Outcome Differences between Intra-Arterial Iso- and Low-Osmolality Iodinated Radiographic Contrast Media in the Interventional Management of Stroke III Trial


AJNR Am J Neuroradiol 2015, 36 (11) 2074-2081
doi: https://doi.org/10.3174/ajnr.A4421
http://www.ajnr.org/content/36/11/2074
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ABSTRACT

BACKGROUND AND PURPOSE: Intracarotid arterial infusion of nonionic, low-osmolal iohexol contrast medium has been associated with increased intracranial hemorrhage in a rat middle cerebral artery occlusion model compared with saline infusion. Iso-osmolal iodixanol (290 mOsm/kg H2O) infusion demonstrated smaller infarcts and less intracranial hemorrhage compared with low-osmolal iopamidol and saline. No studies comparing iodinated radiographic contrast media in human stroke have been performed, to our knowledge. We hypothesized that low-osmolal contrast media may be associated with worse outcomes compared with iodixanol in the Interventional Management of Stroke III Trial (IMS III).

MATERIALS AND METHODS: We reviewed prospective iodinated radiographic contrast media data for 133 M1 occlusions treated with endovascular therapy. We compared 5 prespecified efficacy and safety end points (mRS 0–2 outcome, modified TICI 2b-3 reperfusion, asymptomatic and symptomatic intracranial hemorrhage, and mortality) between those receiving iodixanol (n = 31) or low-osmolal contrast media (n = 102). Variables imbalanced between iodinated radiographic contrast media types or associated with outcome were considered potential covariates for the adjusted models. In addition to the iodinated radiographic contrast media type, final covariates were those selected by using the stepwise method in a logistic regression model. Adjusted relative risks were then estimated by using a log-link regression model.

RESULTS: Of baseline or endovascular therapy variables potentially linked to outcome, prior antiplatelet agent use was more common and microcatheter iodinated radiographic contrast media injections were fewer with iodixanol. Relative risk point estimates are in favor of iodixanol for the 5 prespecified end points with M1 occlusion. The percentage of risk differences are numerically greater for microcatheter injections with iodixanol.

CONCLUSIONS: While data favoring the use of iso-osmolar iodixanol for reperfusion of M1 occlusion following IV rtPA are inconclusive, potential pathophysiologic mechanisms suggesting clinical benefit warrant further investigation.

ABBREVIATIONS: EVT = endovascular therapy; IA = intra-arterial; ICH = intracranial hemorrhage; IMS III = Interventional Management of Stroke III Trial; IRCM = iodinated radiographic contrast media; LOCM = low-osmolal contrast media; MCI = microcatheter injection; mTICI = modified TICI; SICH = symptomatic intracranial hemorrhage

Iodinated radiographic contrast media (IRCM) have variable antithrombotic, fibrinolytic, cytotoxic, hydrostatic, and vasoactive effects. In a rat middle cerebral artery reperfusion model, intracarotid arterial infusion of the nonionic low-osmolal contrast medium (LOCM) iohexol (672 mOsm/kg. H2O) increased intracerebral hemorrhage (ICH) compared with saline infusion. Iso-osmolar iodixanol (290 mOsm/kg H2O) infusion led to...
smaller infarcts and less ICH compared with both low-osmolal iopamidol and saline in a similar model.2 Dzialowski et al12 reported reduced odds of favorable outcome in patients receiving intravenous IRCM for CT angiography before IV thrombolysis.

Practical differences exist as well: IRCM differ in cost (ie, iodixanol is more expensive than LOCM) and ease of use (ie, iodixanol is more viscous and more difficult to inject). No study has prospectively and comprehensively compared outcomes according to intra-arterial (IA) IRCM use in endovascular therapy (EVT) of ischemic stroke in humans, to our knowledge. We report the efficacy and safety outcomes for subjects with EVT for MCA M1 occlusion in the Interventional Management of Stroke III Trial (IMS III) according to IRCM type and osmolality.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Study eligibility/exclusion criteria, methods, and results have been previously reported.4–5 Six hundred fifty-six subjects were randomized to either IV rtPA or IV rtPA plus endovascular therapy. CT angiography or MR angiography was not required but was allowed per protocol for endovascular treatment procedures, following the primary indication, according to EVT use of either iso-osmolar iodixanol or any LOCM.

The 2 IRCM groups were initially compared for differences in prescribed outcomes that might warrant further comparative analysis. Baseline risk factors with a potential effect on clinical efficacy or safety outcome in revascularization therapy were then compared for balance between the 2 groups. Baseline variables imbalanced between IRCM types or associated with outcome (P < .1) were considered potential covariates for the adjusted models. Imbalance/association was measured by using the χ², Fisher, or Wilcoxon 2-sample test, as appropriate. The linearity in the logit assumption was checked for all continuous potential covariates. In addition to IRCM type, final covariates were those selected by using the stepwise method in a logistic regression model. Model fit was assessed via the Hosmer-Lemeshow test. For ease of interpretation, adjusted relative risks were then estimated by using a log-link regression model.

RESULTS

Thirty-one M1 occlusions were treated with iodixanol use during EVT, and 102, with LOCM of 4 different types. Differences in baseline characteristics known to be relevant in stroke efficacy or safety outcome with revascularization therapy and other relevant treatment-related variables are included in Tables 1 and 2.

Table 3 details relative and absolute efficacy and safety differences between the 2 IRCM groups.

Separate adjusted models were fit for each outcome (except SICH, due to an insufficient event rate). Variables imbalanced between IRCM types or associated with outcome (P < .1) were considered potential covariates for the adjusted models, including antiplatelet medication (67.7% iodixanol versus 44.1%, P = .0212), history of coronary artery disease (35.5% iodixanol versus 19.6%, P = .0671), age (iodixanol median, 73 versus 68.5 years, P = .0698), and microcatheter injection (MCI) (median, 1 iodixanol versus 2 LOCM; P = .03), varied according to IRCM type.

Adjusted relative risk point estimates were in favor of the iodixanol group for all outcomes (Table 4). No significant differences for specified outcomes were identified. Conclusions remained the same after sensitivity analyses were performed for asymptomatic ICH and new or worsening neurologic symptoms in the judgment of the clinical investigator that may warrant medical intervention. Asymptomatic ICH within 30 hours of IV rtPA initiation was a secondary safety end point.

Investigators prospectively entered data on the IRCM compound type and volume for EVT subjects. The percentage of iodine concentration and/or specific IRCM osmolality was not consistently recorded. Clinical efficacy and safety end points were analyzed for subjects with EVT for M1 occlusion (defined as occlusion of the MCA trunk with 100% MCA distribution at risk, exclusive of a typical anterior temporal artery distribution), according to EVT use of either iso-osmolar iodixanol or any LOCM.

Table 1: Baseline clinical characteristics considered for adjusted analysis

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Iodixanol</th>
<th>LOCMa</th>
<th>P Value</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Agec (median) (range) (yr)</td>
<td>73 (47–83)</td>
<td>68.5 (24–82)</td>
<td>.07</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Baseline glucoseb (mmol/L) (median) (range)</td>
<td>6.9 (5.2–18.3)</td>
<td>6.6 (3.8–21.5)</td>
<td>.33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Diabetes (%)</td>
<td>19.4</td>
<td>17.7</td>
<td>.83</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Baseline SBP (mm Hg)d (median) (range)</td>
<td>145.5 (116–185)</td>
<td>146 (102–194)</td>
<td>.82</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>History of high BP (%)</td>
<td>74.2</td>
<td>73.5</td>
<td>.94</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Atrial fibrillation (%)</td>
<td>48.4</td>
<td>35.3</td>
<td>.39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Coronary artery disease (%)</td>
<td>35.5</td>
<td>19.6</td>
<td>.07</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ASPECTS 8–10 (%)</td>
<td>41.9</td>
<td>49.0</td>
<td>.49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Baseline NIHSSd ≥20%</td>
<td>35.5</td>
<td>37.3</td>
<td>.86</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>≤19%</td>
<td>64.5</td>
<td>62.8</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Historical mRSh (No. Sx) (%)</td>
<td>90.3</td>
<td>86.3</td>
<td>.46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Antiplatelet agents (%)</td>
<td>67.7</td>
<td>44.1</td>
<td>.02</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Presumptive stroke location right (%)</td>
<td>51.6</td>
<td>49.0</td>
<td>.80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Baseline CTA/MRA (%)</td>
<td>61.3</td>
<td>51.0</td>
<td>.31</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note:—Sx indicates symptoms; SBP, systolic blood pressure; BP, blood pressure.

4 Four LOCM (mOsm/Kg H2O): iohexol (672), iopamidol (616), ioversol (651), iopromide (607).11
5 Baseline factors relevant to prespecified outcomes.
mRS 0–2 outcome models to include adjustments for variables known to be associated with these outcomes.

As a known variable affecting procedure outcome that was unequally distributed, MCIs were further analyzed. In bivariate analysis of MCI number compared with outcomes independent of the IRCM group, significant relationships were identified. Fewer MCIs were associated with greater mRS 0–2 outcome (P = .029) and better reperfusion (P = .003). MCI remained a significant predictor of reperfusion when adjusted for key baseline and treatment-related variables. MCIs were not significant predictors of mRS 0–2 or mortality when adjusted for other key variables. Ninety-one of 133 (68.5%) subjects had MCIs, including 16/31 (52%) with iodixanol and 75/102 (73.5%) with LOCM (P = .022). With MCI use, percentage risk differences in the measured end points were in favor of iodixanol for all end points. MCI use did not differ among device methods.

DISCUSSION
The potential risks and safety of IRCM use in the setting of acute stroke in humans have been discussed for a long time, with the theoretic, unproven risks.11,12 However, with effective ischemic stroke therapies now available, investigation and deeper understanding of the theoretic effects of different media may assume greater practical significance.

Our analyses here disclose potential differences in outcomes from stroke treatment arising from the use of IA iso-osmolar iodixanol versus LOCM agents for EVT following IV rtPA in the setting of microcatheter use. Raw, unadjusted, and adjusted directions of effect were in favor of iodixanol for all prespecified efficacy and safety outcomes. Relatively greater age, blood glucose, percentage of atrial fibrillation, and CT hypodensity (as manifested by a lower ASPECT score), followed by relatively later IV rtPA administration, longer time to artery puncture, and more thrombolysis-only procedures, were present in the iodixanol group. Prior antiplatelet use, the only baseline variable significantly greater with iodixanol, has been associated with a small excess of SICH in systemic thrombolytic therapy.13 While these factors should disadvantage iodixanol regarding mRS 0–2 outcome and ICH rate, point estimates from adjusted analyses remain in favor of iodixanol. MCIs were less common in the iodixanol group. Procedures with no MCI showed no benefit to iodixanol use. When MCIs were analyzed according to IRCM use, however, a greater relative benefit was suggested with MCI iodixanol use compared with LOCM for all end points.

IRCM effects may be collectively related to their ionic or non-ionic properties, iso-osmolality, and their molecular structure and size as monomers or dimers. Osmolality is, in part, related to iodine concentration, generally recommended at 300-mg per cent for cerebral use. Multiple iodine concentrations of the same IRCM compound type were used in IMS III. Consensus that the use of iodine high-osmolal IRCM was associated with worse outcome after infarction in humans and animals has eliminated their use in this setting11,12,14. LOCM non-ionic media may contribute to ICH in animals.1 Differences in ICH number and infarct area effects might also exist between injection of iso-osmolar and LOCM.2 It is reasonable to further hypothesize, then, that nonionic iso-osmolal IRCM may have a less harmful net effect in the setting of acute stroke than nonionic LOCM. No comparative data in IV or IA IRCM use in human stroke are available to refute that hypothesis.3

Mechanisms contributing to potential differences in IRCM efficacy and safety have been extensively analyzed under a variety of experimental conditions in vitro and in animal models, including coagulation, direct cytotoxic, neurotoxic, osmotic, hydrostatic, and direct vasomotor effects.

### Table 2: Relevant treatment-related variables considered for adjusted analysis

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Iodixanol (No.) (% )</th>
<th>LOCM (No.) (% )</th>
<th>P Value</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Time to IV therapy (min) (median)</td>
<td>124</td>
<td>115</td>
<td>.25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Onset to puncture (min) (median)</td>
<td>215</td>
<td>205</td>
<td>.29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Proximal MI (vs distal) (%)</td>
<td>45.2</td>
<td>52.0</td>
<td>.51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thrombolysis only (%)</td>
<td>41.9</td>
<td>36.2</td>
<td>.57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No. microcatheter injections (median)</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>.03</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Heparin volume (U) (median)</td>
<td>3385</td>
<td>2986.8</td>
<td>.59</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New emboli (%)</td>
<td>16.1</td>
<td>11.8</td>
<td>.54</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IRCM volume (mL) (median)</td>
<td>85</td>
<td>64</td>
<td>.34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Infarct volume 24 hr (mL)</td>
<td>61.0</td>
<td>50.2</td>
<td>.23</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Table 3: Efficacy and safety outcomes according to iodixanol versus LOCM use

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Iodixanol (No.) (%)</th>
<th>LOCM (No.) (%)</th>
<th>Absolute % Risk Difference</th>
<th>Relative % Difference</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>N</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>102</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>–</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>mTICI 2b/3</td>
<td>16 (51.6)</td>
<td>42 (41.2)</td>
<td>10.4</td>
<td>20.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>mRS 0–2</td>
<td>11 (35.5)</td>
<td>31 (30.4)</td>
<td>5.1</td>
<td>14.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SICH</td>
<td>2 (6.5)</td>
<td>9 (8.8)</td>
<td>–2.4</td>
<td>–26.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mortality</td>
<td>6 (19.4)</td>
<td>26 (25.5)</td>
<td>–6.1</td>
<td>–23.9</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Table 4: Relative risk of specified outcomes for iodixanol versus LOCM

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Unadjusted RR</th>
<th>99% CI</th>
<th>Adjusted RR</th>
<th>99% CI</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>mRS 0–2</td>
<td>1.675</td>
<td>0.5606</td>
<td>2.4314</td>
<td>1.2002</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>mTICI 2b/3</td>
<td>1.2535</td>
<td>0.7291</td>
<td>2.1549</td>
<td>1.2829</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AICH</td>
<td>0.7031</td>
<td>0.3216</td>
<td>1.5457</td>
<td>0.6596</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SICH</td>
<td>0.7312</td>
<td>0.1048</td>
<td>5.1038</td>
<td>0.7538</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mortality</td>
<td>0.7593</td>
<td>0.2683</td>
<td>2.1486</td>
<td>0.7538</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note:—RR indicates relative risk; AICH, asymptomatic ICH.
Coagulation

Platelet Activity Effects. Direct activation of platelets (ie, degranulation and release of the procoagulant content of attenuated bodies and α-granules) is induced in vitro by nonionic LOCM, with no activation by LOCM ionic (eg, ioxaglate) and nonionic dimeric ioxaglate.15-17 Nonionic iohexol and ioxaglate are equivalent in reducing platelet aggregation.18,19 In vitro platelet activation by thrombin is inhibited by ionic LOCM, whereas non-ionic monomeric LOCM and dimeric ioxaglate did not affect it.20 Prior antplatelet use of aspirin conferred neither clinical nor re-erfusion benefit nor hemorrhagic risk in conjunction with IV rtPA in the National Institute of Neurological Disorders and Stroke trial, and none has previously been demonstrated in EVT.21,22 While antplatelet use in IMS III tended to be associated with increased ICH overall, its use was more common in the ioxaglate group, yet ICH was decreased with ioxaglate use.

Thrombin Activity Effects. The heparin dose used during EVT did not differ between the 2 treatment groups. Nonionic agents cause less direct inhibition of thrombin production compared with ionic LOCM, acting after the generation of thrombin at the step of fibrin monomer polymerization.23 Both ionic and nonionic agents can prolong clotting time and may exaggerate the effects of anticoagulant and antplatelet drugs.24 Nonionic LOCM iopamidol and iohexol have an anticoagulant effect but permit thrombin generation in vitro.25-27 The anticoagulant effect of ioxaglate has been shown to be significantly less than that of iohexol.28 LOCM iopamidol has been found to have a greater thrombotic effect than iodoxanol.28 One of 3 clinical studies of coronary intervention found a significant decrease in abrupt ves- sel occlusions with iodoxanol, particularly in the absence of glyco- protein IIb/IIIa blockers, while the other 2 found no differences in major cardiac events.29 No differences in mortality or length of stay were found among 107,994 coronary angiographies or inter-ventions with 3 different LOCM.30 Outcome differences in IRM effects between procedures performed for acute occlusive EVT have been suggested for coronary intervention yet have also been inconclusive due to limited power.30

Fibrinolytic Effects. IRCM delay and impede fibrinolysis by re-combinant tissue-type plasminogen activator. In vitro studies have shown that while iohexol delays the onset of lysis induced by all lytic agents,ioxaglate delayed the onset of lysis by rtPA and urokinase but not by streptokinase.31 In vivo studies in dogs have shown that alteplase-induced fibrinolysis could be inhibited by iohexol. Reocclusion of coronary arteries following fibrinolysis with iodixanol.36,37 IRCM can also induce apoptosis of endothelial cells in vitro.38 Significant in vitro differences between IRM on red blood cell count morphology may also contribute to thrombosis in vivo, with ioxaglate retaining a greater percentage of normal morphology compared with LOCM agents.39

Both IV and IA IRM injection increase the permeability of the blood-brain barrier under normal conditions in animals.40-42 Osmolality plays an important role in the BBB dysfunction, particu-larly after ischemic injury, even contributing to larger infarcts with hyperosmolar compared with iso-osmolar IRM infusion.12 Hypertension, which may reflexly occur with arterial occlusion, potentiates the effect of these BBB effects.43 In humans, IRM identification in the brain or subarachnoid space after aneurysm coil procedures by using large IRM volumes is usually asymptomatic.44,45 Theoretically, it is possible that large IV or IA doses of IRM (as used in nonischemia EVT procedures) may contribute to exaggerated BBB opening, edema, IRM deposition, and ICH in ischemic stroke EVT as well.46,47

Following acute ischemia in rats, early leakage of MR imaging contrast agents across the BBB has been shown to predict and co-localize to subsequent hemorrhagic transformation.48,49 In humans, contrast media deposition during MR imaging and CT perfusion in the acute ischemic setting is also a marker of subse-quent hemorrhagic transformation.50-52 Depositions confirmed on both post-EVT CT and MR imaging have also co-localized to MR imaging contrast enhancement and hemorrhagic transfor-mation.53 MR imaging contrast deposition during routine gadolinium-enhanced MR imaging following IV rtPA occurs in approxi-mately 20% of infarcts and is predictive of subsequent ICH.54,55 Lummul et al56 connected CT-hyperattenuated cerebral lesions with IRM deposition following both CTA/CTP and sub-sequent EVT. The high incidence of hyperattenuated lesions and the percentage of secondary ICH suggest that they both may be IRM-volume related. It remains unclear whether contrast media deposition is both effect and cause, with IRM leaking across the BBB contributing to additive cytotoxic effects on the interstitium and neuronal elements. However, in IMS III, the median iodix-anol volume was numerically higher than that for LOCM, sug-gesting that either worse measured outcome differences were not merely LOCM-volume related or greater iodixanol volume exerted a protective effect.

Complex mechanisms beyond osmolality-related toxicity and dysfunction may be operative.57,58 Heinrich et al59 compared the cytotoxic effects of dimeric iso-osmolar IRM (iodixanol, iotro- lan) and iso-osmolar formulations of monomeric IRM on renal tubular cells in vitro and found that dimeric IRM have stronger cytotoxic effects, postulating a mechanism beyond osmolality alone. Molecular chemotoxicity decreases as the number of carboxyl groups decreases and the number of hydroxyl groups in-creases, and IRM with no carboxyl groups and a number of
hydroxyl groups evenly distributed around the main molecule have reduced neurotoxicity.\textsuperscript{60,61} Iodixanol has an increased number of hydroxyl groups (n = 9) compared with LOCM (eg, 5 for iopamidol), but more carboxy groups (6 versus 3), theoretically disadvantageous in human use. Increasing the number of hydroxyl groups also increases solubility, thus reducing the tendency to bind to tissues and proteins, which may then lead to inhibition of enzyme systems, including acetylcholinesterase.\textsuperscript{52,63} The net vector for the benefit of the complex structural arrangement of iodixanol is uncertain.

Hyperosmolality-toxicity injury may be offset, in part, by a beneficial osmotic toxicity effect of intravascular IRCM on the intravascular and extracellular spaces based on molecular size. Dimeric iodixanol (1000 Da) is approximately twice as large as monomeric iopamidol (550 Da). Five times larger than mannitol (182 Da), iodixanol may not only be less able to traverse early damage to the BBB to exert adverse direct toxic or osmotic effects beyond endothelial cell tight junctions in the basal lamina or in the extracellular space, but it also may offer a microvascular osmotic advantage.\textsuperscript{64} Conversely, monomeric LOCM may ultimately more easily traverse the damaged membrane to promote increased edema by an osmotic tissue effect. While conflicting evidence regarding increased neurotoxicity once the IRCM has crossed the BBB in animals and humans exists,\textsuperscript{12,14,65-68} an additive effect of IRCM traversing the damaged BBB into the interstitium, affecting cellular and neural elements, contributing to greater ICH potential and neural injury, is hypothesized.

Hydrostatic Effects. Viscosity differences (iodixanol 11.8 cP at 37° versus iopamidol 4.7 cP) may simultaneously lead to a reduced hydrostatic effect of viscous, dimeric iodixanol, with prolonged vascular retention at the injured BBB, and may contribute to the reduced infarct edema volume measured in rats.\textsuperscript{66} Hydrolysis of iodixanol in vitro can produce a derivative of propylene glycol (2,3-dihydroxy-1-propylamine HOCH2-CH\{OH\}-CH2-NH2), which, when injected intra-arterially in a rat ischemia model, has been found to decrease BBB dysfunction by a “sealing” effect, with subsequent decreased permeability and infarct size.\textsuperscript{20} Similar hydrostatic IA “sealing” effects on the BBB could even be possible under certain conditions.\textsuperscript{71,72} Molecule size alone may present a relative microvascular seal, delaying not only early ischemic edema but also diminishing later vasogenic edema associated with hemorrhagic transformation.

Relatively reduced asymptomatic ICH and SICH with iodixanol in IMS III, despite the possibility of better mTICI reperfusion and larger infarct volume, contradict the theoretic construct of reperfusion ICH effects, suggesting that iodixanol may somehow offer an unrelated protective effect against ICH.\textsuperscript{73} The mechanism of hemorrhagic transformation, though linked to reperfusion, infarct volume, and edema, might have a separate and different pathophysiologic pathway after reperfusion of acute ischemic stroke in humans and animals.\textsuperscript{74-75} Infarct size and ICH differences are greater in rats with temporary-versus-permanent MCA occlusion.\textsuperscript{76} Reduced infarct edema volume as a measure of reduced reperfusion injury with both LOCM-versus-saline reperfusion and viscous iso-osmolar-versus-less viscous LOCM has been found in rats.\textsuperscript{1,2} In humans, improved mTICI reperfusion following ischemia would be anticipated to increase levels of reactive oxygen species, including superoxide radical and nitric oxide.\textsuperscript{77,78} Oxidative radicals trigger activation of metalloproteases, which, in turn, potentiate injury to microvasculature and neural cells.\textsuperscript{79,80} However, IRCM may decrease the endothelial production of nitric oxide by reducing the activity of the enzyme nitric oxide synthase, which is responsible for the endogenous synthesis of this vasodilator.\textsuperscript{81,82} Variable vasoactive effects of IRCM have been identified in the renal vasculature, where both iopamidol and iodixanol caused a brief initial vasodilation, followed by increased resistance with iopamidol, but not iodixanol.\textsuperscript{83} Increased CO2 release from the rat hippocampus incubated with the iso-osmolar dimers iotrolan and iodixanol has been measured, a potentiator of vasodilation. Increased CO2 production could involve an effect of the glucose metabolic pathway or be indirect via an unspecified mechanism that increases cell glucose use.\textsuperscript{85} Potential glucose metabolism effects of IRCM have been identified in vitro and in vivo for metrizamide, but not for iohexol or iopamidol. Clinically significant vasomotor differences in the cerebral vasculature in humans are unknown.

Miscellaneous Effects. IRCM have been reported to adversely affect oxyhemoglobin dissociation.\textsuperscript{65} Decreased pH or increased temperature in the hypoxic brain tissue can cause changes in the physicochemical properties of IRCM as well. Increased BBB disruption has been demonstrated in rabbits with IA injection of higher iodine-concentration IRCM (300 versus 150 mg/mL), at a lower temperature (24°C versus 37°C), during a briefer time (1 versus 30 seconds).\textsuperscript{86} The role that these miscellaneous effects might play in EVT can only be theorized.

ICH has been previously linked to microcathether IRCM injections during EVT.\textsuperscript{57,87} Microcathether IRCM injections push saline ahead at higher initial pressures and flow rates, which decrease as the catheter becomes IRCM-filled (D. Hansmann, EKOS, unpublished data, 2014). The viscosity of iodixanol may diminish such distal catheter pressure and flow effects compared with LOCM, and it offers a relative safety margin reflected in lower ICH and SICH rates. Microcathether IRCM injection delivers a higher concentration of IRCM locally within the occlusion, which then may wash out more slowly from patent or partially obstructed microvasculature, thereby amplifying protective hydrostatic microvascular iodixanol effects. Local microcathether saline injections, used to clear catheters of IRCM, with pressure and flow increasing through the act of clearance, may be equally responsible for any untoward effects of IRCM MCI.

There are limitations to our results, analysis, and hypotheses. First, the importance of an unrecognized baseline or treatment factor may be underestimated. Prior antiplatelet and iodixanol use may favor revascularization and clinical outcomes in a way not previously demonstrated in IV or EVT revascularization studies. The specifics of recording IA injections of IRCM in a revascularization procedure leave room for wide ranges of practice variables that theoretically may have a secondary effect on outcome. Injections such as hand or power, intracranial microcatheter or cervical guide, saline-diluted or full-strength, high- or low-pressure, large- or low-volume may all be performed during the same procedure. Differences among operators that almost assuredly exist in all these variables may become relatively reproducible
within a the practice of a single operator or center. Site variables, then, might affect outcomes.

LOCM use following IV rtPA may not have the same effects by comparison in the absence of IV rtPA. While the impact of any proved, actionable differences between IRCM may be diminished in the current EVT atmosphere of shorter procedures with reduced IRCM volume use with application of devices not studied in IMS III, the use of MCI with LOCM may still prove to be a relevant risk factor.

While this is an analysis of a homogeneous population of M1 occlusion, new emboli during treatment in previously uninvolved vessels occurred in 12.8% of subjects with M1 occlusion in IMS III, numerically more common in the iodixanol group (16.1% versus 11.8%). An estimated 13% difference in mRS 0–2 outcomes between subjects with and without new emboli in IMS III has been reported. 4 While new emboli may have contributed to nonsignificantly larger infarcts in the iodixanol group, it remains unclear how larger infarcts relate to better clinical outcome.

CONCLUSIONS

A potential protective effect of iodixanol use in the EVT of M1 occlusion is proposed in IMS III, but perhaps only in the setting of MCI. Iodixanol contributes less endothelial cytotoxic effect to the thrombotic process. Its lower anticoagulant effect may diminish hemorrhagic transformation, with numerically fewer SICHs and fewer asymptomatic ICHs despite greater prior antiplatelet use. Its passage across the BBB is less than that with LOCM, while retaining a favorable osmotic microvascular potential. It may also have beneficial hydrostatic and vasoactive activity. The hypothesis that a small difference in outcomes may indeed exist by using different IRCM remains unproven in a small study population with only 50% of subjects with major arterial occlusion predisposed to good outcome. 60 Further analysis of not only the magnitude of the clinical effect potential of isosmolar IRCM but also the mechanisms conferring such benefit is warranted.

Disclosures: Thomas A. Tomsick—RELATED: Grant: University of Cincinnati. *Comments: Co-Principal Investigator, Principal Interventionist; IMS III; Angiographic Core Laboratory IMS III; Support for Travel to Meetings for the Study or Other Purposes: Executive Committee Meeting; Scientific Meeting; travel expenses reimbursed through an IMS III grant; UNRELATED: Expert Testimony: consult and give expert testimony on stroke imaging or treatment-related cases [multiple law offices]. Lydia D. Foster—RELATED: Grant: National Institute of Neurological Disorders and Stroke. *Ruediger von Kummer—RELATED: Support for Travel to Meetings for the Study or Other Purposes: National Institutes of Health. Comments: travel to meetings of the IMS III executive committee; Board Membership: Lundbeck; Consultancy: Lundbeck, Penumbra, Covidien, Boehringer Ingelheim; Payment for Lectures [including service on Speakers Bureaus]: Penumbra. Mayank Goyal—UNRELATED: Consultancy: Covidien. Comments: for trial design and conduct of Solitaire With the Penumbra System as Primary Endovascular Treatment trial and for teaching engagements; Grants/Grants Pending: Covidien. *Comments: institutional grant for partial funding for Evaluation Study of Congestive Heart Failure and Pulmonary Artery Catheterization Effectiveness trial; Payment for Lectures [including service on Speakers Bureaus]: Covidien. Imanuel Dzialowski—RELATED: Support for Travel to Meetings for the Study or Other Purposes: honoraria for physician scientific advisory activity for the IMS III study. Yuka Y. Paley—RELATED: Grant: National Institutes of Health. *Comments: for the IMS III trial; Support for Travel to Meetings for the Study or Other Purposes: National Institutes of Health. *Comments: for travel related to the IMS III grant activities and presentations at conferences; UNRELATED: Consultancy: Braingate, Biogen. Comments: honorarium for Data Monitoring Committee statistical member; Grants/Grants Pending: National Institutes of Health. *Comments: U01 and R01 grants; Travel/ Accommodations/Meeting Expenses Unrelated to Activities Listed: Braingate. Comments: travel reimbursement for a Data Monitoring Committee meeting. Pooja Khatri—RELATED: Grant: National Institutes of Health IMS III trial grant; UNRELATED: Other: Genentech, Penumbra, Biogen. *Comments: Each pay my institutional department for my research roles in trials: Genentech/Study of Efficacy and Safety of Activase in Patients with Mild Stroke (PRISMS), Lead Principal Investigator, Penumbra/Assess the Penumbra System in the Treatment of Acute Stroke Trial, Neuro Principal Investigator, Biogen/Data Safety Monitoring Board member; Joseph Broderick—RELATED: Grant: Genentech. *Comments: For PRISMS study; Other: Genentech, *Concentric, EKOS. *Cordis Neurovascular. *Comments: study medication for IMS III, Concentric, EKOS, Cordis Neurovascular; catheters for study in early years of IMS III; UNRELATED: Travel/ Accommodations/ Meeting Expenses Unrelated to Activities Listed: Boehringer Ingelheim. Comments: paid for to travel to International Meeting where I was keynote speaker: Sharon D. 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Other: Heart and Stroke Foundation of Alberta/NWT and Nunavut (salary award 2012–2013). *Albert Innovates–Health Solutions [salary award 2009–2014]. *Money paid to the institution.

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