Capillary Index Score in the Interventional Management of Stroke Trials I and II

Firas Al-Ali, MD; Thomas A. Tomsick, MD; John J. Connors III, MD; James M. Gebel, MD; John J. Elias, PhD; Georges Z. Markarian, MD; Zein Al-Ali; Joseph P. Broderick, MD

Background and Purpose—The Capillary Index Score (CIS) is a simple angiography-based scale for assessing viable tissue in the ischemic territory. We retrospectively applied it to Interventional Management of Stroke (IMS) trials I and II to evaluate the predictive value for good outcomes.

Methods—CIS was calculated from pretreatment diagnostic cerebral angiograms blinded to outcome. IMS I and II diagnostic cerebral angiogram images of sufficient quality were reviewed and CIS calculated for treated subjects with internal carotid artery or M1 occlusion. CIS scoring (0–3) was dichotomized into favorable (f CIS; 2 or 3) and poor (p CIS; 0 or 1). Modified thrombolysis in cerebral infarction score 2b or 3 was considered good revascularization. CIS and modified thrombolysis in cerebral infarction scores were compared with good outcome, defined as modified Rankin Scale score ≤2 at 90 days.

Results—Twenty-eight of 161 subjects met the inclusion criteria. Thirteen (46%) had f CIS. Good clinical outcome was significantly different between the 2 CIS groups (62% for f CIS versus 7% for p CIS; P=0.004). Good reperfusion correlated to good outcome (P=0.04). No significant differences in time to intravenous or intra-arterial treatment were identified between f CIS and p CIS groups (P>0.25).

Conclusions—A f CIS was found in ≥50% of subjects and was a virtual prerequisite for good outcome in this study subgroup of IMS I and II. We call this the 50% barrier. (Stroke. 2014;45:00-00.)

Key Words: collateral circulation — diagnostic imaging — diagnostic techniques, neurological — stroke, acute
The ischemic area was defined as the area lacking antegrade flow with blood supplied in a retrograde fashion through the pial collaterals. The CIS was calculated from anterior-posterior images after dividing the ischemic area into 3 equal segments (Figure 1). One point was awarded for each segment of identifiable capillary blush. A CIS=0 (no staining) implies no viable tissue in the ischemic area, whereas a score of 3 implies that essentially all tissues may be salvageable. The anterior-posterior images allow distinction between the left and right hemispheres. Based on previous findings, CIS scoring was dichotomized into f CIS (score=2 or 3) and poor CIS (p CIS; score=0 or 1). Three reviewers blinded to all other information simultaneously measured the CIS and came to unanimous consensus on the final score. Because the CIS scale is relatively simple and differences between scores imply the presence or absence of capillary blush within one third of the ischemic area, consensus was easily achieved.

Demographic information including age and sex and outcome measures were collected from the IMS I and II deidentified databases. Parameters relating to pre-IAT treatment included site of occlusion, time from stroke to onset of intravenous tissue plasminogen activator administration, time to onset of IAT, and baseline NIHSS score. Post-treatment parameters included the modified thrombolysis in cerebral infarction (mTICI) score, cerebral infarction volume from follow-up computed tomographic scan (Cheshire software, Hayden Image Processing Group, Boulder, CO), and 90-day mRS score. For dichotomization of the primary clinical outcome, a 90-day mRS score of 0 to 2 was considered a good outcome. Other dichotomized parameters included mTICI score (poor=0, 1, or 2a; good=2b or 3) and occlusion site (internal carotid artery versus middle cerebral artery). Statistical analysis focused on identifying parameters correlated with the mRS score and the CIS. The dichotomized data on CIS and mTICI score were compared with dichotomized clinical outcomes based on the 90-day mRS score ≤2 using the Fisher exact test. Stepwise multivariable linear regression analyses were used to relate infarction volume, time to IVT, time to IAT, NIHSS score, CIS, and mTICI score to mRS score. Only parameters that significantly (P<0.05) contributed to the regression were retained for subsequent analysis. Relationships between CIS and other parameters were also evaluated. Proportions of men and women and good and bad mTICI scores were compared between the f CIS and p CIS groups with a χ2 test or with a χ2 analysis if the sample size was suitable. Tests were used to compare ages, mRS scores, NIHSS scores, infarction volumes, intravenous times, and intra-arterial times between subjects in the f CIS and p CIS groups. Analyses were conducted using a variety of statistical analyses programs (IBM SPSS Statistics version 20, Minitab version 16, and Microsoft Excel).

### Results

Infarction volume and mRS scores were the parameters most strongly associated with CIS. No significant differences in age, baseline NIHSS, and time to IVT or IAT were identified between the f CIS and p CIS groups (P>0.25; Table 1). Proportions related to mTICI score, occlusion site, and sex also did not vary significantly between the f CIS and p CIS groups (P>0.25; Table 2). Mean infarction volume was 60,000±47,000 mm3 for the f CIS group compared with 121,000±72,000 mm3 for the p CIS group (P=0.02). Mean mRS score was 2.8±2.4 for the f CIS group compared with 4.6±1.1 for the p CIS group (P=0.01).

The primary parameters associated with a good outcome were a f CIS and successful reperfusion. A f CIS was identified in 13 of 28 subjects. An mRS score ≤2 was achieved in 8 (62%) of those subjects (Table 2). Only 1 of 15 subjects (7%) with a p CIS had a good outcome, but nevertheless with a relatively large infarction volume (100,000 mm3). Ten subjects achieved mTICI 2b/3 reperfusion, with 6 reaching a mRS 0 to 2, whereas 3 of 8 subjects with a poor mTICI score had a good clinical outcome, all with CIS=2 (f CIS). Three with a good outcome were from a total of 8 subjects with f CIS and poor reperfusion (38%; Table 3). All 5 subjects who presented with f CIS and achieved good reperfusion had a good outcome (100%). The rates of good clinical outcome were significantly lower among subjects with p CIS (3/9, or 33%) compared with subjects with f CIS and good reperfusion (7/10, or 70%; P=0.0001).

### Statistical Analysis

The primary parameters associated with clinical outcomes were infarction volume and mRS score. Relationships between CIS and other parameters were also evaluated. Stepwise multivariable linear regression analyses were used to relate infarction volume, time to IVT, time to IAT, NIHSS score, CIS, and mTICI score to mRS score. Only parameters that significantly (P<0.05) contributed to the regression were retained for subsequent analysis. Relationships between CIS and other parameters were also evaluated. Proportions of men and women and good and bad mTICI scores were compared between the f CIS and p CIS groups with a χ2 test or with a χ2 analysis if the sample size was suitable. Tests were used to compare ages, mRS scores, NIHSS scores, infarction volumes, intravenous times, and intra-arterial times between subjects in the f CIS and p CIS groups. Analyses were conducted using a variety of statistical analyses programs.

### Table 1. Comparisons Between f CIS and p CIS Groups for Continuous Data

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Parameter</th>
<th>f CIS</th>
<th>p CIS</th>
<th>P Value</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Age, y</td>
<td>61±13</td>
<td>62±13</td>
<td>0.66</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NIHSS score</td>
<td>19±4</td>
<td>20±3</td>
<td>0.32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Time to IVT, min</td>
<td>120±36</td>
<td>133±22</td>
<td>0.26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Time to IAT, min</td>
<td>218±41</td>
<td>218±40</td>
<td>0.98</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Infarction volume, cm³</td>
<td>60±47</td>
<td>121±72</td>
<td>0.02*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>mRS score</td>
<td>2.8±2.4</td>
<td>4.6±1.1</td>
<td>0.01*</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

CIS indicates Capillary Index Score; f CIS, favorable CIS (2 or 3); IAT, intra-arterial treatment; IVT, intravenous treatment; mRS, modified Rankin Scale; NIHSS, National Institutes of Health Stroke Scale; and p CIS, poor CIS (0 or 1).

*Indicates a significant difference.

### Table 2. Proportions of Subjects With Good Outcomes (mRS Score ≤2) and a Favorable CIS for Dichotomized Parameters Along With the Level of Significance From Comparisons

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Good mRS/ Total</th>
<th>P Value</th>
<th>f CIS/Total</th>
<th>P Value</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>CIS</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>p 0 or 1</td>
<td>1/15 (7%)</td>
<td>0.004*</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>f 2 or 3</td>
<td>8/13 (62%)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>mTICI* score</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>0, 1, or 2a</td>
<td>3/18 (17%)</td>
<td>0.04*</td>
<td>8/18 (44%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2b or 3†</td>
<td>2/10 (60%)</td>
<td></td>
<td>5/10 (50%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Occlusion site</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ICA</td>
<td>2/12 (17%)</td>
<td>0.22</td>
<td>4/12 (33%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MCA</td>
<td>7/16 (44%)</td>
<td></td>
<td>9/16 (56%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sex</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>6/15 (40%)</td>
<td>0.43</td>
<td>7/15 (47%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>3/13 (23%)</td>
<td></td>
<td>6/13 (46%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

CIS indicates Capillary Index Score; f, favorable; ICA, internal carotid artery; MCA, middle cerebral artery; mRS, modified Rankin Scale; mTICI, modified thrombolysis in cerebral infarction; and p, poor.

*Indicates a significant difference.

†2b or 3 is considered good revascularization.

Figure 1. Quantification of the Capillary Index Score (CIS) based on an anterior-posterior cerebral angiogram. A, Site of ischemia was the middle cerebral artery (MCA). The arrow marks the anterior cerebral territory. CIS=3 for this image. B, CIS=0 for this image.
with a \( p \) CIS and successful reperfusion (mTICI 2b) had a good outcome. Although the data do not exclude good outcomes for some patients with \( f \) CIS without treatment, revascularization still seems to provide the best chance for a good outcome in these patients.

**The \( f \) CIS and the 50% Barrier**

The current results and those of the previous evaluation of the CIS\(^1\) imply that a \( f \) CIS is a virtual prerequisite for a good clinical outcome. Agreement between the BMC-AIS Registry\(^1\) and IMS I and II trials concerning the percentage of \( f \) CIS (42% and 46%, respectively), despite differences in methods and time to treatment, strengthen the hypothesis that approximately half of patients do not have sufficiently robust collaterals to sustain ischemia until reperfusion (the 50% barrier). Poor collaterals may account for a success rate of only \( \approx 60\% \) for patients without large vessel occlusion on DCA after intravenous tissue plasminogen activator in IMS I and II (T.A. Tomsock, unpublished data, 2013) and IMS III.\(^7\) Treating all who exhibit large vessel occlusion at DCA is unlikely to provide a significantly higher percentage of good outcomes, further pointing to a ceiling effect for good outcomes in patients with IAT-AIS.

No significant relationships were established between \( f \) CIS and age, sex, occlusion site, time to IVT, or time to IAT, although these comparisons were limited by a small sample size. Based on the effect size noted for the current study, >150 patients would be needed to evaluate the relationship between CIS categorization and time to IVT with a power of 0.8. Similarly, no significant relationships with age or time to reperfusion were noted in the BMC-AIS.\(^1\) With recent reports identifying genes thought to be responsible for poor versus good pial collaterals in mice,\(^4\) the presence of a similar gene in humans is plausible. A trial to search for such a gene is ongoing (Genetic Determinants of Collateral Status in Stroke [GENEDCSS] trial).

**Relationship Between Time and Ischemia: Linear Versus Logarithmic**

The data from IMS I and II and BMC-AIS suggest no relationship between CIS and time from ictus. In other words, the CIS of a patient presenting \( <2 \) hours of ictus is not necessarily more favorable than the CIS of a patient presenting at 5 hours. Time from ictus to DCA was similar for the \( f \) CIS and \( p \) CIS groups.
for both the BMC-AIS Registry and current data, and the percentage of subjects with f CIS was similar for the 2 studies despite the current study only including patients presenting <3 hours of ictus, as opposed to 6 hours for the BMC-AIS Registry. These data suggest that the proportion of f CIS remains relatively stable ≤6 hours. Previous trials demonstrate a decrease in %mRS 0 to 2 between 3 and 6 hours. Subjects in IMS I and II and in a pre-IMS registry with intra-arterial therapy initiated <3 hours demonstrated a 60% good outcomes.7 Trial subjects with angiograms but no treatable occlusion recovered similarly. Subjects with M1 or M2 occlusion in Prolyse in Acute Cerebral Thromboembolism (PROACT) II achieved 40% mRS 0 to 2 with treatment initiated at mean 5.3 hours, and control subjects achieved 25% good outcomes.8 Control subjects in Mechanical Embolus Removal in Cerebral Ischemia (MERCI) recovered proportionately less well than treated subjects in PROACT II.9 The ≈20% decrease in proportion of good outcome >2.3 hours from IMS I and II to PROACT II may be attributed to different treatment methods or individual subjects’ ability to maintain collateral viability over time. This 10% per hour difference is not applicable to each subject.8 We hypothesize that those with greater collaterals and higher CIS show less decrease in %mRS 0 to 2 with time than those with a lower CIS. Other authors have demonstrated a statistically significant decrease in the odds ratio of mRS 0 to 2 outcomes within the IMS studies with increasing time from ictus to reperfusion (≤6 hours), also suggesting a linear relationship between good outcomes and time from ictus to reperfusion.8,10

The current data suggest that the decrease in percentage of good outcomes and stable percentage of f CIS are not consistent with a linear relationship between time from ictus and proportion of patients with potentially good outcomes (Figure 2). We do know that a time limit exists before brain tissue becomes irreversibly damaged for a specific patient, depending on residual cerebral blood flow (rCBF). To reconcile this observation, we propose that the linear relationship of time to outcome is a subset of the overall relationship when all AIS patients are taken into account. Analysis of IMS III data regarding odds ratios of good outcomes in CIS 0 to 1 versus CIS 2 to 3 versus time will be of interest in this regard.

When examining the entire population of patients with AIS, the rCBF value of some will be so low that they experience irreversible ischemia within an hour to 2 of ictus (≈50% of all patients, the 50% barrier). These patients are seldom enrolled in studies because of evidence of ischemia on diagnostic imaging or typically do poorly if they are enrolled. A second group of patients are hypothesized to present with intermediate rCBF and will demonstrate a gradual decrease in reversible ischemia with time. A third group of patients with a higher rCBF, but still below the 23 mL/100 g per min threshold established previously, will exhibit a more asymptotic, flat curve (Figure 2), with many typically excluded from studies or treatment because of the artificial time window. Combining these 3 groups, the relationship between time from ictus and reversible ischemia will resemble a more logarithmic function. This logarithmic, rather than linear, fit of time from ictus versus reversible ischemia was actually alluded to in the empirical data available on cerebral ischemia in primates by Jones et al.10 In their seminal articles,4,12,13 rCBF was measured in the ischemic area of monkeys with the time until irreversible tissue damage recorded. An infarction threshold was created separating data that represented normal and infarcted tissue. The data points seem to fit a logarithmic pattern, and we used a logarithmic best fit (Figure 3; r²=0.94) to quantify the relationship between rCBF (mL/100 g per min) and time from ictus to irreversible cerebral tissue damage (infarction; hours) along the threshold as:

\[ rCBF = 6.3\ln(\text{time}) + 3.1 \]

This logarithmic model explains the interesting (and numerous) case reports of similar proportions of good clinical outcomes after treatment before and after 6 hours of ictus.14–17

The main limitation of the current study was the low rate of inclusion from the IMS I and II databases for the current analysis (17%), which can primarily be attributed to a current emphasis on minimizing time to treatment leading to incomplete DCA. The authors think that more importance should be placed on obtaining complete DCA images and quantifying the CIS as part of patient selection, because the additional few minutes will not adversely influence the outcome. Although attempts (unsuccessful still) have been made to relate the CIS...
to measures from perfusion MRI, no other imaging modality currently provides a similar threshold for patient selection.

**Conclusions**

Although time is brain, our data suggest a logarithmic, rather than linear, relationship. During the traditional time window for IAT-AIS, ≈50% of patients may have already sustained irreversible damage before treatment (the 50% barrier). Poor patient selection may explain why the recent IMS III trial and other studies failed to show efficacy of IAT-AIS. Using the CIS for patient selection in future trials should demonstrate the efficacy of IAT-AIS. A large, prospective, multicenter trial is needed.

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**References**

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