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Automatic Cardiotocography Diagnostic System Based on Hilbert Transform and Adaptive Threshold Technique

JOÃO ALEXANDRE LOBO MARQUES[1], (Member, IEEE), PAULO CÉSAR CORTEZ[2], JOÃO PAULO DO VALE MADEIRO[3], SIMON JAMES FONG[4], FERNANDO SOARES SCHLINDWEIN[5], AND VICTOR HUGO C. DE ALBUQUERQUE[6]

[1]Laboratory of Neuroeconomics, School of Business, University of Saint Joseph, Macau 0000, China
[2]Department of Engineering of Teleinformatics, Federal University of Ceará, Fortaleza 60455-900, Brazil
[3]Instituto de Engenharias e Desenvolvimento Sustentável, UNILAB, Redenção 62790-000, Brazil
[4]Computer and Information Science Department, University of Macau, Macau 0000, China
[5]Engineering Department, University of Leicester, Leicester LE1 7RH, U.K.
[6]Laboratory of Bioinformatics, University of Fortaleza, Fortaleza 60811-905, Brazil

Corresponding author: João Alexandre Lobo Marques (alexandre.lobo@usj.edu.mo)

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ABSTRACT The visual analysis of cardiotocographic examinations is a very subjective process. The accurate detection and segmentation of the fetal heart rate (FHR) features and their correlation with the uterine contractions in time allow a better diagnostic and the possibility of anticipation of many problems related to fetal distress. This paper presents a computerized diagnostic aid system based on digital signal processing techniques to detect and segment changes in the FHR and the uterine tone signals automatically. After a pre-processing phase, the FHR baseline detection is calculated. An auxiliary signal called detection line is proposed to support the detection and segmentation processes. Then, the Hilbert transform is used with an adaptive threshold for identifying fiducial points on the fetal and maternal signals. For an antepartum (before labor) database, the positive predictivity value (PPV) is 96.80% for the FHR decelerations, and 96.18% for the FHR accelerations. For an intrapartum (during labor) database, the PPV found was 91.31% for the uterine contractions, 94.01% for the FHR decelerations, and 100% for the FHR accelerations. For the whole set of exams, PPV and SE were both 100% for the identification of FHR DIP II and prolonged decelerations.

INDEX TERMS Cardiotocography (CTG), fetal heart rate (FHR), Hilbert transform, uterine contractions (UC).

I. INTRODUCTION

Fetal Medicine aims to monitor and determine actions to provide fetus wellbeing. Cardiotocography (CTG) is an exam applied before or during labor to monitor simultaneously FHR and UC based on Doppler ultrasound and toco sensors, making it possible to identify fetal cardiovascular or neurological risky situations or pathologies [1].

The heart rate is a relevant signal for the analysis of not only the cardiovascular system but also the influence of the autonomous nervous system for the body circadian rhythms. Because of that, the development of different approaches for computerized diagnostic systems are constantly present in the literature [2]–[4].

According to the American Congress of Obstetricians and Gynecologists (ACOG), common problems found during the analysis of Electronic Fetal Monitoring (EFM) are the poor inter observer and intra observer diagnostics reliability and the high rates of false-positives in visual interpretation [5].

The FHR can be monitored in many different ways, each one with advantages and drawbacks [6]. For example, the fetal scalp ECG is precise and consistent but an invasive technique (and it is available only after 'crowning'). More recently, the Phonocardiography (PCG) has been used as a simple and reliable FHR detector based on the recording of the heart beat sounds and the Hilbert Transform (HT) can be used for instantaneous frequency detection and effective

noise reduction [7]. ECG instantaneous energy using HT has also been considered for heart sound segmentation [8].

Nevertheless, the CTG can be considered a gold standard examination for the FHR detection [9]. Doppler sensors have similar accuracy to that of fetal abdominal ECG and can also be used in many different clinical situations [10].

This work presents a complete computerized CTG analysis system based on a group of innovative approaches and techniques, which includes pre-processing, the Hilbert Transform application with an adaptive threshold as a detector of changes of the time series.

The most important characteristics of the FHR and UC signals are automatically detected, such as the FHR baseline, detection and segmentation of FHR accelerations and decelerations, detection and segmentation of UC and the relationship in time between UC and FHR decelerations. In case of the detection of abnormal or suspicious CTG traces a set of alarms and warnings is proposed.

II. RELATED WORKS

The computerized analysis of Cardiotocographies is a relevant clinical application for fetal distress detection.

In this scenario, different digital signal processing techniques have been used to extract information from these signals, such as the application of wavelets for the signal filtering and processing [11].

For the fetal distress classification, many different approaches have been proposed, such as fuzzy inference systems [12]; artificial neural networks (ANN) [13], [14], and also the application of combined techniques of ANN with other signal processing tools, such as multi resolution Principal Component Analysis (PCA) [15].

In a more different approach, nonlinear analysis are relevant, since the fetal and maternal signals present components of nonlinear dynamics [16]. Some recent works consider entropies measures, such as Approximate Entropy and/or Sample Entropy using a windowed analysis to detect significant changes in real time during a CTG examination [16].

The Detrended Fluctuation Analysis (DFA) has been also considered as a tool to help the medical teams to evaluate the FHR signal in a long term basis, since the CTG examination lasts 20 minutes the minimum and medical teams are not able to constantly check the monitoring [17].

On the analysis of time based changes and behavior of CTG signals, partially or fully computerized systems are proposed in the literature and two relevant solutions are described.

Dawes *et al.* [18] developed an algorithm for the FHR analysis based on low-pass frequency filters to obtain the baseline and identify accelerations and decelerations. This algorithm was used in the System 8000, a commercial software which is now discontinued. Mantel *et al.* [19] improved some aspects of Dawes' algorithm, for example in the beginning of the recording and the detection of changes of the baseline.

Daumer and Neiss [20] presented the Delayed Moving Window (DMW), a patented algorithm commercially used in CTGOnline system [21]. It intends to be a general tool to detect drifts, jumps and outliers in time series, and it can be used as an online alarm system.

The methodology with innovative approaches and techniques is presented in the next section.

III. MATERIALS AND METHODS

A. DEVELOPMENT ENVIRONMENT AND DATA ACQUISITION

The system was developed using Matlab scripting language. Data were acquired using a GE Corometrics 250CX Series Cardiotocography system, based on pulsed Doppler with a pulse repetition frequency of 4 kHz in single ultrasound mode and uses autocorrelation technique. The equipment preprocesses and sends two 4 Hz time series (FHR and UC) to the diagnostic aid system. The equipment itself has a set of threshold alarms to indicate loss of detection and persistent bradycardia (that could be the detection of maternal heart rate) and can optionally monitor 3-lead maternal ECG and maternal pulse oximetry [22].

B. DATABASE

Two databases from Trium Analysis Online GmBH were evaluated. The characteristics are presented in Table 1.

TABLE 1. CTG-I and CTG-A database characteristics.

Characteristic	CTG-I	CTG-A
Type of CTG	Intrapartum	Antepartum
Number of exams	32	100
Training dataset (exams)	16	50
Validation dataset (exams)	16	50
Average Duration (minutes)	220	200
Stand. Dev Duration (minutes)	134	140
Maximum Duration (minutes)	38	39
Minimum Duration (minutes)	906	466

The pre-classification procedure was performed by 3 experienced Obstetricians from MEAC-UFC and divided in two steps. First, they marked each CTG trace individually. After that, they compared their results and defined by consensus the presence of each UC occurrence and FHR change and classification.

Fetal outcome information, such as umbilical cord blood acid-base analysis and Apgar score were not available for both databases. Therefore, the system was validated only according to the medical staff pre-classification.

C. CTG FEATURE EXTRACTION

The diagram presented in Fig. 1 shows the sequence of steps necessary to obtain the full computerized CTG analysis system. In this example, the CTG trace contains 1000 seconds (4.000 samples) and was extracted from the CTG examination number 0227251. In Fig. 1-a is presented the CTG trace (FHR and UC signals). The first task is to evaluate the signal basal behavior for both monitored signals.

The baseline determination is then presented in Fig. 1-b. The baseline must keep the same level even in the presence

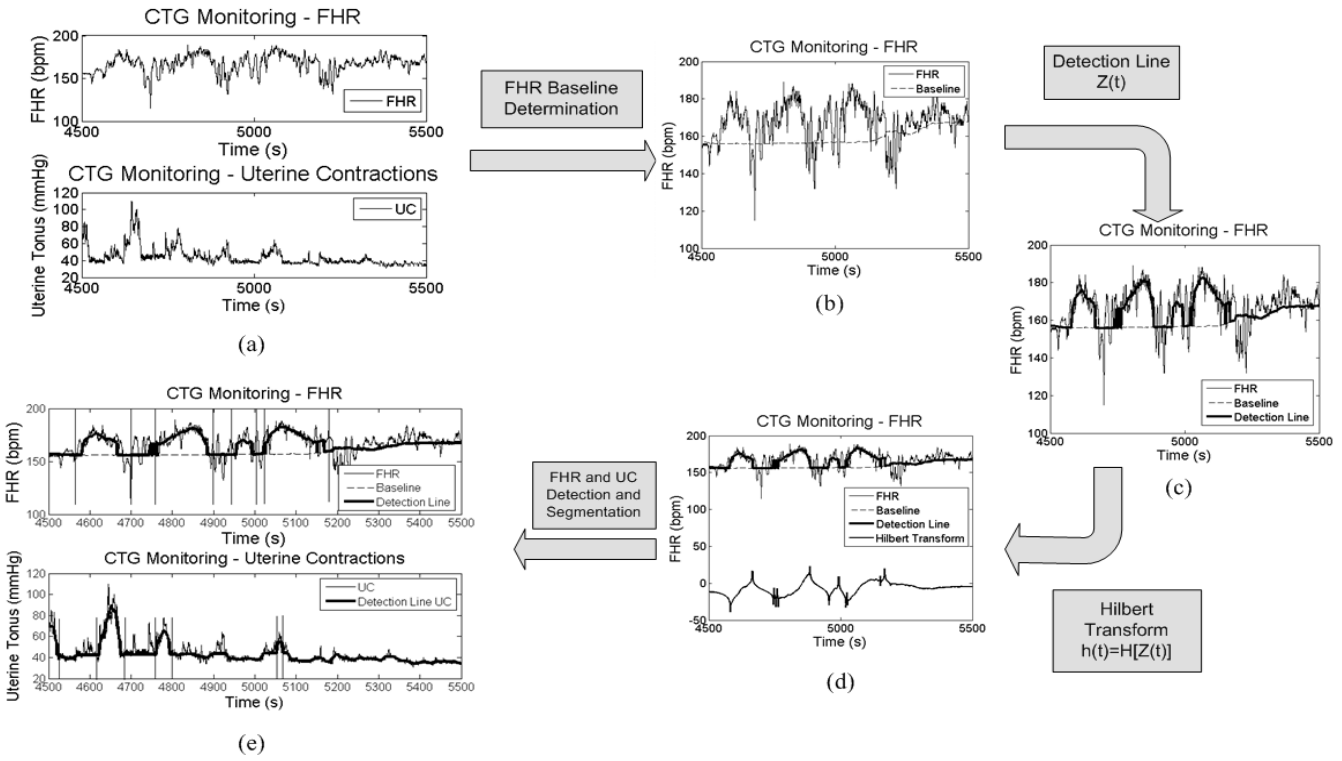

FIGURE 1. **Computerized CTG System step-by-step block diagram. The CTG trace interval was extracted from the CTG examination number 0227251: (a) the original FHR and UC signals after the preprocessing phase; (b) Baseline signal determination; (c) Detection line signal following the original signal behavior; (d) Hilbert Transform. The same approach is used to detect FHR deceleration and uterine contractions (UC signal). In (e) is presented the system output for FHR and UC.**

of FHR accelerations and decelerations and must change only after a long term change. After that, in Fig. 1-c the detection line is calculated, which is an auxiliary signal following the FHR behavior used for detection and segmentation of significant changes in time. The Hilbert Transform output is shown in Fig 1-d, where the minimum and maximum peaks correspond to the beginning and ending of FHR accelerations. The same approach is used for the detection and segmentation of FHR deceleration and uterine contractions (UC signal). Finally, in Fig. 1-e the complete analysis of FHR and UC is presented and the existence of simultaneous occurrences can be evaluated.

For a better representation, let us consider $X(t)$ as the FHR time series containing N samples $\{X(1), X(2), \ldots, X(N)\}$. The baseline is named as $Y(t)$ and the detection line is $Z(t)$. For the uterine contractions, let us consider $X'(t)$ as the original time series, the baseline as $Y'(t)$ and the detection line $Z'(t)$.

D. PRE PROCESSING MODULE

Because of the external sensors, both FHR and UC signals can present noise and may contain zeroes when there is a loss of detection. In normal exams, zeroes are sporadic and can be discarded from the original signals during a pre-processing phase.

In case of ectopic values, such as abrupt changes in the signal, must be treated as noise and corrected. This is implemented comparing each sample $X(i)$ with the next one $X(i+1)$. If the difference between them is higher than a threshold $\alpha = 20$ *bpm*, then the $X(i+1)$ sample is replaced with an average from $X(i)$ and $X(i+2)$.

If the loss of signal is more than 5 seconds (20 samples), the trace analysis is suspended and the software displays this information to the medical staff as a warning.

For uterine contractions signal $X'(t)$, a similar approach is performed, considering that CTG equipment has two different external sensors, zeroes or ectopic samples detection are not related to the ones found for FHR monitoring.

After this first phase, we must calculate two new signals: the baseline and the detection line.

E. BASELINE DETERMINATION

FHR baseline level is an important parameter for clinical analysis and its determination is a field of study in itself. It is considered in order to detect fetal bradycardia or tachycardia.

This work presents a new automatic method to determine the FHR baseline, following the international guidelines for CTG interpretation and the medical staff orientation. The FHR baseline is defined in the literature as the average of the FHR trace considering a 5 to 10 minutes intervals.

This process must exclude decelerations, accelerations and periods of high long term variability [5].

The proposed technique to automatically determine the baseline signal $Y(t)$ is presented in details in the following steps I to VI:

I Firstly, the average μ is calculated for each k-samples windows of the original signal X(t) (k is equivalent to $\Delta t_s = 10$ *minutes* [2]). The windowed signal $W(t)$ is generated, as presented in Eq. (1) and (2):

$$\mu = \frac{\sum_{i=p}^{p+k-1} X(i)}{k} \quad (1)$$

$$W(i)_{i=p}^{p+k-1} = \mu \quad (2)$$

where p is the loop reference index, starting on $p = 0.5 * k$ (considering a tolerance interval of 5 minutes in the beginning of the original signal) with increments of k samples ($p = p + k$) for each loop.

II A first baseline reference is then determined as the first sample of $W(t)$. This reference will be considered in the next steps to detect baseline changes.

III After determining $W(t)$ for the whole FHR trace, a new loop is executed with a k-samples window comparing the baseline reference with each of the $W(t)$ samples. The variable p' is considered as the loop reference index starting on $p' = 0.5^* k$ with unitary increments ($p' = p'+1$).

IV Two conditions must be satisfied to consider a baseline change:

- Condition 1: the system checks if the absolute difference between the baseline reference value and each of $W(t)$ sample is greater than $\beta_1 = 5$ *bpm* [5].
- Condition 2: if condition 1 is satisfied, then the system must analyze if this difference remains greater than β_1 for more than $\Delta t_c = 6$ *minutes* (1440 samples).

V If condition 2 is satisfied, then a new baseline reference value is determined equals to the last sample of the $W(t)$ window.

VI Finally, for each p', a baseline sample $Y(p')$ is determined as the average of the$k$-samples window of the original signal $X(t)$ as presented in Eq. 3:

$$Y(p') = \frac{\sum_{i=p'}^{p'+k-1} X(i)}{k} \quad (3)$$

The parameter Δt_c was determined during the training phase and a discussion about its value is presented in the Discussion Section.

In each baseline reference determination, the system records the new value in the database and monitors it in case of occurrence of tachycardia or bradycardia [5]. In this second case, the system warns the medical staff about the possibility of the maternal heart rate is being detected instead of the FHR.

In Fig. 2, a baseline change is presented during the CTG examination number 0208432. The duration of the FHR change was longer than Δt_c (6 minutes), the Condition 2 stated in step IV for the baseline determination.

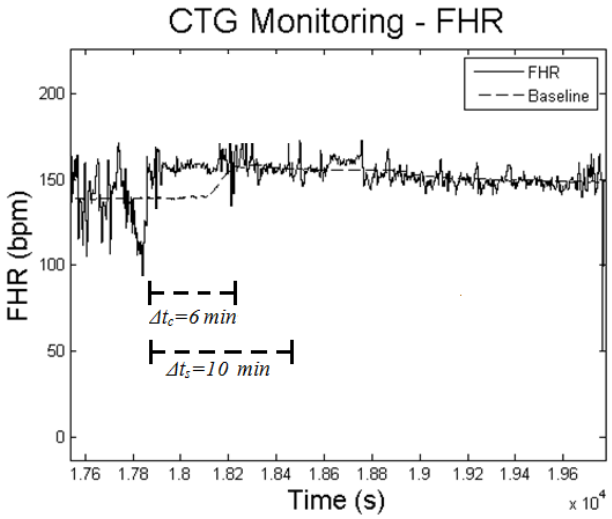

FIGURE 2. Change of baseline level through the CTG examination number 0208432. The duration of the change lasts more than the defined threshold.

It is also important to determine the uterine tonus baseline because this signal has no absolute basal value and may change with maternal position adjustments. This is the main cause of false positives and false negatives of the UC detection.

A particular reference must be established for every single examination. The proposed technique is based on the amplitude threshold $\beta_2 = 10$mmHg and it is not necessary to verify the duration of the change.

F. DETECTION LINE DETERMINATION

The second signal to be determined is the Detection Line, Z(t), which can be considered as a low pass filter of the original signal based on the previously calculated baseline.

In the beginning, Z(t) is equal to the baseline Y(t) until there is a significant change in the original signal X(t) higher than the trigger $\gamma 1$. When this happens, the Z(t) is calculated as the moving average of X(t) with window length Δtmm1. For the proposed system these parameter values are $\gamma 1 = 10$ bpm and Δtmm1 $= 60$ seconds. For the UC signal, the considered values are $\gamma 2 = 10$ mmHg and Δtmm2 $= 60$ seconds.

The proposed values were determined according to the medical staff evaluation and the results obtained for the training datasets.

When the difference between the averaged value and the baseline is lower than the trigger levels, Z(t) is equal to Y(t) again. This process is performed for the complete CTG traces.

Fig. 1-c presents an example of detection line for the FHR signal, calculated after the baseline determination and Fig. 3 presents the UC detection line trace.

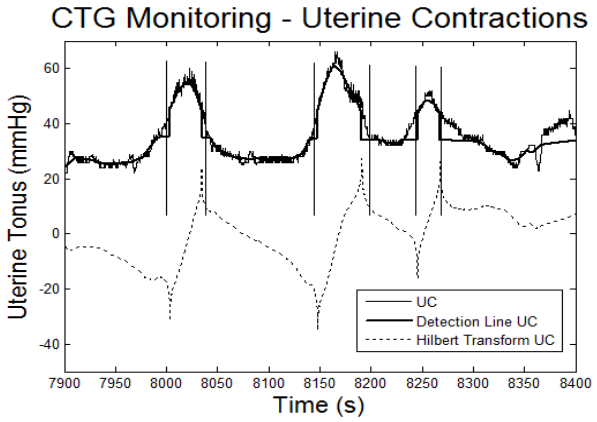

FIGURE 3. Uterine contractions segmentation during the examination number 2232241. The Hilbert transform helps detect the beginning, ending and maximum points. The segmentation bars are traced slightly before and after the detection.

G. FILTER AND DETECTION

After determining the detection line, its Hilbert Transform is calculated. The application of this filter on the signal f(t) results in one analytic signal, which is, by definition, a signal without negative frequency components in its spectrum. Because of this, the complex to real convergence process can be done only considering the real part of this signal [23]. This signal processing technique has been successfully used because of its mathematical properties for different applications, such as signal and image processing [24].

Other important properties that must be considered to analyze its performance as a good detector of the fiducial points in the original time series are the orthogonality property and the energy analysis [25].

The Hilbert Transform $\hat{f}(t)$ of one function $f(t)$ can be expressed as

$$\hat{f}(t) = \frac{1}{\pi} P \int_{-\infty}^{+\infty} \left(\frac{f(\tau)}{t-\tau} \right) d\tau \tag{4}$$

when the integral exists. Because of the pole in $\tau = t$, it may not be possible to calculate the integral equation. The P term in front of the integral represents the use of the Cauchy principal value technique, which increases the number of functions for which the integral in the equation exists [18].

H. CTG SIGNALS SEGMENTATION

The signal is segmented to determine the begin and the end of the changes and also their maximum and minimum values.

In Fig. 3 an example of uterine contraction detection and segmentation is presented. Each contraction is associated with a pair of fiducial points. Firstly, a negative amplitude peak followed by a positive amplitude peak are found. These peaks correspond to the beginning and ending of the contraction, while the zero cross on the Hilbert transform signal represents the maximum value in the original signal. For the FHR signal, a similar analysis can be performed.

Negative changes, FHR decelerations, for example, will result in a positive peak followed by a negative peak on the Hilbert transform signal and the minimum is the zero cross.

To minimize the probability of false positives, the proposed system uses also an adaptive threshold technique originally designed to detect QRS complexes in ECG exams described in [26] and [27]. Three different thresholds are proposed: ξac and ξdec for the FHR accelerations and decelerations, respectively, and ξcont for the uterine contractions, which initial values are presented in Table 2. These parameters are adjusted using the general expression

$$\xi[k] = \frac{\tau_1 \, Re[k] + \tau_2 \, R[k-1]}{\tau_1 + \tau_2} \psi, \tag{5}$$

where $\tau 1$ and $\tau 2$ are relative weights, Re[k] is an amplitude (absolute value) estimation based on the kth occurrence of the change, which also depends on the value of ξ[k - 1]; R[k - 1] is the magnitude (absolute value) of the (k-1)th change, and ψ, $0 < \psi < 1$, is a percentage factor chosen empirically [26].

TABLE 2. Set of Adaptive parameters and respective initial values.

Parameter	Value
ξ_{ac}	10 bpm
ξ_{dec}	10 bpm
ξ_{cont}	5 mmHg

The detection of the change in the time series is only considered if the filtered signal's peaks are greater than the respective adaptive threshold value.

A FHR trace with two decelerations, two accelerations and their respective detection and segmentation based on the Hilbert Transform can be seen in Fig. 4.

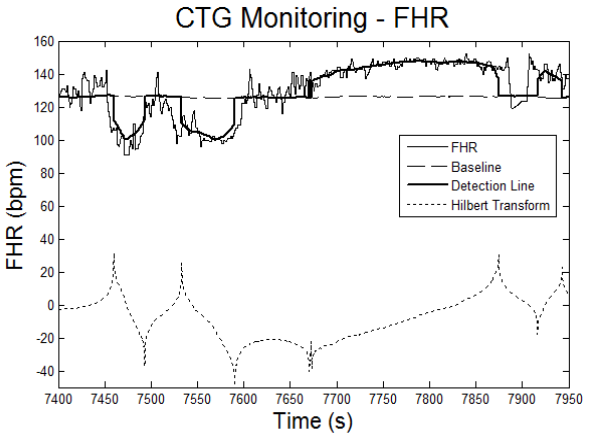

FIGURE 4. Example of a detection and segmentation of FHR signal during the CTG examination number 0643162.

I. DECELERATIONS CLASSIFICATION

Uterine contractions can affect fetal blood oxygenation, causing a heart rate deceleration. Therefore, as mentioned before,

it is necessary to establish a temporal relationship between the FHR and the uterine contractions, especially during FHR decelerations.

The automatic classification of decelerations is a necessary task for a computerized CTG system, since their visual classification by the medical staff is subjective, hence not very robust and, at times inaccurate.

The method is directly obtained from the previous phase. When the system detects a FHR deceleration, it saves the beginning and ending points in time and the minimum value.

After that, the system checks if there are any uterine contractions already detected during this interval with a tolerance window of ε ($\varepsilon = 10$ seconds) and it was determined according to the medical staff definition.

If there are no uterine contractions, the deceleration duration is calculated and is classified as variable or prolonged. If there is a contraction, its fiducial points are compared with the deceleration fiducial points, allowing the classification as DIP I or DIP II.

Fig. 5 presents an example of simultaneous occurrence of changes in both monitored signals during the examination number 1105411. The system detects a late deceleration (fetal distress).

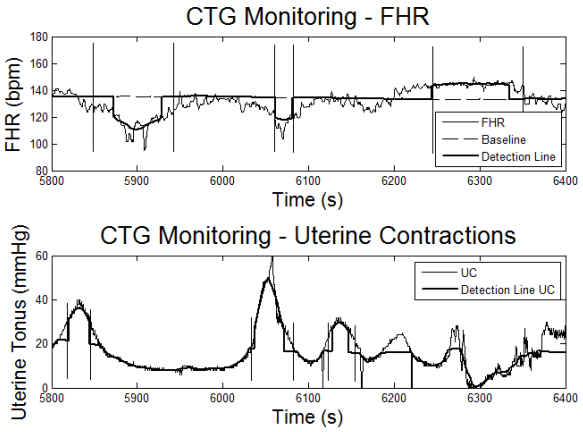

FIGURE 5. Detection of a FHR DIP-II deceleration during the CTG examination number 2232241. Deceleration nadir occurs after uterine contraction peak.

An early deceleration was detected during the examination number 0827261 and is presented in Fig. 6. This kind of deceleration is considered as physiological and does not indicate fetal health problems.

A prolonged deceleration detected during the examination number 1105411 is presented in Fig. 7. This can be related to different maternal or fetal abnormal condition and the exam must be considered as indeterminate or abnormal [5].

J. ALARMS AND WARNINGS

Based on the extracted CTG parameters for each exam, a set of alarms and warnings based on [5] is proposed in Table 3.

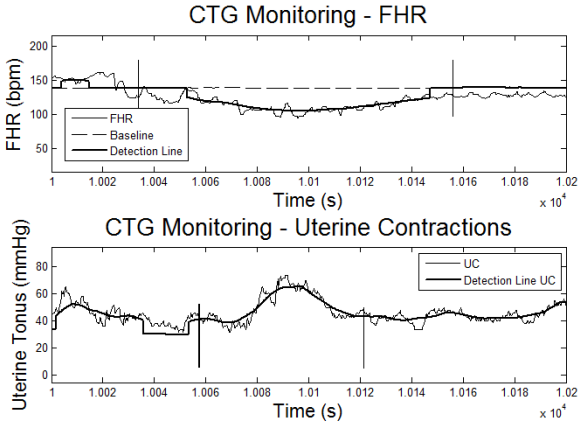

FIGURE 6. Detection of a FHR DIP-I deceleration during the CTG examination number 0827261. Deceleration occurs mirrored with uterine contraction.

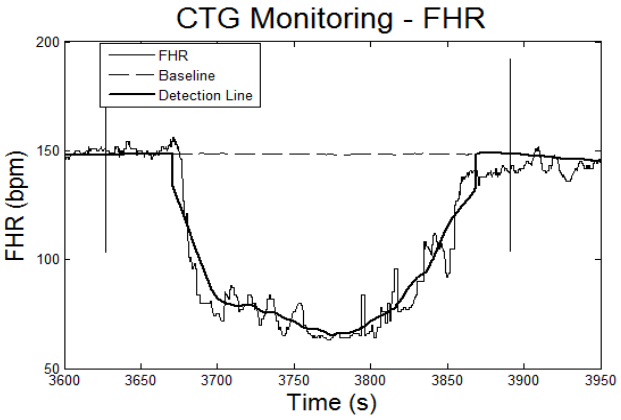

FIGURE 7. Detection of a FHR prolonged deceleration during the CTG examination number 1105411, which is not related to the uterine contractions and is non-reassuring.

TABLE 3. CTG System set of alarms and warnings.

Abnormality	Criteria	Alarm/Warning
Fetal Tachycardia	*Y(t) > 160bpm*	User message (optional sound alarm)
Fetal Bradycardia	*Y(t) < 110bpm*	User message (optional sound alarm)
FHR Loss of Detection	*X(t)=0* *Interval > 5s*	User message (optional sound alarm)
UC Loss of Detection	*X'(t)=0* *Interval > 10s*	User message (optional sound alarm)
Early Deceleration	Deceleration mirrored with uterine contraction	User message
Late Deceleration	Deceleration minimum after UC peak	User message (optional sound alarm)
Prolonged Deceleration	2 min. < Dec. Duration < 10 min.	User message
Absence of FHR Acceleration	No FHR acceleration detection	User message

IV. RESULTS

In this section, the results obtained for both datasets CTG-I and CTG-A are presented.

TABLE 4. Detection and classification results for the CTG-I and CTG-A validation datasets for the proposed and reference methods - SE and PPV indices.

Description	CTG Specialists	Detected Proposed Method	SE Proposed Method	PPV Proposed Method	Detected Reference Method	SE Reference Method	PPV Reference Method
CTG-I – General Results							
UC	403	410	93.05%	91.31%	373	76.18%	81.63%
FHR Acel	22	21	95.45%	100%	18	77.27%	95.45%
FHR Dec (total)	117	111	88.89%	94.01%	116	75.21%	93.16%
CTG-I – FHR Decelerations Classification							
Variable	78	75	89.74%	93.58%	93	87.17%	93.58%
DIP I	25	22	80.00%	92.00%	12	40.00%	92.00%
DIP II	12	12	100%	100%	9	66.67%	91.66%
Prolonged	2	2	100%	100%	2	100%	100%
CTG-A – General Results							
UC	0	0	--	--	--	--	--
FHR Acel	603	596	95.02%	96.18%	551	88.22%	96.84%
FHR Dec (total)	294	282	92.85%	96.80%	301	92.51%	95.57%
CTG-A – FHR Decelerations Classification							
Variable	291	279	92.78%	96.90%	299	92.78%	95.53%
DIP I	0	0	--	--	--	--	--
DIP II	0	0	--	--	--	--	--
Prolonged	3	3	100%	100%	2	66%	100%

The two sets of examinations were submitted to a group of CTG specialists from the Maternity Hospital MEAC-UFC for visual inspection and identification of the following parameters for each examination: baseline values; uterine contractions (UC) identification; FHR accelerations identification; FHR decelerations identification and classification for each deceleration.

The DMW technique [20], a patented commercial and CE approved computerized CTG analysis system, developed by Trium Analysis Online GmBH, was presented as the Reference Method.

The set of techniques presented in this work is references as the Proposed Method.

A. BASELINE DETERMINATION RESULTS

The first relevant information that must be obtained to support the diagnostic in a CTG examination is the baseline determination.

Since the baseline level can change during a CTG recording, all the levels found for each examination by the Reference and the Proposed methods were compared.

The comparison showed no statistical significance ($p<0.05$) based on Pearson correlation, between the baseline calculated values 75% of the examinations in CTG-A, which is before labour, and 83% and CTG-I databases, which is during labour.

B. DETECTION AND CLASSIFICATION RESULTS

The detection and classification results for the Proposed and the Reference methods are presented in Table 4 for both the CTG-I and CTG-A databases, considering the previously marked values identified by the group of CTG specialists.

The two databases were divided in two groups identified as Group 1 - ''General Results'' and Group 2 - ''FHR Decelerations Classification''.

The indices considered in the analysis were the sensitivity (SE), for the evaluation of false negatives, and the positive predictivity value (PPV), evaluating the occurrence of false positives.

In the first group of results, ''CTG-I - General Results'', the CTG-I database is considered and the Proposed System achieved 93.05% of PPV and 91.31% of SE for the uterine contractions, during labor, while the Reference Method achieved SE 76.18% and PPV 81.63%. No false positives for FHR accelerations were found by the Proposed Method, resulting in 100% (PPV) and 95.45% (SE). The DMW Reference Method achieved 77.27% (SE) and 94.45% (PPV).

The second group of results is the ''CTG-I - FHR Decelerations Classification''. For the prolonged decelerations, both methods achieved 100% for SE and PPV indices. On the other hand, the lowest SE value, 40%, was found for the Reference Method when classifying DIP-I decelerations, with the occurrence of false negatives, while the Proposed Method achieved 80%.

The third group presents the ''CTG-A - General Results''. Since this database is before labour, no UC is expected. Considering the FHR accelerations detection, for the proposed method SE was 95.02% and PPV was 96.18%, while for the reference method SE was 88.22% and PPV was 96.84%.

Finally, the last group in Table 4 is the ''CTG-A - FHR Decelerations Classification''. For the variable deceleration, the Proposed Method achieved SE equals to 92.78% and PPV, 96.90%, while for the Reference Method the SE was 92.51% and PPV was 95.57%. The Reference Method couldn't detect one prolonged deceleration while the Proposed Method detected all of them.

V. DISCUSSION

The presented results show robustness of the system when submitted to artifact noises in rather severe conditions,

producing low levels of false positives and false negatives for both *antepartum* and *intrapartum* databases.

The baseline determination is a critical task since the following steps are based on it. As the parameters $\beta 1$ and Δts follow the medical guidelines, the Δtc is the main tuning parameter that may influence the system SE and PPV results. If it is chosen a value smaller than Δtc, the signal baseline may follow any transient changes and it will increase the false negative rates. If it the value is greater than Δtc, it can miss a real baseline change and increase false positive rates.

When compared the proposed FHR baseline with the reference method, both signals presented a similar overall behavior in all CTG traces, even during the intervals when the statistical significance could not be determined.

During the Detection Line, $Z(t)$, calculation, if the trigger $\gamma 1$ is smaller than the selected value, the system may consider normal oscillations as acceleration or deceleration and this will increase false positive rates. On the other hand, if $\gamma 1$ is greater than the selected value, the false negative rates may increase and real FHR changes are not going to be detected. A similar discussion applies for the UC signal parameters. If $\gamma 2$ is smaller than the selected value, the system may found UC false positives and if it is greater than the selected value, the system can miss a real uterine contraction.

Following the same discussion, for the decelerations classification task, if the parameter ε is smaller than the proposed value, the system may classify an early deceleration as a late deceleration, which may incur in a severe diagnostic error, that may lead to unnecessary labour intervention. On the contrary, if it is greater than the selected value, late deceleration may be classified as an early one. In this case, a labour intervention would be necessary and the system would miss it.

For the acceleration and uterine contraction detection, this work achieved better results than the Reference Method. Both methods achieved similar results when analyzing variable decelerations.

An important contribution of the proposed technique is the classification of DIP-II and Prolonged FHR deceleration, which are indicative of fetal distress. The proposed system achieves 100% for both SE and PPV indices. Besides, when compared to the Reference Method, the proposed system improved the classification rates. This indicates not only a good performance in FHR decelerations classification, but for the system application as a computerized diagnostic aid tool.

Finally, the system achieves low levels of false positives and false negatives rates not only for FHR accelerations detection and variable decelerations classification, but also for the deceleration classification task.

VI. CONCLUSION

Fetal monitoring using CTG is being widely used by Obstetricians and Gynecologists because it is a non-invasive, easy to implement, low cost examination.

This paper presents a new method to automatically detect and segment changes in FHR and UC signals, based on a set of pre-processing techniques, with fixed and adaptive thresholds and the time domain analysis provided by the Hilbert transform. It detects and classifies the existence of simultaneous FHR decelerations and uterine contractions, resulting in high levels of sensitivity (SE) and positive predictivity value (PPV) indices for the considered databases, both before and during labor.

The clinical impact of the proposed system is to allow the possibility of reduction on the level of subjectivity of the CTG analysis and help improve the diagnostic accuracy.

Future works may consider the use of other approaches to detect transient changes in the original signals, such as Wavelets, to compare with the proposed technique and the application of deep learning architectures for the signal classification.

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JOÃO ALEXANDRE LOBO MARQUES was born in Fortaleza, Brazil. He received the degree in electrical engineering from Federal University of Ceará (UFC) in 1996, the Ph.D. degree from the Department of Teleinformatics Engineering, UFC, Brazil, and the Ph.D. degree from the Technische Universität München, München, Germany, in 2010.

He was a Researcher and the Innovation Director of University Lusiada (Angola and Portugal) for 8 years and Centrovita Clinic (2015–2016). He is currently an Associate Professor with the University of Saint Joseph, Macau, China. He is also a Post-Doctoral Researcher and an Honorary Visiting Fellow with the University of Leicester, U.K. He is also the Software Department Chief with University UGS, Angola, in 2016. He has published over 60 papers in high impact international journals and relevant conferences. He is also a Board Member of the XS Innovation Group in Brazil. He developed a solid international career with academic positions and relevant research developed in Asia (China), Europe (England, Germany, and Portugal), Africa (Angola), and America (USA and Brazil).

His research interests include heart signal analysis (EKG, HRV, QTV, and others), biofeedback, neuroscience applied to education and management, computational and artificial intelligence, machine learning and deep learning, mathematical transforms, and the nonlinear analysis of biological time series.

PAULO CÉSAR CORTEZ received the B.Sc. degree in electrical engineering from the Federal University of Ceará (UFC), Brazil, in 1982, and the M.Sc. and Ph.D. degrees in electrical engineering from the Federal University of Paraíba in 1992 and 1996, respectively. He is currently a Full Professor with the Department of Teleinformatics Engineering, UFC. His fields of interest include image and signal analysis, computer-aided diagnostic systems, computer vision, biomedical signal processing, and biomedical systems.

JOÃO PAULO DO VALE MADEIRO received the B.Eng. degree in electrical engineering from the Federal University of Ceará (UFC), Brazil, in 2006, and the M.Sc. and D.Sc. degrees with the Department of Teleinformatics Engineering, UFC, in 2007 and 2013, respectively. He was with the University of Leicester, U.K., during his doctoral studies. He is currently a Professor with the Institute for Engineering and Sustainable Development, University for the International Integration of the Afro-Brazilian Lusophony, Brazil. He has published widely in leading international journals, and presented at numerous national and international conferences. His research interests are focused on digital signal processing, computer-aided diagnostic systems, automatic ECG parameter extraction, and the application of non-linear techniques for cardiac signals.

SIMON JAMES FONG received the B.Eng. degree (Hons.) in computer systems and the Ph.D. degree in computer science from La Trobe University, Australia, in 1993 and 1998, respectively. He is currently an Associate Professor with the Computer and Information Science Department, University of Macau. He is also the Co-Founder of the Data Analytics and Collaborative Computing Research Group, Faculty of Science and Technology. Prior to his academic career, he took up various managerial and technical posts, such as systems engineer, IT consultant, and an e-commerce director in Australia and Asia. He has published over 432 international conferences and peer-reviewed journal papers, mostly in the areas of data mining, data stream mining, big data analytics, and metaheuristics optimization algorithms and their applications. He is an active Researcher with leading positions, such as the Vice-Chair of the IEEE Computational Intelligence Society Task Force on Business Intelligence and Knowledge Management, and the Vice-Director of the International Consortium for Optimization and Modelling in Science and Industry.

FERNANDO SOARES SCHLINDWEIN was born in Porto Alegre, Brazil, in 1956. He received the B.Eng. degree (Hons.) in electrical/electronic engineering from the Federal University of Rio Grande do Sul, Brazil, in 1979, the M.Sc. degree (Hons.) in biomedical engineering and the D.Sc. degree in biomedical engineering from the Federal University of Rio de Janeiro (UFRJ), Brazil, in 1982 and 1991, respectively, and the Ph.D. degree in surgery from the University of Leicester, U.K., in 1990. He has supervised 16 Ph.D. research students as a Main Supervisor. From 1980 to 1992, he was a Lecturer with COPPE/UFRJ. He is currently a Reader with the Department of Engineering, University of Leicester. He has over 270 publications. His main current research interests are on real-time signal processing applied to biomedical engineering, with emphasis on applications-related to cardiac arrhythmias, in special, applied to the characterization and the treatment of atrial fibrillation.

VICTOR HUGO C. DE ALBUQUERQUE received the degree in mechatronics technology from the Federal Center of Technological Education of Ceará in 2006, the M.Sc. degree from the Department of Teleinformatics Engineering, Federal University of Ceará, in 2007, and the Ph.D. degree in mechanical engineering with emphasis on materials from the Federal University of Paraíba in 2010. He is currently an Assistant VI Professor with the Graduate Program in Applied Informatics and the Coordinator of the Laboratory of Bioinformatics, University of Fortaleza. He is also the Leader of computational methods with the Bioinformatics Research Group. He has experience in computer systems. He has authored or coauthored over 160 papers in refereed international journals, conferences, four book chapters, and four patents. His main research fields are applied computing, intelligent systems, visualization, and interaction, with a specific interest in pattern recognition, artificial intelligence, image processing and analysis, and automation with respect to biological signal/image processing, image segmentation, biomedical circuits, and human/brain–machine interaction including augmented and virtual reality simulation modeling for animals and humans. In addition, he is also involved in research with the microstructural characterization field through the combination of non-destructive techniques with signal/image processing and analysis, and pattern recognition. He was a TPC member of many international conferences. He has been a lead guest editor of several high-reputed journals. He is an Editorial Board Member of the IEEE Access, *Computational Intelligence and Neuroscience*, the *Journal of Nanomedicine and Nanotechnology Research*, and the *Journal of Mechatronics Engineering*.