ≥ 9 h/night. The underlying reasons are unclear, but the finding is consistent with data and recommendations highlighting the risk of excess sleep (20,21), which is likely confounded by factors such as coexisting depression and cardiovascular disease, social isolation and inflammatory conditions (22,23). Thus, our findings most likely represent a known relationship between excess sleep and adverse outcomes rather than any “toxicity” of extended PAP usage. Our clinical experience suggests that extremes of CPAP usage (e.g. >9 h/night) are sometimes seen in moribund patients who are bed-ridden or

pre-terminal patients who use CPAP for extended time periods. Of note, risks of ER visits and hospitalizations with PAP usage of ≥ 9 h/night were still lower than with < 1 h/night usage, despite the potential confounding effect of excessive sleep duration and other factors.

PAP usage may also be linked with health behaviors such that the benefits observed could be a function of education, diet, exercise, or other behaviors common in patients with good adherence. Platt et al. (16) reported that PAP usage tracks with statin use, and suggested that PAP usage might be confounded by medication adherence. We therefore investigated the impact of this 'healthy user' effect. This analysis showed no difference in PAP benefits between statin adherent and non-adherent patients, indicating that the healthy user effect is unlikely to be a key mechanism underlying our observations, and therefore reductions in healthcare resource use were likely attributable to PAP use itself rather than a function of some confounding variable. Additional sensitivity analyses were conducted using adherence to antihypertensives, and bronchodilators, in which we saw similar results. While we attempted to control for potential healthy user confounding, it is possible that some residual confounding exists. However, based on the clear relationship with increased PAP usage, it seems unlikely that it could be entirely explained by healthy user effect.

Strengths of this study are the large sample size, rigorous analyses, and evaluation of objective and important clinical outcomes. However, we acknowledge several limitations. Firstly, the administrative data used lack some information, including underlying disease severity. Thus, we are supportive of smaller scale mechanistic studies to gather more granular data than is feasible with our study design. Secondly, this was not a randomized controlled trial and therefore the results may reflect correlation rather than causation. However, we view

these real world data as informative and relevant for clinical practice. Randomized controlled trials are not feasible on the large scale of the present study. Moreover, one could not ethically randomize patients to receive adequate versus inadequate therapy. Nonetheless, we hope that our new findings help to guide/encourage subsequent studies. Thirdly, the administrative database did not include US Medicare fee-for-service patients. Thus, the findings may not be applicable to these patients or those without access to healthcare, and conclusions are therefore limited to the population studied.

In conclusion, these real-world data show a clear dose-response relationship between PAP usage and healthcare resource utilization, with benefits seen even when device usage was 2–3 h/night. These data could help inform evidence-based guidelines for PAP usage and reimbursement until more definitive data are available. Based on CMS adherence criteria alone, the current data have the potential to impact on medical decision making for OSA patients worldwide, possibly allowing a greater number of individuals to benefit from even low-level usage of CPAP therapy.

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Figure Legends

Figure 1. Cohort flow chart. APAP, automatically-titrating continuous positive airway pressure; BPAP, bilevel positive airway pressure; CPAP, continuous positive airway pressure; ESRD, end-stage renal disease; OSA, obstructive sleep apnea; PAP, positive airway pressure.

Figure 2: Number of obstructive sleep apnea (OSA) patients by hours/night of positive airway pressure (PAP) usage at 3, 12 and 24 months of follow-up

Figure 3: Annualized crude rate, per 1000 of all-cause hospitalizations (**A**) and annualized risk-standardized rate, per 1000 of all-cause hospitalizations (**B**) at 3, 12 and 24 months after positive airway pressure (PAP) device setup.

Figure 4: Annualized crude rate, per 1000 of all-cause emergency room (ER) visits (**A**) and annualized risk-standardized rate, per 1000 of all-cause ER visits (**B**) at 3, 12 and 24 months after positive airway pressure (PAP) device setup.

Table 1. Baseline characteristics of the study population.

	Overall (n=179,188)
Female, n (%)	72,571 (40.5)
Age*, years	52.5 (53)
Obesity, n (%)	92,282 (51.5)
Comorbidities, n (%)	
Hypertension	102,496 (57.2)
Coronary artery disease	21,503 (12.0)
Atrial fibrillation	11,110 (6.2)
Heart failure	10,035 (5.6)
Type 2 diabetes	40,496 (22.6)
Chronic obstructive pulmonary disease	15,948 (8.9)
Depression	28,133 (15.7)
None	53,219 (29.7)
Payer, n (%)	
Commercial/other	139,408 (77.8)
Medicaid	21,861 (12.2)
Medicare Advantage	18,098 (10.1)
Residual AHI*, events/hr	
At 3 months	3.0 (1.8)
At 12 months	2.7 (1.7)
At 24 months	2.7 (1.6)
Healthcare utilization in the year before PAP	
Mean number of hospitalizations per patient	0.11
Mean number of emergency room visits per patient	0.53

*Age and Residual AHI data are shown as mean (median).

Table 2. Risk-adjusted minimum positive airway pressure (PAP) usage threshold and incremental benefit

	3 months		12 months		24 months	
	Hospitalization	ER visits	Hospitalization	ER visits	Hospitalization	ER visits
Predicted event rate per 1000 patients	32	119	109	471	202	930
Percent reduction per additional hour of PAP usage (95% CI)*	9.7% (8.7, 10.6)	7.4% (6.9, 8.0)	6.8% (6.2, 7.4)	5.8% (5.5, 6.1)	5.4% (4.9, 5.8)	5.1% (4.9, 5.4)
Absolute reduction in events per additional hour of PAP usage, per 1000 patients (95% CI)**	3.1 (2.8, 3.4)	8.9 (8.2, 9.5)	7.4 (6.7, 8.0)	27 (25.9, 29.0)	10.9 (9.9, 11.8)	48 (45.5, 50.3)
Minimum usage for benefit, h/night [#]	3	1	3	1	2	1

CI, Confidence Interval; ER, emergency room.

*calculated as (1-incidence rate ratio)

**Based on the percent reduction and lower/upper confidence limits applied to the predicted event rate

[#]divided into usage categories (ie: 0 is <1, 1 is 1 to <2, 2 is 2 to <3, through to ≥9)

Figures

Figure 1.

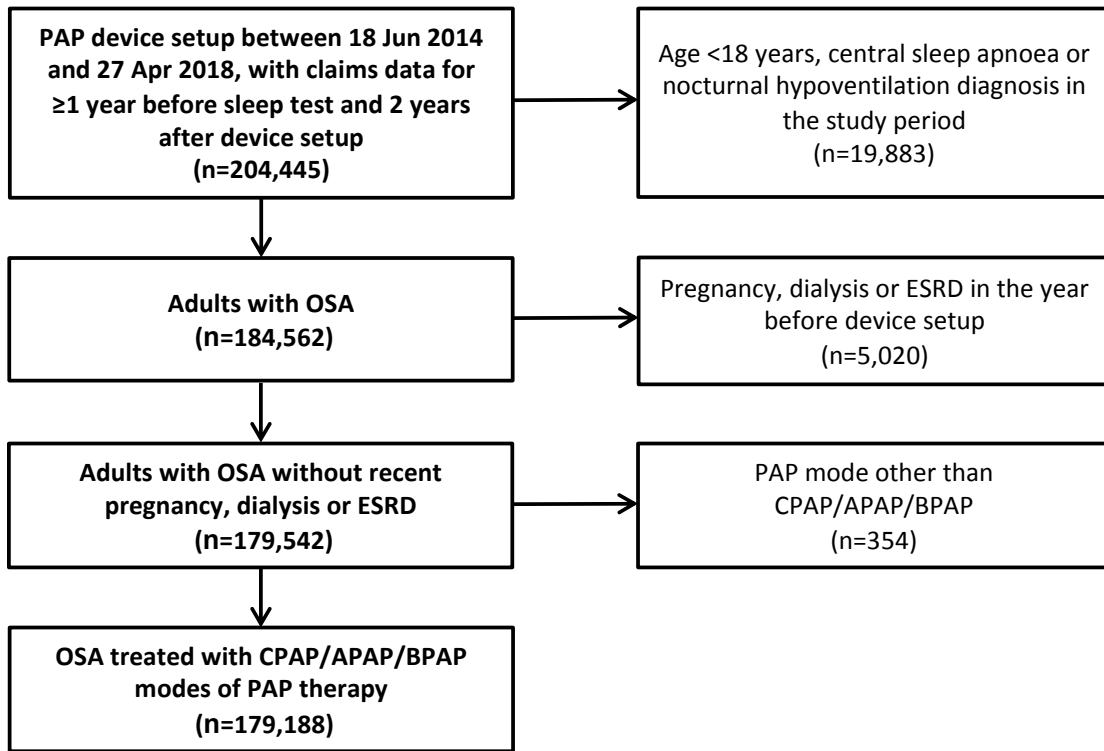


Figure 2.

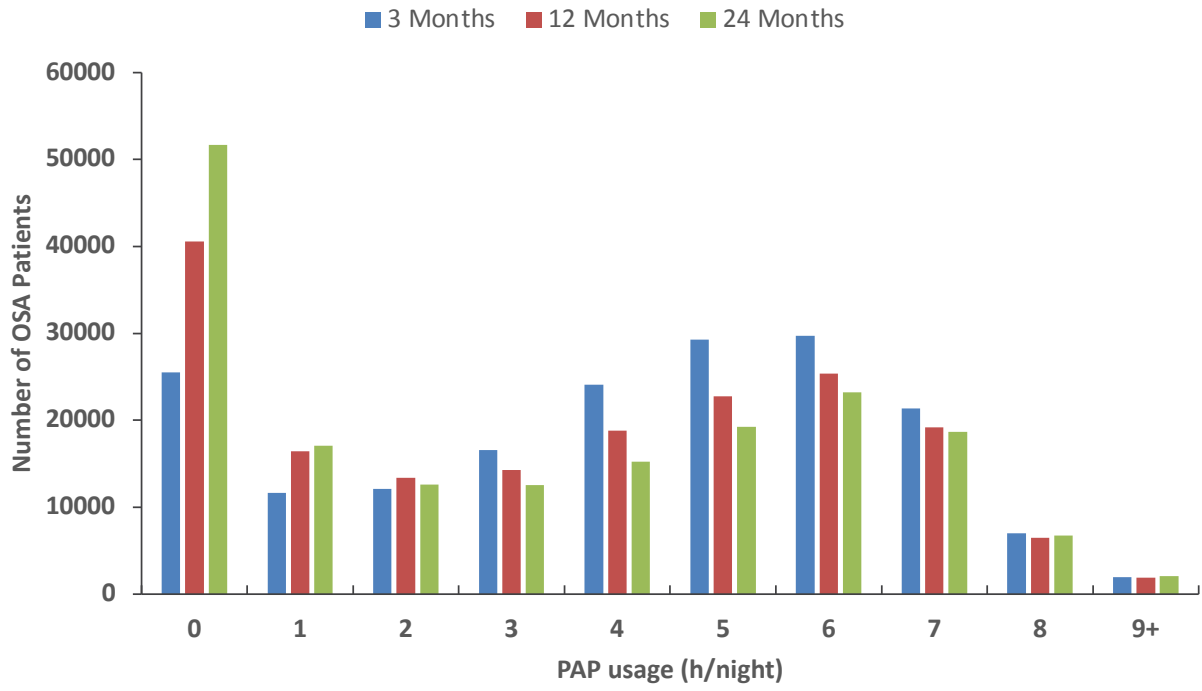


Figure 3.

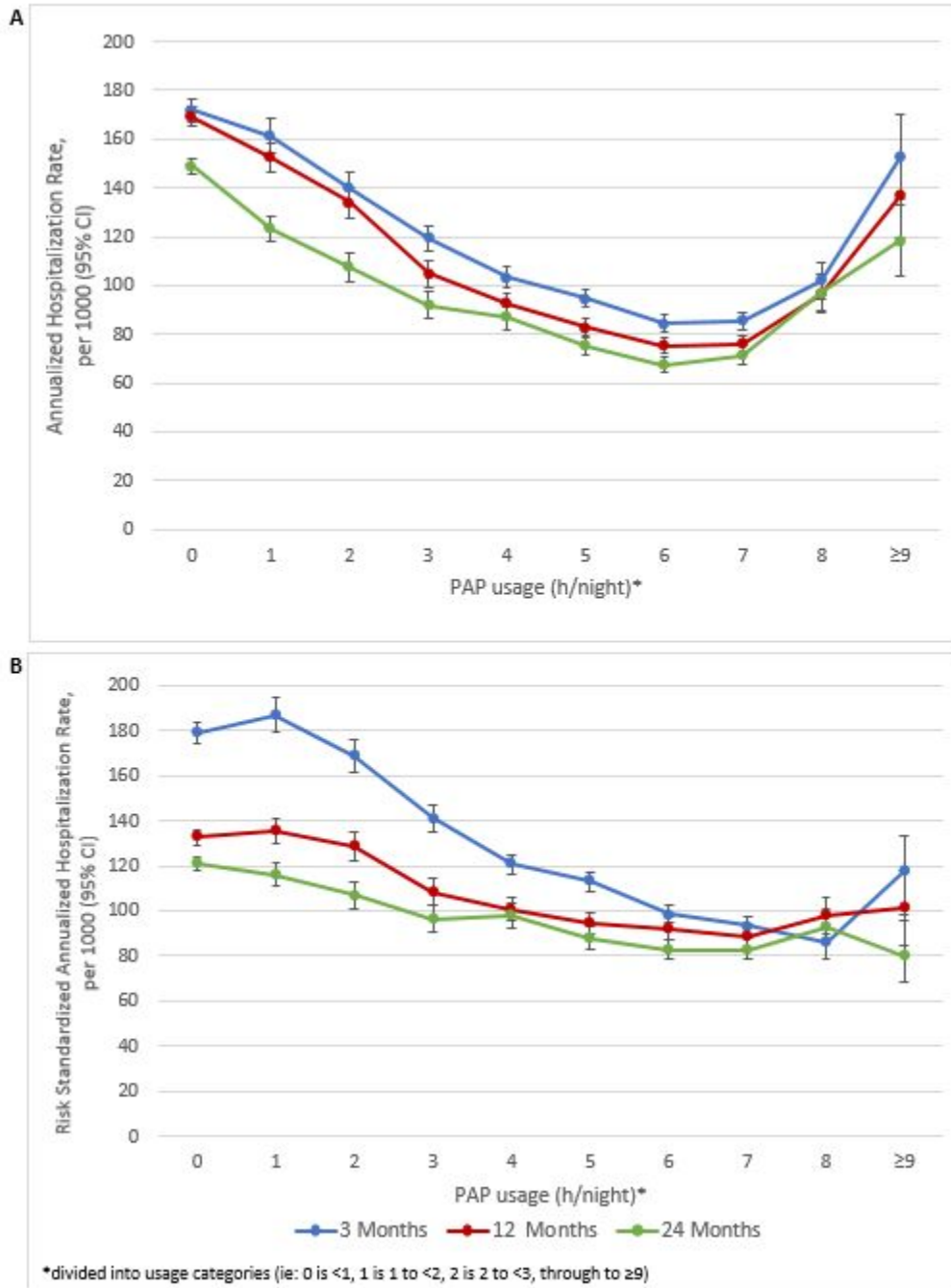


Figure 4.

