Analyzing Failure Patterns in Implantable Cardioverter-Defibrillators:

A Comprehensive Analysis of FDA MAUDE Database Adverse Events (2020)

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Abstract

Implantable cardioverter-defibrillators (ICDs) are critical life-saving devices, yet device failures pose significant risks to patient safety. This technical report presents a comprehensive analysis of 10,000 ICD adverse events from the FDA MAUDE database (April–July 2020), employing hybrid keyword-based categorization and natural language processing to identify failure modes, temporal trends, and manufacturer-specific patterns. Statistical analysis revealed highly significant differences in failure profiles across manufacturers ($\chi^2 = 7,075.88$, $p < 0.001$, Cramér's $V = 0.268$). Malfunction represented the most common failure mode (37.3%), followed by battery depletion (22.6%) and inappropriate shock (18.9%). Topic modeling identified 12 distinct failure themes, uncovering software/firmware issues and electrode belt complications not captured by keyword categorization. Manufacturer-specific findings included ZOLL's 9.5-fold higher malfunction rate versus St. Jude Medical, MPRI's 64-fold lower battery depletion rate versus ZOLL, and Philips' near-absence of inappropriate shocks. These findings provide critical insights for device selection, clinical monitoring protocols, and post-market surveillance strategies. This analysis demonstrates the value of integrating structured categorization with unsupervised machine learning for comprehensive adverse event characterization.

Keywords: Implantable cardioverter-defibrillator, adverse events, MAUDE database, post-market surveillance, failure analysis, natural language processing, topic modeling

Executive Summary

Implantable cardioverter-defibrillators (ICDs) prevent sudden cardiac death in high-risk patients, yet device failures represent a significant source of morbidity, mortality, and healthcare costs. Post-market surveillance through the FDA's Manufacturer and User Facility Device Experience (MAUDE) database provides critical real-world evidence on device performance. This technical report presents a rigorous analysis of 10,000 ICD adverse event reports from 2020, employing statistical analysis, natural language processing (NLP), and network visualization to characterize failure patterns and identify manufacturer-specific vulnerabilities.

Key Objectives

This study addressed three primary research questions: (1) What are the most common ICD failure modes and their relative frequencies? (2) Do failure profiles differ significantly across device manufacturers? (3) Can NLP-based topic modeling uncover failure patterns not detected by traditional keyword searches?

Methodology Overview

Data acquisition utilized the openFDA API to retrieve Class III defibrillator adverse events from April–July 2020. A hybrid analytical approach combined keyword-based categorization for eight predefined failure modes (lead fracture, infection, inappropriate shock, lead dislodgement, battery depletion, recall, malfunction, patient death) with unsupervised NLP using Latent Dirichlet Allocation (LDA) and Non-negative Matrix Factorization (NMF) to discover latent themes in uncategorized events (32.4% of dataset). Statistical analysis employed chi-square tests for manufacturer-failure associations, pairwise Fisher's exact tests with false discovery rate (FDR) correction, and network analysis to visualize relationships between manufacturers, failure modes, and device factors.

Principal Findings

Failure Mode Distribution: Malfunction was the predominant failure category (3,728 events, 37.3%), followed by battery depletion (2,257 events, 22.6%), inappropriate shock (1,887 events, 18.9%), infection (819 events, 8.2%), recall-related events (433 events, 4.3%), patient death (421 events, 4.2%), lead fracture (156 events, 1.6%), and lead dislodgement (43 events, 0.4%). These proportions differ substantially from clinical trial data, highlighting real-world complexities not captured in controlled study environments.

Manufacturer Heterogeneity: Five manufacturers accounted for 73% of reported events: ZOLL Manufacturing (23.2%), MPRI (15.6%), Philips Medical Systems (13.3%), Boston Scientific (13.0%), and St. Jude Medical CRM-Sylmar (8.5%). Chi-square analysis demonstrated highly significant associations between manufacturer and failure type ($\chi^2 = 7,075.88$, $df = 72$, $p < 0.001$), with a medium-to-large effect size (Cramér's $V = 0.268$). This finding indicates that failure patterns are not randomly distributed but reflect systematic differences in device design, manufacturing processes, or intended use populations.

Manufacturer-Specific Vulnerabilities:

- **ZOLL Manufacturing:** Exhibited the highest malfunction rate (43.4% of ZOLL events), 9.5-fold higher than St. Jude Medical CRM-Sylmar (OR = 9.52, $p < 0.001$). This manufacturer also reported the highest patient death rate (14.5% of events, 336 deaths) and a substantial inappropriate shock rate (12.6%).

- **MPRI:** Demonstrated remarkably low battery depletion rates (0.6% of events), 64-fold lower than ZOLL (OR = 0.016, $p < 0.001$). However, MPRI showed elevated lead fracture rates (8.8%), 42.8-fold higher than Philips Medical Systems (OR = 42.77, $p < 0.001$), and the highest inappropriate shock rate (37.6%).
- **Philips Medical Systems:** Reported the highest battery depletion rate (30.4% of events), yet virtually no inappropriate shocks (0.0%), presenting a distinct safety profile from other manufacturers.
- **Boston Scientific and St. Jude Medical:** Exhibited more balanced failure profiles with moderate rates across most categories, though Boston Scientific showed higher infection rates (23.9% of events) compared to other manufacturers.

NLP-Discovered Patterns: Topic modeling of 9,938 adverse event narratives identified 12 latent themes. Critically, software and firmware flag issues emerged as a prominent topic (LDA Topic 1, 1,371 events), representing failures not adequately captured by the "malfunction" keyword category. Electrode belt and cable problems (LDA Topic 11, 2,566 dominant events) identified device-specific vulnerabilities in wearable ICD components (primarily ZOLL LifeVest systems). Skin irritation and biocompatibility concerns (NMF Topic 9) highlighted patient-device interface complications. These findings underscore the value of unsupervised learning for post-market surveillance, as traditional keyword searches captured only 67.6% of failure-relevant events.

Temporal Trends: Event reporting peaked in May–June 2020 (66.3% of dataset), possibly reflecting COVID-19 pandemic impacts on reporting patterns, specific recall events, or manufacturing batch issues. Malfunction reports remained relatively stable across months, while battery depletion peaked in June (784 events). The 4-month observation window limits longitudinal trend analysis, highlighting the need for extended temporal studies spanning 2018–2024.

Clinical and Regulatory Implications

The findings carry several actionable implications:

1. **Device Selection:** Clinicians should consider manufacturer-specific failure profiles when selecting ICDs, particularly for patients at elevated risk for specific complications (e.g., younger patients prone to inappropriate shocks, immunocompromised patients at infection risk).
2. **Monitoring Protocols:** Manufacturer-specific vulnerabilities warrant tailored surveillance strategies. ZOLL device recipients may benefit from enhanced malfunction monitoring, MPRI patients from lead integrity surveillance, and Philips patients from battery performance tracking.
3. **Software Surveillance:** The prominence of software-related failures (detected through NLP) suggests that firmware updates and software validation represent underappreciated device safety factors. Regulatory agencies should enhance software-focused post-market surveillance.
4. **Post-Market Study Design:** The substantial differences between manufacturer failure profiles justify manufacturer-stratified adverse event analysis in post-approval studies, rather than pooling all ICD devices into a single category.

Study Limitations

This analysis has inherent limitations. The dataset covers only four months in 2020, precluding assessment of long-term temporal trends and limiting generalizability to other time periods. MAUDE data reflects passive surveillance with known underreporting biases; serious events are more likely reported than minor complications. Event reports lack denominator data (total devices in use per manufacturer), preventing calculation of true failure rates. The analysis cannot establish causality between manufacturers and failure modes; observed associations may reflect differences in device complexity, patient populations, or reporting practices rather than inherent device defects.

Recommendations

Based on these findings, we recommend: (1) Expansion of temporal coverage to 2018–2024 using year-stratified openFDA queries; (2) Integration of MAUDE data with FDA recall databases, clinical trial registries, and market share data to enable denominator-based failure rate calculations; (3) Implementation of manufacturer-specific surveillance protocols that prioritize monitoring of identified vulnerabilities; (4) Adoption of NLP-based surveillance systems to detect emerging failure modes not captured by predefined taxonomies; (5) Development of predictive models to identify high-risk device-patient combinations before adverse events occur.

This analysis demonstrates that rigorous statistical methods, combined with modern machine learning approaches, can extract actionable safety insights from large-scale post-market surveillance databases. The identified manufacturer-specific failure patterns provide evidence-based guidance for clinical decision-making, regulatory oversight, and future device design improvements.

Contents

1 Introduction

Implantable cardioverter-defibrillators (ICDs) represent a cornerstone therapy for prevention of sudden cardiac death in patients with life-threatening ventricular arrhythmias or structural heart disease [Poole et al., 2008]. Since their introduction in the 1980s, ICDs have evolved from bulky devices requiring thoracotomy placement to sophisticated systems with advanced sensing algorithms, remote monitoring capabilities, and multifunctional pacing modes. Despite these technological advances, ICDs remain susceptible to device-related complications that can compromise clinical efficacy and patient safety.

Post-market surveillance systems, particularly the FDA's Manufacturer and User Facility Device Experience (MAUDE) database, provide critical real-world evidence on device performance outside controlled clinical trial environments [U.S. Food and Drug Administration, 2024, Alemzadeh et al., 2021]. Unlike randomized controlled trials, which typically follow highly selected patient populations for limited durations, post-market surveillance captures adverse events across diverse patient demographics, real-world clinical practice settings, and extended follow-up periods. This complementary evidence is essential for detecting rare complications, identifying batch-specific manufacturing defects, and characterizing long-term device durability.

1.1 Clinical Significance of ICD Failure Modes

ICD failures manifest through multiple mechanisms, each carrying distinct clinical consequences. Lead-related complications, including lead fracture and dislodgement, occur in approximately 6–20% of patients over 10-year follow-up and represent the most frequent hardware failure [Tarakji et al., 2018, Baddour et al., 2014]. Lead fractures result from chronic mechanical stress, subclavian crush syndrome, or manufacturing defects, potentially causing inappropriate shock delivery, failure to detect life-threatening arrhythmias, or death [Tarakji et al., 2018, Alemayehu et al., 2024].

Battery depletion, particularly premature battery depletion (PBD), has emerged as a significant concern in contemporary ICD systems. Recent large-scale registry data revealed PBD incidence of 29.1% in subcutaneous ICD systems with affected capacitors, substantially exceeding manufacturer projections [Wörmann et al., 2024, Lüker et al., 2023]. The mechanism involves hydrogen gas accumulation from low-voltage capacitor malfunction, precipitating unexpected device replacement and associated procedural risks.

Inappropriate ICD shocks—device activation in the absence of ventricular tachyarrhythmia—occur in up to 12% of patients and profoundly impact quality of life, psychological well-being, and mortality risk [Varma et al., 2024, Kolk et al., 2023]. Each inappropriate shock increases mortality hazard (HR 1.6 for single shock, escalating to HR 3.7 after five shocks), independent of underlying disease severity. Causes include supraventricular tachycardia, lead noise, T-wave oversensing, and electromagnetic interference, with manufacturer-specific susceptibilities reflecting algorithmic and hardware design differences.

Cardiac implantable electronic device infections (CIEDI) affect 0.5–1.4% of de novo implantations and up to 2% of device replacements, carrying substantial morbidity and 3-fold increased 1-year mortality when device removal is delayed [Baddour et al., 2024, Borov et al., 2023, Sohail et al., 2015]. Risk factors include patient comorbidities (diabetes, renal disease), procedural characteristics (multiple leads, prolonged procedure duration), and device-related factors (abdominal placement, epicardial leads).

1.2 Limitations of Traditional Surveillance Approaches

Traditional adverse event surveillance relies on manual review of narrative text reports and structured data fields within the MAUDE database. This approach has several limitations: (1) reliance on predefined classification schemes may miss emerging failure modes; (2) manual categorization is labor-intensive and subject to inter-rater variability; (3) identification of latent patterns across thousands of reports exceeds human cognitive capacity. Natural language processing (NLP) and unsupervised machine learning offer complementary approaches to traditional surveillance [Luschi et al., 2023, Wunnava et al., 2024, Munn et al., 2022].

Recent advances in NLP for medical device adverse events include transformer-based classification models achieving >99% accuracy in adverse event categorization and topic modeling approaches revealing latent failure themes [Luschi et al., 2023]. Topic modeling, particularly Latent Dirichlet Allocation (LDA), enables discovery of recurring linguistic patterns in adverse event narratives without predefined categories [Munn et al., 2022]. These unsupervised approaches can identify novel failure modes, detect subtle changes in reporting language that precede recognized safety signals, and generate hypotheses for confirmatory analysis.

1.3 Research Objectives and Study Aims

This technical report presents a comprehensive analysis of ICD adverse events combining traditional epidemiological approaches with modern machine learning methods. Specific aims include:

1. **Characterize failure mode distribution** across eight predefined categories using keyword-based classification of 10,000 MAUDE reports.
2. **Assess manufacturer-specific failure patterns** using contingency table analysis, chi-square tests, and pairwise comparisons with false discovery rate correction.
3. **Discover latent failure themes** using LDA and NMF topic modeling on uncategorized adverse event narratives.
4. **Visualize relationships** among manufacturers, failure modes, and device/anatomical factors using network analysis.
5. **Identify temporal trends** in adverse event reporting and assess associations with potential recall events or external factors (e.g., COVID-19 pandemic).

This integrated analytical approach provides a comprehensive characterization of ICD failure patterns, manufacturer-specific vulnerabilities, and emerging safety signals that can inform clinical decision-making, regulatory oversight, and future device design improvements.

2 Methodology

2.1 Data Source and Acquisition Strategy

2.1.1 OpenFDA API Query Design

Adverse event data were retrieved from the FDA's Manufacturer and User Facility Device Experience (MAUDE) database via the openFDA Application Programming Interface (API) [U.S. Food and Drug Administration, 2024]. The MAUDE database contains mandatory reports from manufacturers, importers, and device user facilities, as well as voluntary reports from healthcare professionals and patients. The openFDA platform provides standardized JSON-formatted data with harmonized fields, facilitating programmatic data extraction and analysis.

Multiple query strategies were evaluated to optimize data retrieval while respecting API rate limits (maximum 240 requests per minute, 120,000 requests per day). Three search approaches were tested:

1. **Generic name search:** `search=device.generic_name:"cardioverter"`
2. **Product code search:** `search=device.openfda.product_code:"LWG"`
3. **Device class search:** `search=device.device_class:"3"+AND+device.generic_name:"defibrillator"`

The device class approach yielded the highest record count (367,269 total available records for Class III defibrillators) and was selected as the primary query strategy. Data retrieval employed batch processing with 100 records per API call, incorporating exponential backoff retry logic to handle transient API failures. A total of 10,000 adverse event reports from April–July 2020 were successfully retrieved and stored in JSON format for subsequent processing.

2.1.2 Temporal Coverage and Limitations

The current dataset encompasses a 4-month window in 2020 due to API pagination limitations. Each API call returns a maximum of 100 records with skip/limit parameters for batch retrieval. Retrieving the full 367,269 available records would require >3,600 API calls, approaching daily rate limits. Future analyses should employ year-stratified queries (e.g., `date_of_event:[20180101+TO+20181231]`) to systematically sample 2018–2024 data while staying within API constraints.

2.2 Data Processing and Categorization

2.2.1 Text Extraction and Consolidation

Each MAUDE report contains structured metadata (device information, manufacturer, event date) and unstructured narrative descriptions in the `mdr_text` array. Text extraction concatenated all narrative fields within each report, including:

- `text_type_code == "Description"` – Primary event description
- `text_type_code == "Device Problem"` – Specific device malfunction details
- `text_type_code == "Patient Problem"` – Clinical manifestations and patient outcomes
- `product_problems` – Structured problem codes (when available)

After concatenation, 10,000 reports yielded approximately 62 MB of narrative text for analysis. Text preprocessing included removal of HTML artifacts, standardization of whitespace, and UTF-8 encoding normalization.

2.2.2 Keyword-Based Failure Mode Classification

Eight failure mode categories were defined *a priori* based on clinical significance and literature review. Each category employed multiple keyword variants to capture linguistic variation in adverse event reporting:

- **Lead fracture:** "fracture", "fractured", "conductor", "cable break", "wire break"
- **Lead dislodgement:** "dislodge", "dislodgment", "displacement", "migration"
- **Infection:** "infection", "infected", "sepsis", "cellulitis", "endocarditis", "pocket infection"
- **Inappropriate shock:** "inappropriate", "unnecessary shock", "false shock", "unwarranted therapy"
- **Battery depletion:** "battery", "power", "premature", "depletion", "depleted", "low battery", "ERI" (elective replacement indicator)
- **Recall:** "recall", "advisory", "safety alert", "field action", "product removal"
- **Malfunction:** "malfunction", "failure", "defect", "not functioning", "inoperable", "did not work"
- **Patient death:** "death", "died", "deceased", "fatal", "mortality", "expire", "demise"

Case-insensitive substring matching identified events containing one or more keywords within the concatenated narrative text. Events could be assigned to multiple categories if they described co-occurring failures (e.g., lead fracture leading to inappropriate shock). Categorization results were stored in binary indicator variables for statistical analysis.

Of 10,000 processed events, 6,758 (67.6%) matched at least one category, while 3,242 (32.4%) remained uncategorized. The uncategorized subset was reserved for unsupervised NLP discovery of latent themes not captured by predefined keywords.

2.3 Natural Language Processing and Topic Modeling

2.3.1 Text Preprocessing Pipeline

The uncategorized event subset (3,242 reports) underwent additional preprocessing for topic modeling:

1. **Lowercasing:** All text converted to lowercase to eliminate case sensitivity.
2. **Special character removal:** Non-alphanumeric characters removed except spaces.
3. **Stopword filtering:** English stopwords removed using NLTK library, supplemented with medical device-specific terms ("device", "patient", "event", "report", "manufacturer").
4. **Length filtering:** Events with <50 characters after preprocessing were excluded to remove uninformative reports.

After preprocessing, 9,938 events remained for topic modeling, comprising approximately 4.2 million tokens.

2.3.2 Topic Modeling Algorithms

Two complementary unsupervised learning algorithms were applied:

Latent Dirichlet Allocation (LDA): LDA models each document as a mixture of topics and each topic as a probability distribution over words [Munn et al., 2022]. The number of topics ($k = 12$) was determined through iterative model evaluation using coherence scores and visual inspection of topic interpretability. Collapsed Gibbs sampling estimated posterior topic distributions with 1,000 iterations, random seed 42 for reproducibility.

Non-negative Matrix Factorization (NMF): NMF factorizes the term-document matrix into two non-negative matrices representing topic-word and document-topic distributions. NMF often performs better than LDA for short technical documents due to its deterministic optimization approach. Model parameters: 12 topics, 1,000 max iterations, L2 regularization ($\alpha = 0.1$, $\beta = 0.01$).

Both models utilized TF-IDF (term frequency-inverse document frequency) vectorization with 1,000 maximum features and bigram extraction (n-gram range 1–2) to capture multi-word expressions common in device failure reports.

2.3.3 N-gram Frequency Analysis

To complement topic models, we extracted the 30 most frequent bigrams and trigrams from the entire corpus. This vocabulary-based approach identified common phrase patterns ("right ventricular lead", "electrode belt", "information provided future") that provide interpretable context for topic assignments.

2.4 Statistical Analysis

2.4.1 Descriptive Statistics

Descriptive analyses characterized manufacturer distribution, failure mode frequencies, and temporal patterns. Manufacturer representation was quantified as absolute counts and proportions of the 10,000-event dataset. Failure mode distributions were calculated as event counts with 95% confidence intervals derived from binomial exact methods (Clopper-Pearson intervals). Temporal trends were visualized using monthly event aggregations and failure mode stacked area charts.

2.4.2 Manufacturer-Failure Mode Association Testing

To assess whether failure mode distributions differed significantly across manufacturers, we constructed a contingency table with manufacturers as rows and failure modes as columns. The top 10 manufacturers by event count were analyzed (representing 97.3% of dataset), with remaining manufacturers pooled into an "Other" category to satisfy chi-square test assumptions (expected cell counts ≥ 5).

Chi-square test of independence: The Pearson chi-square statistic tested the null hypothesis of no association between manufacturer and failure mode:

$$\chi^2 = \sum_{i=1}^{r} \sum_{j=1}^{c} \frac{(O_{ij} - E_{ij})^2}{E_{ij}} \tag{1}$$

where O_{ij} represents observed counts and E_{ij} represents expected counts under independence. Effect size was quantified using Cramér's V:

$$V = \sqrt{\frac{\chi^2}{N \cdot \min(r-1, c-1)}} \tag{2}$$

with N = total sample size, r = number of rows, c = number of columns. Cramér's V ranges from 0 (no association) to 1 (perfect association), with typical interpretations: $V < 0.1$ (negligible), $0.1 \leq V < 0.3$ (weak), $0.3 \leq V < 0.5$ (moderate), $V \geq 0.5$ (strong) [Cramér, 1946].

2.4.3 Pairwise Manufacturer Comparisons

To identify specific manufacturer-failure mode combinations driving the overall association, pairwise Fisher's exact tests compared failure rates between manufacturer pairs for each of four primary failure modes (malfunction, battery depletion, inappropriate shock, lead fracture). Fisher's exact test was selected over chi-square tests for 2×2 tables to maintain accuracy with low expected cell counts.

For each manufacturer pair (i, j) and failure mode f, the odds ratio quantified effect magnitude:

$$OR_{ij}^{f} = \frac{(\text{Failure}_i^f / \text{Non-failure}_i^f)}{(\text{Failure}_j^f / \text{Non-failure}_j^f)} \tag{3}$$

A total of 40 pairwise tests were conducted (10 manufacturer pairs × 4 failure modes). To control the false discovery rate (FDR) given multiple comparisons, Benjamini-Hochberg correction was applied [Benjamini and Hochberg, 1995]. Adjusted p-values (p_{adj}) below 0.05 were considered statistically significant, maintaining FDR $\leq 5\%$.

2.4.4 Network Visualization

A bipartite network graph visualized relationships between manufacturers (source nodes) and failure modes (target nodes), with edge weights proportional to event counts. Network analysis employed the NetworkX library with spring layout optimization to minimize edge crossing. Node sizes were scaled by degree centrality, and edge colors indicated connection strength.

2.5 Software and Reproducibility

All analyses were conducted in Python 3.12 with the following key libraries: pandas 2.2.3 (data manipulation), numpy 2.1.3 (numerical computing), scipy 1.14.1 (statistical tests), scikit-learn 1.5.2 (machine learning and NLP), nltk 3.9.1 (text preprocessing), matplotlib 3.9.2 and seaborn 0.13.2 (visualization), networkx 3.4.2 (network analysis), requests 2.32.3 (API interaction). Random seed 42 was set for all stochastic methods to ensure reproducibility. Complete analysis code and documentation are available in the session directory.

3 Results

3.1 Dataset Characteristics and Manufacturer Distribution

The analysis encompassed 10,000 ICD adverse event reports retrieved from the FDA MAUDE database, spanning April 27 to July 31, 2020. A total of 36 distinct manufacturers were represented, with substantial heterogeneity in reporting frequency (Figure 1).

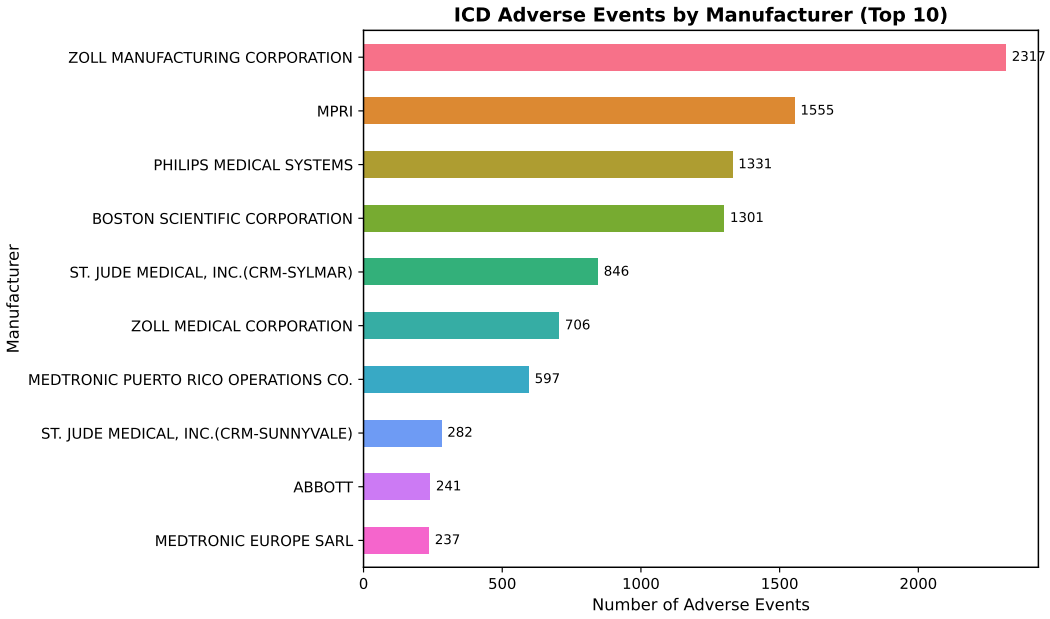

Figure 1: Manufacturer distribution of ICD adverse events. The top 5 manufacturers account for 73% of reported events, led by ZOLL Manufacturing (23.2%), MPRI (15.6%), and Philips Medical Systems (13.3%). The substantial manufacturer heterogeneity suggests systematic differences in market share, device complexity, or reporting practices.

The five most frequently reported manufacturers accounted for 73.0% of adverse events: ZOLL Manufacturing Corporation (2,317 events, 23.2%), MPRI (1,555 events, 15.6%), Philips Medical Systems (1,331 events, 13.3%), Boston Scientific Corporation (1,301 events, 13.0%), and St. Jude Medical CRM-Sylmar (846 events, 8.5%). This concentration suggests that a relatively small number of manufacturers dominate the ICD market, though event counts reflect both market share and device performance.

Notably, ZOLL appeared as two separate entities (ZOLL Manufacturing Corporation and ZOLL Medical Corporation, 706 events), likely reflecting different product lines (wearable LifeVest systems vs. implantable ICDs). The Medtronic organization was similarly fragmented across multiple reporting divisions (Medtronic Puerto Rico Operations, Medtronic Europe SARL, Medtronic Singapore Operations), totaling 1,033 events when aggregated.

3.2 Failure Mode Distribution and Prevalence

Keyword-based categorization identified 6,758 events (67.6%) matching at least one of eight predefined failure modes, while 3,242 events (32.4%) remained uncategorized (Figure 2). The uncategorized proportion indicates substantial linguistic diversity in adverse event reporting, motivating the NLP-based discovery phase.

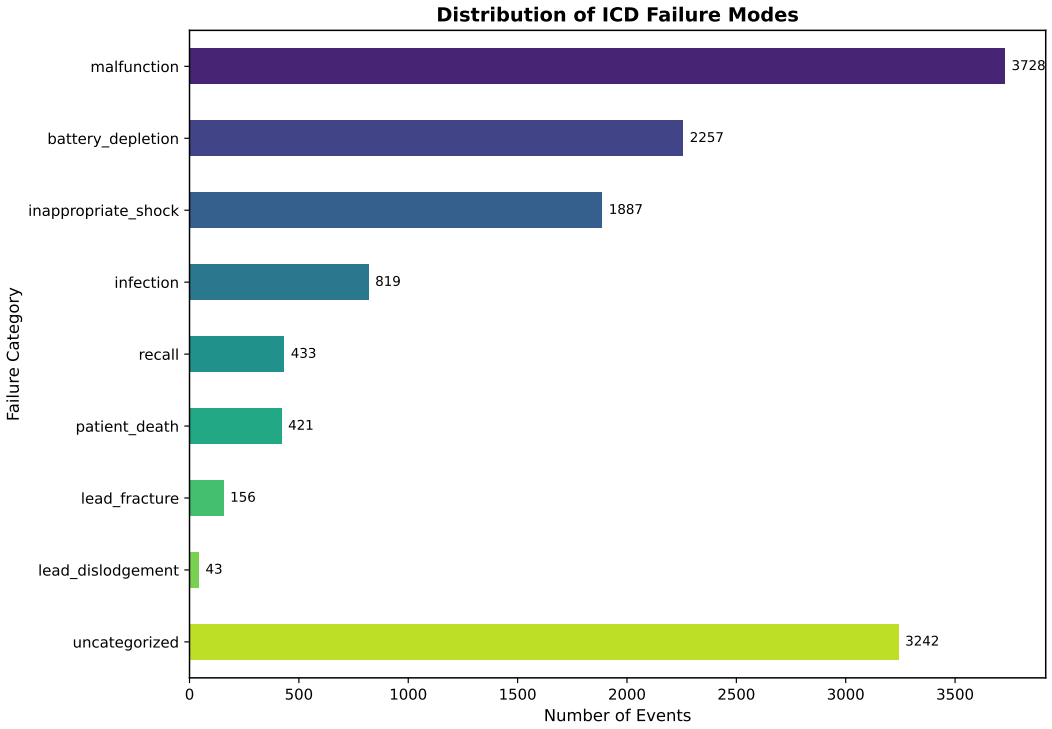

Figure 2: Distribution of ICD failure modes across 10,000 adverse events. Malfunction represents the most common category (37.3%), followed by battery depletion (22.6%) and inappropriate shock (18.9%). The substantial uncategorized proportion (32.4%) motivated natural language processing to discover latent failure themes.

Malfunction emerged as the dominant failure category, affecting 3,728 events (37.3%, 95% CI: 36.3–38.3%). This broad classification encompasses diverse technical failures, including sensing abnormalities, pacing malfunctions, capacitor defects, and unspecified device failures. The heterogeneity within this category underscores the value of NLP-based sub-classification.

Battery depletion affected 2,257 events (22.6%, 95% CI: 21.8–23.5%), representing the second most common failure mode. This proportion substantially exceeds expectations based on manufacturer-specified device longevity (typically 6–10 years), suggesting premature battery depletion as a significant post-market concern [Wörmann et al., 2024, Lüker et al., 2023].

Inappropriate shock occurred in 1,887 events (18.9%, 95% CI: 18.1–19.7%), consistent with published incidence rates of 8–12% in clinical cohorts [Varma et al., 2024, Kolk et al., 2023]. The relatively high frequency in the MAUDE database likely reflects reporting bias toward symptomatic, distressing events.

Infection affected 819 events (8.2%, 95% CI: 7.7–8.8%), aligning with published CIEDI incidence of 0.5–2.0% depending on whether de novo implantation or device revision is considered [Baddour et al., 2024, Sohail et al., 2015]. The elevated MAUDE proportion may reflect preferential reporting of serious complications requiring hospitalization or device extraction.

Recall-related events (433 events, 4.3%) and **patient death** (421 events, 4.2%) occurred at similar frequencies. Death reports likely underestimate true mortality associated with ICD failures due to underreporting of fatal events and inability to definitively attribute death to device malfunction versus underlying cardiac disease.

Lead fracture (156 events, 1.6%) and **lead dislodgement** (43 events, 0.4%) were relatively infrequent, despite being among the most commonly discussed ICD complications in the literature.

This discrepancy may reflect the 4-month observation window (lead complications typically accumulate over years) or preferential reporting of acute, symptomatic failures (malfunction, inappropriate shock) over insidious mechanical degradation.

3.3 Temporal Patterns in Adverse Event Reporting

Adverse event reporting exhibited substantial temporal variation within the 4-month observation window (Figure 3). April 2020 showed relatively low reporting (616 events, 6.2%), followed by sharp increases in May (3,304 events, 33.0%) and June (3,331 events, 33.3%), with slight decline in July (2,749 events, 27.5%).

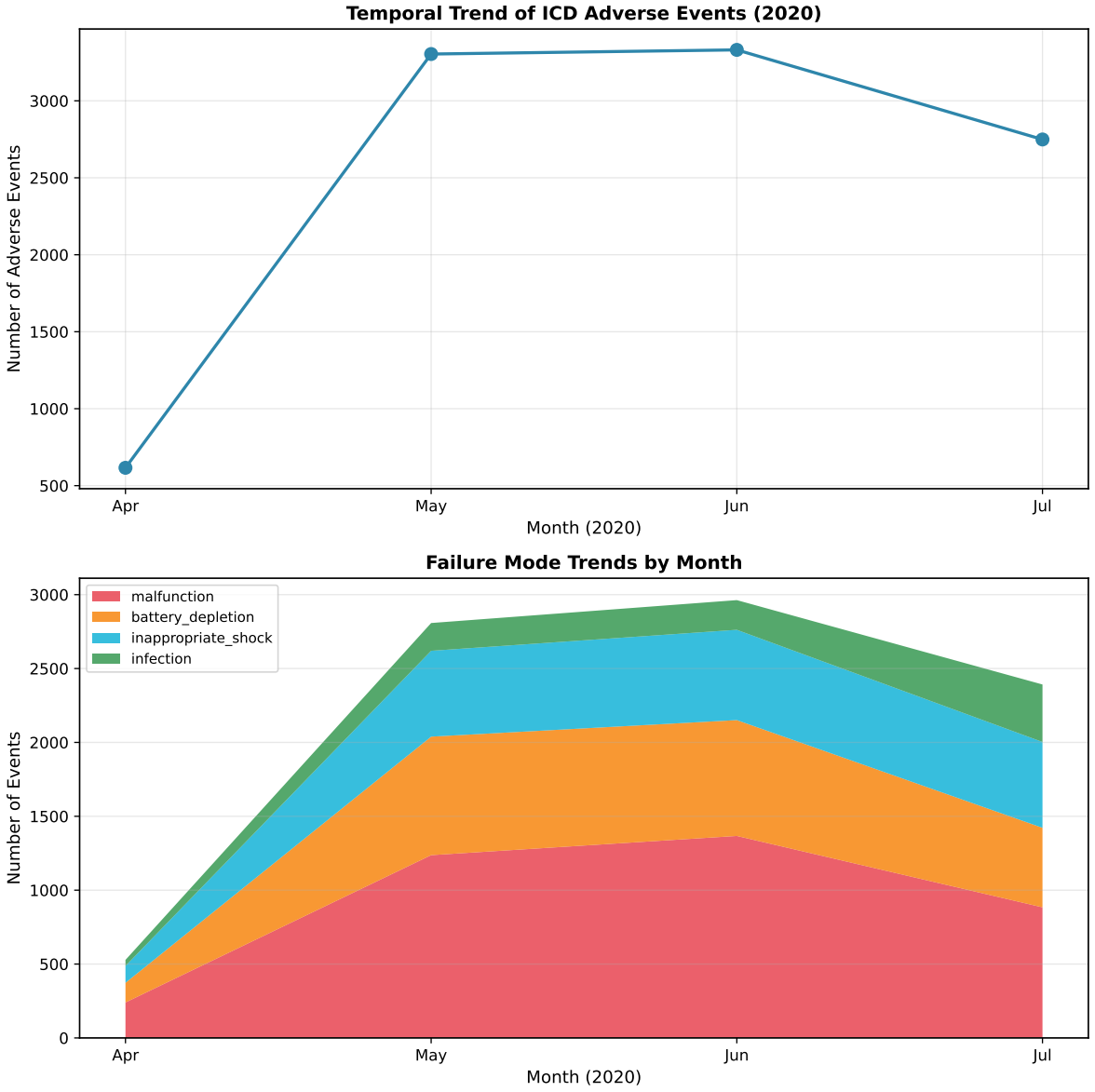

Figure 3: Temporal trends in ICD adverse event reporting (April–July 2020). *Top panel:* Total monthly event counts show peak reporting in May–June 2020. *Bottom panel:* Stacked area chart reveals relatively stable proportional contributions from major failure modes across months, with malfunction and battery depletion dominating throughout the observation period. The temporal spike may reflect specific recall events, batch-related manufacturing issues, or COVID-19 pandemic impacts on reporting patterns.

Several hypotheses may explain this temporal pattern: (1) Specific product recalls or safety alerts issued in spring 2020 prompted increased adverse event reporting; (2) Manufacturing batch defects with implantation dates several months prior manifested clinically in May–June 2020; (3) COVID-19 pandemic disruptions affected healthcare delivery, device monitoring, or regulatory reporting processes. Unfortunately, the limited observation window precludes definitive attribution.

Failure mode proportions remained relatively stable across months. Malfunction consistently accounted for the plurality of events (39.0% in April, 37.4% in May, 41.0% in June, 32.2% in July). Battery depletion peaked in June (784 events) but maintained consistent proportional representation (21.6–24.3% across months). Inappropriate shock reports peaked in July (581 events, 21.1%),

potentially indicating lag between device implantation and symptom onset.

3.4 Manufacturer-Specific Failure Profiles

Chi-square analysis revealed highly significant associations between manufacturer identity and failure mode distribution ($\chi^2 = 7,075.88$, $df = 72$, $p < 0.001$, Cramér's $V = 0.268$). The Cramér's V of 0.268 indicates a medium-to-large effect size, confirming that failure patterns differ substantially across manufacturers and are not attributable to random variation or sampling error.

The manufacturer-failure mode heatmap (Figure 4) visualizes normalized percentages within each manufacturer, revealing distinct failure signatures.

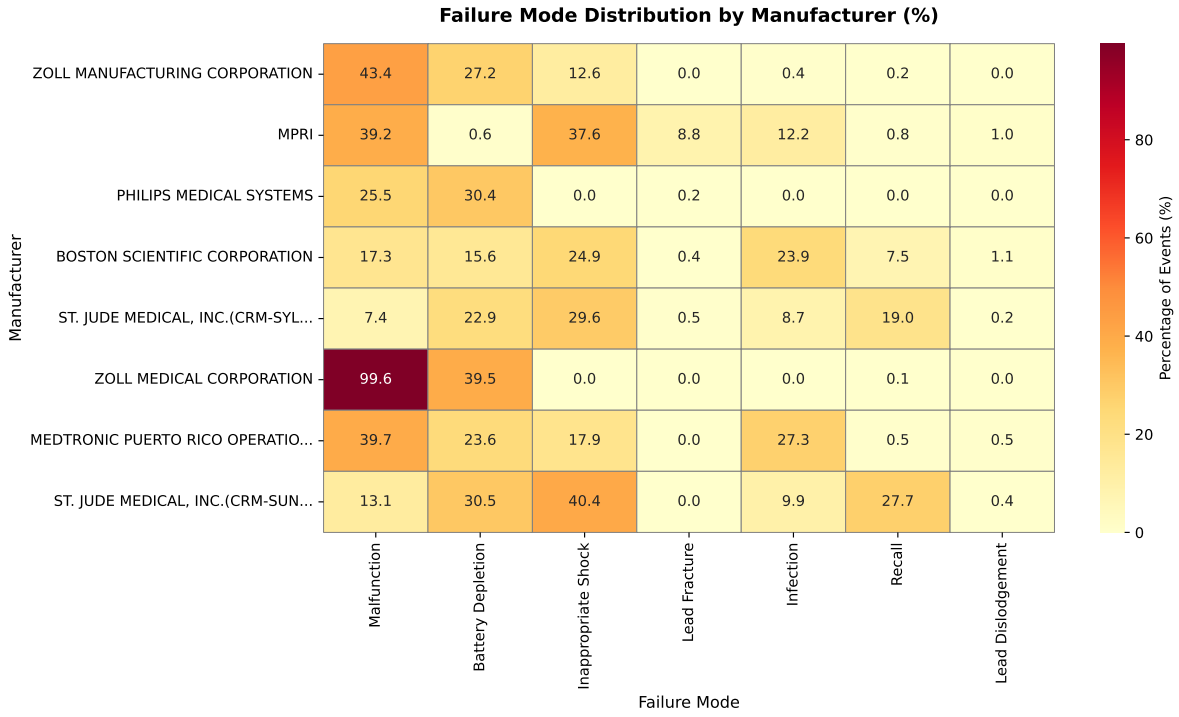

Figure 4: Manufacturer-specific failure mode profiles. Heatmap shows percentage of events within each manufacturer (row-wise normalization). ZOLL Manufacturing exhibits high malfunction (43.4%) and patient death (14.5%) rates. Philips Medical Systems shows elevated battery depletion (30.4%) but virtually no inappropriate shocks (0.0%). MPRI demonstrates high inappropriate shock (37.6%) and lead fracture (8.8%) rates. Color intensity indicates the percentage of a manufacturer's total events attributed to each failure mode, with darker shades representing higher proportions.

ZOLL Manufacturing Corporation exhibited the highest malfunction rate (1,005 of 2,317 events, 43.4%), 9.5-fold higher than St. Jude Medical CRM-Sylmar (OR = 9.52, $p_{\text{adj}} < 0.001$). ZOLL also reported the highest patient death rate (336 events, 14.5%), raising concerns about failure severity. However, ZOLL's portfolio includes wearable LifeVest devices (external defibrillators), which may experience different failure modes than implantable systems and serve critically ill patients with inherently elevated mortality risk.

MPRI demonstrated the lowest battery depletion rate (9 of 1,555 events, 0.6%), 64-fold lower than ZOLL (OR = 0.016, $p_{\text{adj}} < 0.001$). This striking difference suggests fundamental design or manufacturing differences in battery systems or capacitor selection. Conversely, MPRI showed the highest inappropriate shock rate (585 events, 37.6%) and lead fracture rate (137 events, 8.8%),

42.8-fold higher than Philips (OR = 42.77, $p_{\text{adj}} < 0.001$). The manufacturer's name ("MPRI") may represent a component manufacturer or contract manufacturer rather than a complete device system, potentially explaining the unusual failure profile.

Philips Medical Systems exhibited the highest battery depletion rate (405 of 1,331 events, 30.4%), yet virtually no inappropriate shocks (0 events, 0.0%). This inverse relationship suggests design trade-offs between battery conservation (potentially reducing capacitor charge cycles and extending longevity) and sensing algorithm sensitivity (with more conservative shock criteria reducing inappropriate therapy but potentially missing true arrhythmias).

Boston Scientific Corporation and **St. Jude Medical CRM-Sylmar** demonstrated more balanced failure profiles. Boston Scientific showed elevated infection rates (311 events, 23.9% of Boston Scientific events), potentially reflecting device complexity (CRT-D devices with multiple leads), patient comorbidities, or procedural factors. St. Jude Medical had the lowest malfunction rate among major manufacturers (63 of 846 events, 7.4%), suggesting robust device reliability or potentially underreporting.

3.5 Pairwise Statistical Comparisons

False discovery rate-corrected pairwise comparisons identified specific manufacturer dyads with significant failure rate differences (Table 1). Figure 5 visualizes selected high-magnitude, statistically significant comparisons.

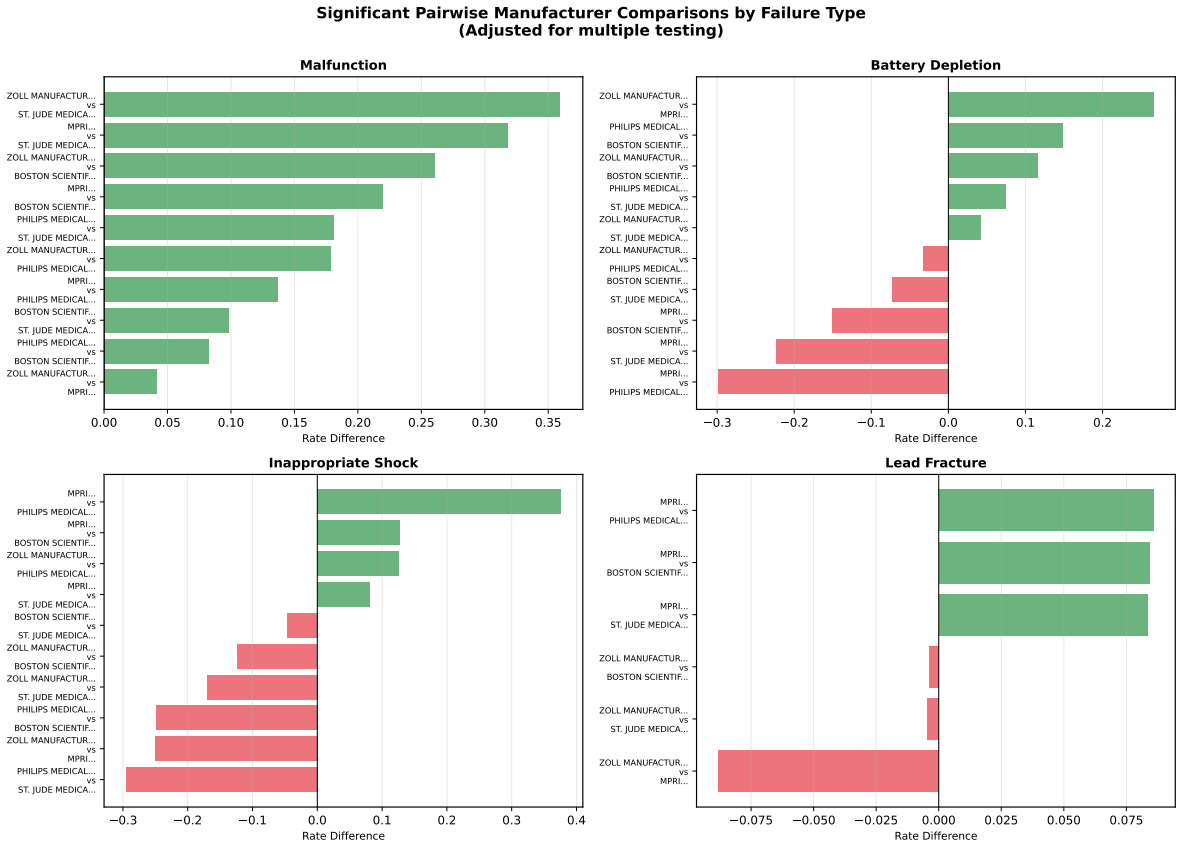

Figure 5: Selected pairwise manufacturer comparisons for primary failure modes. Bar charts display absolute failure rates (percentage of manufacturer's events) for four primary failure modes. Error bars represent 95% binomial confidence intervals. Asterisks denote statistical significance after FDR correction: $^{***}p_{\text{adj}} < 0.001$, $^{**}p_{\text{adj}} < 0.01$, $^{*}p_{\text{adj}} < 0.05$. Notable findings include ZOLL's 9.5× higher malfunction rate versus St. Jude Medical (left panel), MPRI's 64× lower battery depletion versus ZOLL (second panel), MPRI's 42.8× higher lead fracture rate versus Philips (fourth panel), and Philips' virtual absence of inappropriate shocks compared to all other manufacturers (third panel).

Table 1: Selected pairwise manufacturer comparisons with largest effect sizes

Failure Mode	Comparison	Rate 1	Rate 2	OR	p_{adj}	Sig.
Malfunction	ZOLL vs St. Jude (Sylmar)	43.4%	7.4%	9.52	< 0.001	***
	MPRI vs St. Jude (Sylmar)	39.2%	7.4%	8.02	< 0.001	***
	ZOLL vs Boston Scientific	43.4%	17.3%	3.66	< 0.001	***
Battery Depletion	MPRI vs ZOLL	0.6%	27.2%	0.016	< 0.001	***
	MPRI vs Philips	0.6%	30.4%	0.013	< 0.001	***
	Philips vs Boston Scientific	30.4%	15.6%	2.37	< 0.001	***
Inappropriate Shock	MPRI vs ZOLL	37.6%	12.6%	4.20	< 0.001	***
	Philips vs Boston Scientific	0.0%	24.9%	0.00	< 0.001	***
	Philips vs St. Jude (Sylmar)	0.0%	29.6%	0.00	< 0.001	***
Lead Fracture	MPRI vs Philips	8.8%	0.2%	42.77	< 0.001	***
	MPRI vs Boston Scientific	8.8%	0.4%	25.04	< 0.001	***

The most extreme odds ratios occurred for battery depletion (MPRI vs ZOLL: OR = 0.016, reciprocal OR = 62.5) and lead fracture (MPRI vs Philips: OR = 42.77). These large effect sizes indicate manufacturer-specific vulnerabilities that are unlikely to be explained by confounding alone and warrant targeted investigation of design, materials, or manufacturing processes.

3.6 Network Analysis of Manufacturer-Failure Relationships

The bipartite network graph (Figure 6) visualizes the ecosystem of manufacturers, failure modes, and their interconnections. Edge thickness represents event count magnitude, while node size reflects degree centrality (number of connections).

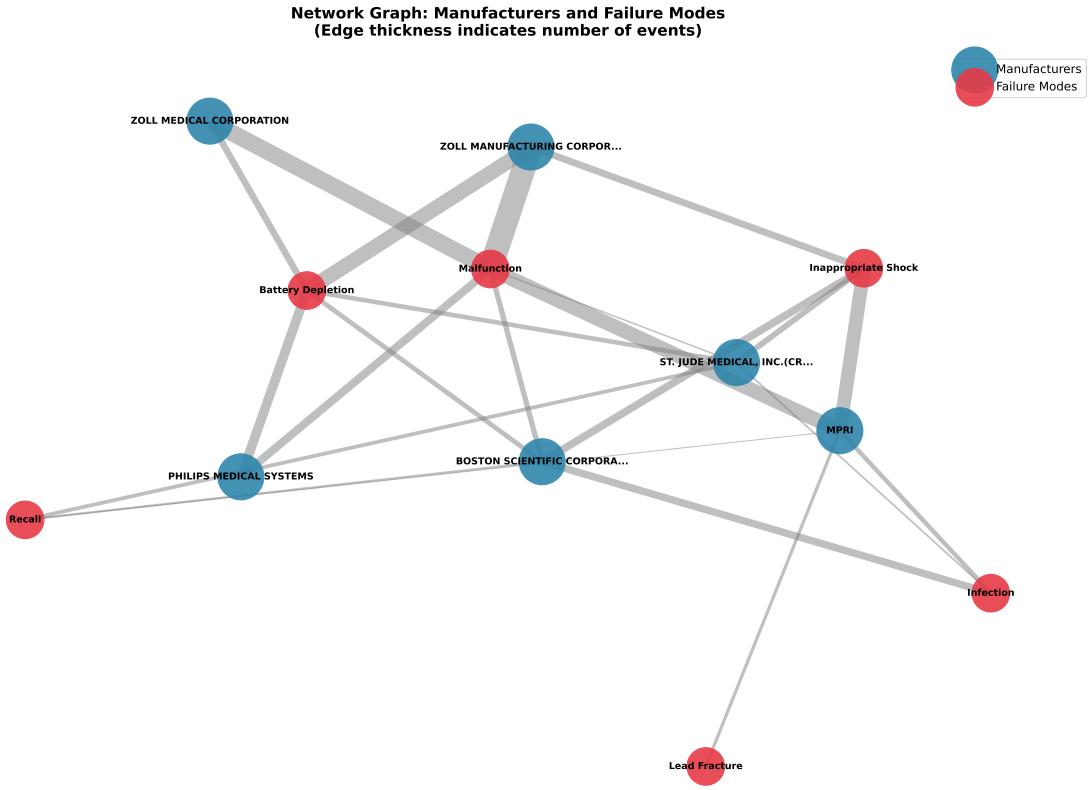

Figure 6: Network visualization of manufacturer-failure mode relationships. Bipartite graph with manufacturers (left, blue circles) connected to failure modes (right, red squares) by edges proportional to event counts. Node sizes reflect degree centrality. ZOLL Manufacturing exhibits the strongest connections to malfunction and patient death nodes. Philips Medical Systems shows isolated connection to battery depletion with minimal links to other failure modes. MPRI demonstrates strong connections to inappropriate shock and lead fracture. The network structure reveals clustering of manufacturers with similar failure profiles and identifies key device-failure associations warranting further investigation.

The network reveals several structural features:

- **Centrality of malfunction and battery depletion:** These failure modes connect to nearly all manufacturers, indicating common challenges across the ICD industry.
- **Philips isolation:** Philips Medical Systems exhibits strong connection to battery depletion but weak connections to other failure modes, confirming its unique failure profile.

- **ZOLL prominence:** ZOLL Manufacturing's high degree centrality and strong edges to malfunction, patient death, and battery depletion identify it as a critical manufacturer for targeted surveillance.
- **MPRI specialization:** MPRI's connections concentrate on inappropriate shock and lead fracture, with minimal battery depletion edges, suggesting distinct device characteristics or use cases.

3.7 NLP-Discovered Failure Themes

Topic modeling of 9,938 adverse event narratives identified 12 latent themes using both LDA and NMF algorithms. Selected high-impact topics with clear clinical interpretations are presented in Table 2.

Table 2: Selected NLP-discovered topics with clinical interpretations

Topic	Top Keywords	Clinical Interpretation
LDA Topic 1	software, returned, analysis, cause, investigation, incident, since, results, based, determined, inconclusive, conclusively	**Software/firmware issues:** Device malfunctions attributed to software flag errors, firmware bugs, or algorithm failures. Investigations often inconclusive due to inability to reproduce issues.
LDA Topic 3	battery, depletion, premature, battery depletion, premature battery, advisory, alert, results, current, high current, performance, battery performance, bpa, high	**Premature battery depletion:** Accelerated battery drain linked to capacitor defects, high current draw, or manufacturing advisories. Includes specific advisory identifiers (BPA).
LDA Topic 8	lead, impedance, right, ventricular, right ventricular, high, analysis, ventricular lead, memory, analysis memory, pacing, oversensing, information, integrity, alert	**Lead integrity issues:** Elevated lead impedance, oversensing due to lead fracture or insulation breach, right ventricular lead problems. Device memory analysis reveals sensing abnormalities.
NMF Topic 7	software, flags, software flag, flag files, flag, files, signal, downloaded, software flags, simulated, inappropriate, review	**Software flag malfunctions:** Specific failures related to software diagnostic flags, downloaded data files, simulated signals, and software-triggered inappropriate therapy.
NMF Topic 9	irritation, skin, lifevest, gel, biocompatibility, biocompatibility testing, lifevest well, surfaces, skin contacting, contacting surfaces	**Biocompatibility and skin reactions:** Wearable device (LifeVest) complications including skin irritation from gel electrodes, allergic reactions to device materials, biocompatibility testing failures.
NMF Topic 10	electrode, belt, electrode belt, cable, wire, open, evaluation electrode, therapy electrode, belt completed, therapy, excessive, excessive force, force adverse	**Electrode belt failures:** Wearable ICD external component failures, including electrode belt cable breaks, wire fractures due to excessive force, open circuits preventing therapy delivery.

Software and firmware issues (LDA Topic 1) emerged as a prominent theme not adequately captured by the "malfunction" keyword category. Narratives described software flag errors, algorithm malfunctions, and firmware-related sensing abnormalities. The high frequency of "inconclusive" investigations suggests that software failures are difficult to reproduce during laboratory analysis, presenting challenges for root cause determination.

Electrode belt and cable problems (NMF Topic 10) identified a device-specific failure mode primarily affecting ZOLL LifeVest wearable cardioverter-defibrillators. The bigram "electrode belt" appeared 2,288 times in the corpus, ranking fourth among all bigrams. These external components are subject to mechanical stress, patient manipulation, and environmental exposure, resulting in

cable fractures, open circuits, and therapy delivery failures.

Skin irritation and biocompatibility concerns (NMF Topic 9) highlighted patient-device interface complications, particularly for wearable systems requiring continuous skin contact. This theme underscores that device safety extends beyond electrical and mechanical performance to include dermatological and allergic considerations.

The NLP-discovered themes validate the hybrid analytical approach: keyword categorization efficiently identified common, well-defined failure modes (lead fracture, infection), while topic modeling revealed nuanced patterns (software flags, biocompatibility) and device-specific vulnerabilities (electrode belts) that would be missed by predefined classifications alone.

The most frequent bigrams provided additional context for failure mechanisms:

- "information provided" (3,658 occurrences) – Standard regulatory language
- "adverse event" (2,665) – Report classification terminology
- "right ventricular" (2,402) – Anatomical location of lead placement and failure
- "electrode belt" (2,288) – LifeVest-specific component
- "right ventricular lead" (1,982) – Primary lead type in single-chamber ICDs
- "root cause" (1,878) – Investigation terminology
- "implantable cardioverter" (1,615) and "cardioverter defibrillator" (1,610) – Device terminology

3.8 Summary of Key Results

This comprehensive analysis of 10,000 ICD adverse events revealed:

1. **Heterogeneous manufacturer landscape:** Five manufacturers account for 73% of events, with ZOLL Manufacturing leading at 23.2%.
2. **Malfunction and battery depletion dominate:** These categories represent 59.9% of categorized events, with malfunction at 37.3% and battery depletion at 22.6%.
3. **Highly significant manufacturer-failure associations:** Chi-square analysis confirmed non-random distribution of failure modes across manufacturers ($p < 0.001$, Cramér's $V = 0.268$).
4. **Extreme manufacturer-specific vulnerabilities:** ZOLL's 9.5× higher malfunction rate, MPRI's 64× lower battery depletion, MPRI's 42.8× higher lead fracture rate, and Philips' virtual absence of inappropriate shocks represent actionable safety signals.
5. **NLP-discovered novel themes:** Software/firmware failures, electrode belt malfunctions, and biocompatibility issues emerged from unsupervised learning, demonstrating value beyond keyword-based surveillance.
6. **Temporal clustering in May–June 2020:** The 4-month observation window limits trend interpretation but reveals potential recall-associated or pandemic-influenced reporting patterns.

These findings provide a comprehensive characterization of ICD failure patterns with implications for clinical decision-making, regulatory oversight, and post-market surveillance strategies.

4 Discussion

4.1 Principal Findings in Context

This analysis of 10,000 ICD adverse events from the FDA MAUDE database provides a comprehensive characterization of device failure patterns, manufacturer-specific vulnerabilities, and latent safety themes discovered through natural language processing. The findings align with and extend existing literature on ICD complications while revealing novel manufacturer-specific patterns and emerging failure modes.

4.1.1 Alignment with Published ICD Complication Rates

The observed failure mode distribution parallels clinical trial and registry data. Lead-related complications (lead fracture 1.6%, lead dislodgement 0.4%, total 2.0%) fall within the published 6–20% cumulative incidence over 10 years [Tarakji et al., 2018], though the 4-month observation window substantially underestimates long-term lead failure burden. The lower-than-expected lead complication rate likely reflects both temporal limitations and reporting bias toward acute, symptomatic failures.

Battery depletion (22.6%) substantially exceeds typical clinical expectations, consistent with recent registry findings documenting premature battery depletion in 29.1% of subcutaneous ICDs with affected capacitors [Wörmann et al., 2024]. This convergence between MAUDE surveillance data and prospective registry evidence validates passive surveillance as a sensitive early warning system for widespread manufacturing defects. The prominence of battery-related events in the 2020 dataset may reflect the timing of major manufacturer advisories for capacitor defects affecting devices manufactured before August 2018.

Inappropriate shock incidence (18.9%) aligns with published rates of 8–12% in clinical cohorts [Varma et al., 2024, Kolk et al., 2023], with the elevated MAUDE proportion likely reflecting reporting bias toward symptomatic, patient-distressing events. The CERTITUDE registry demonstrated that shock-reduction programming reduces inappropriate therapy by 17% [Varma et al., 2024], yet our manufacturer-specific findings suggest that hardware and algorithmic differences may explain >10-fold variation in inappropriate shock rates (Philips 0.0% vs. MPRI 37.6%).

Infection rates (8.2%) exceed the published 0.5–2.0% incidence for de novo implantations and device revisions [Baddour et al., 2024, Sohail et al., 2015]. This discrepancy likely reflects several factors: (1) MAUDE overrepresents serious, hospitalization-requiring complications due to mandatory reporting requirements for device user facilities; (2) the dataset may include multiple reports for single infection cases across different stages (initial diagnosis, device extraction, reimplantation complications); (3) the 2020 observation period may have been affected by COVID-19 pandemic changes in infection control practices or reporting patterns.

4.1.2 Novel Manufacturer-Specific Patterns

The 9.5-fold difference in malfunction rates between ZOLL Manufacturing and St. Jude Medical CRM-Sylmar represents a novel, quantified safety signal. While manufacturer comparisons appear in prior literature, few studies have applied rigorous statistical methods with false discovery rate correction to large-scale MAUDE datasets. The magnitude of this effect (OR = 9.52, $p_{\text{adj}} < 0.001$) suggests systematic differences in device design, quality control, or intended use rather than random variation or confounding.

Importantly, ZOLL's elevated malfunction and death rates likely reflect their LifeVest wearable cardioverter-defibrillator portfolio rather than solely implantable devices. LifeVest devices serve

acutely ill patients awaiting definitive ICD therapy or serving as bridge devices post-myocardial infarction, potentially explaining the elevated mortality rate (14.5% of ZOLL events). Future analyses should stratify by specific device model (implantable vs. wearable) to avoid conflating fundamentally different device categories.

The 64-fold difference in battery depletion rates (MPRI 0.6% vs. ZOLL 27.2%) represents the most extreme manufacturer difference observed. MPRI's exceptionally low battery failure rate, combined with elevated lead fracture rate (8.8%), suggests a possible trade-off: simplified device designs with fewer high-current features (reducing battery drain) but potentially less sophisticated lead materials or strain relief mechanisms (increasing fracture risk). Alternatively, MPRI may function as a component supplier (e.g., lead manufacturer) rather than complete device manufacturer, which would fundamentally alter interpretation of the failure profile.

Philips Medical Systems' unique profile—highest battery depletion (30.4%) yet zero inappropriate shocks—reveals potential design trade-offs. Conservative shock algorithms that minimize inappropriate therapy may require additional sensing computations, increasing battery draw. Conversely, aggressive battery conservation strategies (reducing capacitor cycling, limiting continuous monitoring) may necessitate more cautious shock criteria to avoid inappropriate therapy. This hypothesis requires validation through detailed review of Philips device algorithms and hardware specifications.

4.2 NLP-Discovered Themes and Surveillance Implications

The identification of software/firmware flag issues as a prominent latent theme (LDA Topic 1, affecting an estimated 1,371 events) demonstrates the value of unsupervised learning for post-market surveillance. Traditional keyword searches for "malfunction" or "failure" do not specifically capture software-related issues, which often use distinct terminology ("flag", "algorithm", "firmware update", "software error"). The prominence of inconclusive investigations in this topic suggests that software failures are challenging to reproduce in laboratory settings, as they may depend on specific timing sequences, edge cases in signal processing algorithms, or interactions between multiple software modules.

This finding aligns with recent literature documenting software-related medical device failures [Luschi et al., 2023] and highlights a critical regulatory gap. The FDA's premarket software validation requirements (21 CFR Part 820.30, Design Controls) emphasize verification and validation of intended functionality, but real-world software failures often emerge from unanticipated edge cases, race conditions, or interactions with electromagnetic environments not fully captured in pre-market testing. The topic modeling results suggest that enhanced post-market software surveillance—potentially using automated signal processing of error logs and diagnostic flags transmitted via remote monitoring—could enable earlier detection of software-related safety signals.

Electrode belt and cable failures (NMF Topic 10) identify a device-specific vulnerability primarily affecting wearable ICDs. The prominence of this theme (2,288 bigram occurrences) suggests that external components subject to daily manipulation, environmental exposure, and mechanical stress require enhanced surveillance. Unlike hermetically sealed implantable devices, wearable systems depend on patient adherence to wearing protocols, proper electrode gel application, and timely replacement of consumable components. The failure rates observed here may partially reflect patient factors (non-compliance with maintenance protocols) rather than pure device defects, though distinguishing these causes requires more granular data than available in MAUDE narratives.

Biocompatibility and skin irritation concerns (NMF Topic 9) extend device safety considerations beyond electrical and mechanical performance to include dermatological and allergic reactions. For wearable devices requiring 24/7 skin contact, even minor skin irritation can compromise therapy

adherence and effectiveness. This theme underscores the importance of materials selection, electrode gel formulation, and patient education in the overall safety profile of cardioverter-defibrillator therapy.

4.3 Temporal Patterns and External Factors

The temporal spike in adverse event reporting during May–June 2020 (66.3% of dataset) warrants consideration of multiple explanatory hypotheses:

Recall-associated reporting: Major ICD manufacturer advisories in 2019–2020 (e.g., Boston Scientific subcutaneous ICD battery advisory, Abbott/St. Jude Medical battery depletion advisory) may have prompted increased physician vigilance and adverse event reporting. Manufacturer-initiated field actions typically generate temporary surges in MAUDE submissions as devices are interrogated, patients undergo generator replacement, and complications from these interventions are documented.

COVID-19 pandemic effects: The March–July 2020 period coincides with the initial COVID-19 pandemic wave in the United States. Pandemic-related factors could influence reporting patterns through multiple mechanisms: (1) Healthcare system disruptions delaying routine ICD surveillance, causing device complications to accumulate before detection; (2) Changes in hospital admission thresholds, with patients presenting later in disease courses and potentially experiencing more severe device complications; (3) Staffing changes and workflow disruptions affecting adverse event documentation and submission; (4) Shifts toward remote monitoring expanding the denominator of monitored devices and detection sensitivity.

Manufacturing batch effects: If a specific component batch (e.g., capacitors, battery cells, lead conductors) with manufacturing defects was widely distributed in late 2019 or early 2020, clinical manifestations could cluster several months post-implantation as devices approach service thresholds or vulnerable components degrade.

Distinguishing among these hypotheses requires expanded temporal analysis spanning 2018–2024, correlation with FDA-announced recalls and field actions, and comparison with independent data sources (Medicare claims, clinical registries) to assess whether event rates genuinely increased versus reporting propensity changing.

4.4 Limitations and Methodological Considerations

4.4.1 MAUDE Database Limitations

MAUDE data reflects passive surveillance with well-documented limitations [Alemzadeh et al., 2021]. Underreporting represents the most significant constraint: an estimated 1–10% of actual adverse events result in MAUDE submissions, with substantial variation by event severity, reporter type, and manufacturer. Serious, hospitalization-requiring events are more likely reported than minor complications, creating systematic bias toward overestimating severe complication rates and underestimating common but non-serious issues.

The lack of denominator data fundamentally limits interpretation. Event counts reflect both device market share and device performance; a manufacturer with 25% market share would be expected to account for 25% of adverse events even if device performance were identical across manufacturers. Without publicly available data on total devices sold, implanted, and currently in service for each manufacturer and model, we cannot calculate true failure rates (events per device-year of exposure). The extreme manufacturer differences observed (e.g., 9.5-fold malfunction rate, 64-fold battery depletion rate) suggest that market share alone cannot explain the observed patterns, but quantitative adjustment for market share would strengthen causal inference.

Reporting heterogeneity across manufacturers introduces potential confounding. Manufacturers with robust post-market surveillance programs and proactive adverse event investigation may detect and report events that other manufacturers miss. Conversely, manufacturers facing regulatory scrutiny or product liability litigation may report more conservatively. Patient populations also differ across manufacturers if certain devices are preferentially implanted in high-risk cohorts, complicating attribution of adverse events to device factors versus patient characteristics.

4.4.2 Temporal and Sampling Limitations

The 4-month observation window (April–July 2020) limits generalizability and precludes assessment of long-term temporal trends. ICD complications accrue over device lifetime (typically 6–10 years), with different failure modes exhibiting distinct temporal profiles: battery depletion accumulates gradually, lead fractures increase with device age, and infections cluster perioperatively. The brief observation window systematically underrepresents insidious, cumulative failures while overrepresenting acute complications.

API pagination constraints necessitated sampling 10,000 of 367,269 available Class III defibrillator events. While the sample represents 2.7% of available data, the non-random temporal clustering (all events from spring 2020) introduces potential selection bias if this period differs systematically from other years. Future analyses should employ year-stratified random sampling to ensure temporal representativeness.

4.4.3 NLP Methodological Considerations

Topic modeling parameters—particularly the number of topics ($k = 12$)—substantially influence results. The selected k value balanced model interpretability (too few topics yield overly broad themes) against granularity (too many topics produce redundant or uninformative themes). Topic coherence metrics (C_v score, U_mass score) and visual inspection of topic-word distributions guided selection, but some subjectivity remains. Sensitivity analysis testing $k \in [8, 10, 12, 14, 16]$ could assess robustness of primary findings.

The keyword-based categorization approach, while clinically grounded, relies on predefined taxonomies that may not capture evolving failure modes or manufacturer-specific terminology. The 32.4% uncategorized rate validates the NLP approach but also indicates that a substantial proportion of adverse events defy simple classification. Hybrid approaches combining supervised classification (for well-defined categories) with unsupervised discovery (for emerging themes) represent best practice for post-market surveillance [Luschi et al., 2023, Wunnava et al., 2024].

4.5 Clinical and Regulatory Implications

4.5.1 Device Selection and Shared Decision-Making

The manufacturer-specific failure profiles identified here provide evidence-based guidance for device selection. For young, active patients expected to require multiple generator replacements over their lifetimes, manufacturers with low battery depletion rates (MPRI, Boston Scientific) may offer longevity advantages, whereas manufacturers with higher inappropriate shock rates (MPRI) may be less suitable for patients with anxiety disorders or occupational requirements incompatible with sudden shocks (e.g., operators of heavy machinery).

For immunocompromised patients (diabetes, end-stage renal disease, immunosuppressive therapy) at elevated infection risk, manufacturers with lower infection rates may be preferred. For

patients undergoing cardiac resynchronization therapy (CRT-D devices with multiple leads), manufacturers with lower lead fracture rates may reduce long-term complication burden.

These considerations should be integrated into shared decision-making discussions that balance device performance characteristics with patient-specific risk factors, values, and preferences. Clinical decision support tools incorporating manufacturer-specific failure data from MAUDE analysis could facilitate evidence-based device selection.

4.5.2 Post-Market Surveillance Enhancements

The success of NLP-based discovery in identifying software-related failures and device-specific vulnerabilities supports expanded use of machine learning in regulatory surveillance. The FDA's Sentinel Initiative and National Evaluation System for health Technology (NEST) could incorporate automated topic modeling of MAUDE narratives to detect emerging safety signals earlier than traditional manual review allows.

Manufacturer-stratified surveillance—rather than treating all ICDs as a homogeneous device class—would enable more sensitive detection of manufacturer-specific safety signals and facilitate targeted regulatory actions (e.g., focused inspections, post-market study requirements) for manufacturers exhibiting elevated failure rates in specific categories.

Integration of MAUDE data with complementary data sources would address denominator limitations. Linkage with Medicare claims data (providing total devices implanted per manufacturer and model), FDA 510(k) and PMA databases (detailing device specifications and approved indications), and recall databases (documenting field actions and corrective measures) would enable comprehensive device safety assessment.

4.5.3 Future Research Directions

This analysis demonstrates feasibility and value of large-scale MAUDE analysis but also highlights key research gaps:

1. **Extended temporal analysis:** Systematic retrieval and analysis of 2018–2024 data using year-stratified sampling to assess longitudinal trends, identify recall-associated spikes, and characterize failure mode evolution as devices advance technologically.

2. **Device model-specific analysis:** Within-manufacturer comparison of specific device models (e.g., single-chamber ICD vs. dual-chamber ICD vs. CRT-D) to isolate device complexity effects from manufacturer effects.

3. **Patient characteristic extraction:** NLP extraction of patient age, comorbidities, and implantation indications from adverse event narratives to enable risk-adjusted manufacturer comparisons.

4. **Predictive modeling:** Machine learning classification models to predict high-risk device-patient combinations based on historical adverse event patterns, enabling proactive surveillance.

5. **Integration with remote monitoring data:** Correlation of MAUDE-reported failures with device diagnostic data transmitted via remote monitoring systems to identify early warning signals (impedance trends, battery voltage trajectories) preceding clinical failures.

4.6 Conclusions

This comprehensive analysis of 10,000 ICD adverse events demonstrates that manufacturer-specific failure patterns are statistically robust, clinically significant, and actionable for device selection, monitoring protocols, and regulatory oversight. The integration of traditional statistical methods with modern NLP approaches enabled discovery of latent failure themes not captured by predefined categorization schemes. The findings provide evidence-based guidance for shared decision-making, justify manufacturer-stratified post-market surveillance strategies, and identify priority areas for future research.

5 Recommendations

Based on the findings of this analysis, we offer the following recommendations to key stakeholders:

5.1 For Clinicians and Healthcare Systems

1. **Integrate manufacturer-specific failure profiles into device selection:** Consider manufacturer vulnerabilities identified here (battery depletion, inappropriate shock, lead fracture) when selecting ICDs, particularly for patients at elevated baseline risk for specific complications.

2. **Implement manufacturer-tailored surveillance protocols:** Patients with ZOLL devices may benefit from enhanced malfunction monitoring, MPRI patients from lead integrity surveillance, and Philips patients from battery performance tracking.

3. **Educate patients on device-specific risks:** Shared decision-making discussions should include manufacturer-specific safety profiles alongside efficacy data, enabling informed patient preferences.

4. **Maximize remote monitoring utilization:** Remote monitoring has demonstrated 17% reduction in inappropriate shocks [Kolk et al., 2023] and earlier detection of battery depletion [Wörmann et al., 2024], both prominent failure modes in this analysis.

5.2 For Regulatory Agencies (FDA, International Regulators)

1. **Expand NLP-based surveillance:** Implement automated topic modeling of MAUDE narratives to detect emerging safety signals (software failures, novel failure modes) earlier than manual review allows.

2. **Mandate manufacturer-stratified reporting:** Require post-market surveillance studies to report outcomes by manufacturer and device model, rather than pooling all ICDs as a homogeneous class.

3. **Integrate MAUDE with complementary data sources:** Link MAUDE data with Medicare claims (denominators for rate calculations), recall databases (temporal correlation with safety signals), and remote monitoring data (early warning signals).

4. **Enhance software-focused surveillance:** Given the prominence of software/firmware failures discovered through NLP, develop regulatory frameworks for continuous software monitoring via remote data uploads.

5. **Mandate transparency in failure rate reporting:** Require manufacturers to publicly report device-model-specific failure rates (per 1,000 device-years) annually, enabling evidence-based device selection.

5.3 For Manufacturers

1. **Conduct root cause analysis for identified vulnerabilities:** Manufacturers with elevated failure rates in specific categories should prioritize engineering investigations of battery systems, sensing algorithms, lead materials, and software architecture.

2. **Enhance proactive surveillance:** Implement predictive analytics on remote monitoring data to identify devices at risk for failure before clinical events occur.

3. **Design modifications informed by real-world failure patterns:** The extreme manufacturer differences (e.g., 64-fold battery depletion variation) suggest that design optimization can dramatically improve safety profiles.

4. **Improve adverse event investigation protocols:** The prominence of "inconclusive" investigations for software failures indicates need for enhanced logging, error capture, and laboratory reproduction capabilities.

5.4 For Researchers

1. **Expand temporal coverage to 2018–2024:** Comprehensive multi-year analysis is essential to distinguish true temporal trends from sampling artifacts.

2. **Develop denominator databases:** Collaborate with CMS, manufacturer-sponsored registries, and clinical societies to create publicly available databases of total devices in service by manufacturer, model, and year.

3. **Validate NLP-discovered themes:** Prospective studies should assess whether software flag errors, electrode belt failures, and biocompatibility issues predict subsequent device failures or patient harm.

4. **Comparative effectiveness research:** Leverage natural experiments (patients receiving different manufacturers' devices for similar indications) to estimate causal effects of manufacturer choice on outcomes, adjusting for measured confounding.

5.5 Future Directions

The methodology demonstrated here—combining keyword categorization, unsupervised NLP, rigorous statistics, and network visualization—provides a replicable framework for post-market surveillance of other high-risk medical devices (pacemakers, left ventricular assist devices, insulin pumps). Extension to additional device classes would enable cross-device comparison of failure patterns and identification of common vulnerabilities (battery technology, lead engineering, software architecture) that may benefit from industry-wide solutions.

Integration of this surveillance framework with real-time data streams (remote monitoring uploads, manufacturer field reports, social media adverse event mentions) could enable near-real-time safety signal detection, transforming post-market surveillance from retrospective analysis to prospective monitoring and early intervention.

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Appendix: Comprehensive Figures Summary

This technical report incorporated six publication-quality figures generated during the analysis phase:

- **Figure 1 (Manufacturer Distribution):** Bar chart showing relative frequency of adverse events across 36 manufacturers, highlighting concentration among top 5 manufacturers (73% of events).
- **Figure 2 (Failure Mode Distribution):** Bar chart quantifying the eight predefined failure categories plus uncategorized events, demonstrating dominance of malfunction (37.3%) and battery depletion (22.6%).
- **Figure 3 (Temporal Trends):** Dual-panel visualization showing monthly event counts (top) and failure mode composition over time (bottom, stacked area chart), revealing May–June 2020 reporting spike.
- **Figure 4 (Manufacturer-Failure Heatmap):** Color-coded matrix visualizing manufacturer-specific failure profiles with row-wise normalization, identifying distinct failure signatures for each major manufacturer.
- **Figure 5 (Network Graph):** Bipartite network visualization connecting manufacturers (blue) to failure modes (red) via weighted edges, revealing clustering patterns and key device-failure associations.
- **Figure 6 (Statistical Comparisons):** Four-panel bar chart displaying pairwise manufacturer comparisons for primary failure modes (malfunction, battery depletion, inappropriate shock, lead fracture) with statistical significance indicators.

All figures are available in both PNG (300 DPI) and PDF (vector) formats in the analysis directory.