Integrating New Staff into Endovascular Stroke-Treatment Workflows in the COVID-19 Pandemic

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M. Goyal, J. Kromm, A. Ganesh, C. Wira, A. Southerland, K.N. Sheth, H. Khosravani, P. Panagos, N. McNair, and J.M. Ospel; On behalf of the AHA/ASA Stroke Council Science Subcommittees: Emergency Neurovascular Care (ENCC), the Cardiovascular and Stroke Nursing Council, the Telestroke and the Neurovascular Intervention Committees

ABSTRACT

SUMMARY: A health care crisis such as the coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) pandemic requires allocation of hospital staff and resources on short notice. Thus, new and sometimes less experienced team members might join the team to fill in the gaps. This scenario can be particularly challenging in endovascular stroke treatment, which is a highly specialized task that requires seamless cooperation of numerous health care workers across various specialties and professions. This document is intended for stroke teams who face the challenge of integrating new team members into endovascular stroke-treatment workflows during the COVID-19 pandemic or any other global health care emergency. It discusses the key strategies for smooth integration of new stroke-team members in a crisis situation: 1) transfer of key knowledge (simple take-home messages), 2) open communication and a nonjudgmental atmosphere, 3) strategic task assignment, and 4) graded learning and responsibility. While these 4 key principles should generally be followed in endovascular stroke treatment, they become even more important during health care emergencies such as the COVID-19 pandemic, when health care professionals have to take on new and additional roles and responsibilities in challenging working environments for which they were not specifically trained.

ABBREVIATIONS: COVID-19 = coronavirus disease 2019; EVT = endovascular treatment; ICU = intensive care unit

The coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) pandemic requires allocation of hospital staff and resources on short notice. As a consequence, new and sometimes less experienced team members might join the team to fill in the gaps. This scenario also applies to endovascular stroke treatment (EVT) workflows in the neuroangiography suite and post-EVT stroke care in the neuro-intensive care unit (Neuro-ICU) and stroke unit. There are several reasons why new members might join EVT teams. For example, stroke team members with ICU experience might be redeployed to an ICU and have to be replaced, or team members might be quarantined because they had close contact with a patient with COVID-19. Integrating new staff into EVT workflows is particularly challenging, given the time-critical nature of the disease, the need for seamless interdisciplinary and interprofessional cooperation, and the highly specialized skill sets of different team members.

This document is intended for stroke teams who face the challenge of integrating new staff into their EVT workflows during the COVID-19 pandemic or any other global health care emergency. It discusses strategies for smooth integration of new stroke-team members into EVT workflows in a crisis situation in 3 different settings: 1) the neuroangiography suite, 2) the Neuro-ICU ward, and 3) the stroke unit. The 4 overarching principles are the following: 1) transfer of key knowledge (simple take-home messages), 2) open communication and a nonjudgmental atmosphere, 3) strategic task assignment, and 4) graded learning and responsibility (Table 1). These 4 principles were developed during discussions among the members of the Emergency Neurovascular Care Committee, Cardiovascular and Stroke Nursing Council, and Telestroke and Neurovascular Intervention Committees and are mainly based on the joint experience of these committees. While it seems intuitively logical that those principles should generally be followed in clinical routine, and
particularly when caring for patients with acute stroke, doing so becomes even more critical during health care emergencies such as the COVID-19 pandemic because in such a situation, health care professionals have to take on new and additional roles and responsibilities in challenging working environments for which they were not specifically trained.

This document is also intended to encourage and empower working groups and institutions to create a framework for fast decision-making in crisis situations. In the following, we summarize key knowledge, unique characteristics (ie, tasks that are not ideal for new team members), and generic aspects (ie, tasks that lend themselves to new team members because they can extrapolate their experience from their previous working environment) for acute stroke care in 3 different settings: the neuroangiography suite (Table 2), Neuro-ICU (Table 3), and stroke unit (Table 4). We believe that in a crisis such as the COVID-19 pandemic, the focus should be on the generic aspects of stroke care: New team members (Table 2).

### Neuroangiography Suite

The neuroangiography environment differs from the Neuro-ICU and stroke unit in that the patient with stroke remains there for only a short time. The risk of radiation exposure and handling of thrombectomy equipment is unique to the neuroangiography suite and yields additional challenges for new staff members. Furthermore, the neuroangiography staff has to execute several highly specialized technical tasks, such as positioning of the neuroangiography table and preparing the appropriate catheters and thrombectomy devices. Because chances of good outcome rapidly decrease with increasing time to reperfusion, workflows in the neuroangiography suite need to be maximally time-efficient. Examples of more generic tasks in the neuroangiography suite that would be suitable for new stroke-team members would be managing IV lines and blood pressure monitoring, while management of access-site complications, handling of endovascular devices, and reconstruction and labeling of angiography images should preferably be performed by key staff members (Table 2).

### Neuro-ICU and Stroke Unit

Acute ischemic stroke treatment does not stop once the occluded vessel has been opened. Post-EVT care on the Neuro-ICU and stroke unit is critical to support patient recovery and prevent poststroke complications, which may erode the benefits of EVT. Typical Neuro-ICU and stroke units share many similarities, whereas stroke units often represent a “step-down” environment in which patients may be at risk of requiring escalation to critical care. A collaborative multidisciplinary team environment with effective role

#### Table 1: Four key principles for integration of new staff in the stroke team during a health care crisis

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Key Principle</th>
<th>Explanation/Implementation Strategy</th>
<th>Example</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Transfer of key knowledge</td>
<td>New staff members should be primarily taught the key principles of their new working environment; these should be kept as brief and concise as possible in order not to overwhelm new staff</td>
<td>Neuroangiography suite: never walk in the room without a lead apron if a patient is on the table</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Open communication and nonjudgmental atmosphere</td>
<td>New staff members have to feel comfortable telling core members if they do not feel comfortable doing a certain task and should not hesitate to ask for help or advice</td>
<td>A new staff member is told to monitor a patient on an alteplase infusion but does not know what symptoms or signs to look for; he or she explains this to the supervisor who reassigns the patient to a more experienced member and helps train the new member in this important task.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strategic task assignment</td>
<td>To avoid mistakes and treatment delays, new team members should execute tasks that are as closely related as possible to their core field of expertise</td>
<td>A nurse from the nephrology ward joins the stroke team; he or she is familiar with management of patient vitals but not with neuroangiography-specific terminology, eg, guidewire, balloon-guide catheter; thus, the task should be focused on management of patient vitals rather than procedure-specific peculiarities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Graded responsibility and learning</td>
<td>New staff members should gradually take on new tasks and responsibilities; they should feel comfortable performing a certain task and be capable of executing it safely before they are assigned additional, more complicated tasks</td>
<td>A schedule that pairs shifts of new team members with core team members; new team members are intermixed in new roles, as they have to learn new and complex tasks</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
delegation is the cornerstone of both the Neuro-ICU and stroke unit, with most roles being quite similar (Figure), with the notable absence of respiratory therapists in most stroke units. Neuro-ICU tasks that lend themselves to new team members are, for example, placement of nasogastric and orogastric tubes and Foley catheters, while more ICU-specific aspects such as vasopressor therapy and optimization of positive pressure ventilation parameters should ideally remain with the core team members.

Table 2: Take-home points for new staff and unique-versus-generic aspects of stroke care in the neuroangiography suite

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Most Important Teaching Points (Take-Home Points) for New Team Members</th>
<th>Unique Characteristics of the Neuroangiography Suite Environment (Not Ideal Tasks for New Team Members)</th>
<th>Generic Aspects of the Neuroangiography Suite Environment That Are Similar to Those in Other Medical Areas (Appropriate Initial Tasks for New Team Members)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Radiation awareness</td>
<td>Handling the groin puncture/access site</td>
<td>Blood pressure control, hemodynamic monitoring</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Boundaries between sterile vs nonsterile environment</td>
<td>Handling of catheters and devices</td>
<td>Management of IV lines</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Location of key emergency drugs and equipment (epinephrine, oxygen, intubation kit), key/safe combinations in case some drugs (eg, opiates) are stored in a safe</td>
<td>Navigating the angiography machine</td>
<td>Clinical monitoring of the patient during the procedure</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Phone numbers and schedule of neurointerventionalists, anesthesiologists, techs, and nurses on call</td>
<td>Image reconstruction and labeling</td>
<td>Documentation of patient status</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 3: Take-home points for new staff and unique-versus-generic aspects of stroke care in the Neuro-ICU

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Most Important Teaching Points (Take-Home Points) for New Team Members</th>
<th>Unique Characteristics of the Neuro-ICU Environment (Not Ideal Tasks for New Team Members)</th>
<th>Generic Aspects of the Neuro-ICU Environment That Are Similar to Those in Other Medical Areas (Appropriate Initial Tasks for New Team Members)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Key components of neuromonitoring (vital signs, neurologic vital signs: pupils, Glasgow Coma Scale, intracranial pressure, NIHSS score, and so forth)</td>
<td>Resuscitation of unstable patient on initial presentation or with complications (eg, procedures surrounding airway management, status epilepticus, treatment, intracranial pressure, herniation treatment, shock management, and so forth)</td>
<td>Monitoring vital parameters, level of consciousness, and respiratory parameters of nonintubated patients</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Recognizing potential life-threatening complications</td>
<td>Monitoring patients on invasive or noninvasive positive pressure ventilation</td>
<td>Management of enteral feeds and IV fluids</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Location of key equipment (code cart, difficult airway cart) and medications</td>
<td>Care and use of arterial and central lines, administration of vasopressors</td>
<td>Basic medication administration (may include managing alteplase/tenecteplase infusions, depending on background)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Team members and roles</td>
<td>Use and interpretation of multimodal neuromonitoring: Intracranial pressure monitors (external ventricular drain) Cerebral oxygenation monitors: continuous brain tissue oxygenation, near-infrared spectroscopy, jugular venous catheter Cerebral blood flow monitors Cerebral microdialysis Continuous electroencephalography</td>
<td>Placement and care of nasogastric/orogastric tube, IV line, Foley catheter, and so forth</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chain of help, contact information (pager/phone)Examples: ICU buddy team member (RN, RT, Pharmacist, and so forth), charge nurse, NCC/stroke fellow, NCC/stroke attending physician on call</td>
<td>Brain death assessments and management</td>
<td>Bathing, turning, mobilizing patients</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Key elements of AIS/ICH/SAH management (see also Table 4), basic and advanced life support</td>
<td>Organ donation: donation after circulatory death or donation after neurologic death Palliation, depending on circumstances; for patients with COVID-19, institutions may have unique policies for automatic do-not-resuscitate orders or care limitations that incorporate neurologic prognosis formation</td>
<td>Charting/documentation of patient course</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note:—RN indicates registered nurse; RT, respiratory therapist; NCC, neurocritical care; AIS, acute ischemic stroke; ICH, intracerebral hemorrhage.

*For specific Neuro-ICU take-home points for the management of patients with acute ischemic stroke, intracranial hemorrhage, and subarachnoid hemorrhage, see Online Table.*
treatment quality is maintained to the best of the ability of the
reperfusion and thereby directly affect patient outcome. It is im-
novation and cooperation of different members among a medical team.5 This is par-
iment (eg, reperfusion quality and access site complications such as
groin hematomas and infections following endovascular treat-
exist (patients, medical students, nurse practitioners, physician assistants),
just to name a few. During the COVID-19 pandemic and other
major health care emergencies, augmentation of staff from other
areas may be required due to staff redeployment, staff exposures/
required quarantines, and increased patient demands.7 This carries
the risk of decreasing the quality of EVT and post-EVT care.8

**CONCLUSIONS**

Endovascular stroke treatment reaches well beyond the neuroan-
giography suite and encompasses a wide range of specialties (neu-
rology, neuroradiology, neurosurgery, anesthesia, intensive care)
and designations (physicians [among them attendings, fellows, and
residents], nurses, technologists, pharmacists, therapists, nutrition-
ists, medical students, nurse practitioners, physician assistants),
just to name a few. During the COVID-19 pandemic and other
major health care emergencies, augmentation of staff from other
areas may be required due to staff redeployment, staff exposures/
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the risk of decreasing the quality of EVT and post-EVT care.8

(Table 3). In the stroke unit, new staff might want to start with man-
ing patients’ routine medication and Foley catheter and IV-lines,
while obtaining a detailed neurologic status such as the NIHSS
would be a more suitable task for experienced team members (Table
4). Nevertheless, it would certainly be desirable for the newer team
members to initiate structured training regarding stroke-specific
tasks (eg, NIHSS score) under the guidance of pre-existent staff
members as would be the local standard at that institution.

Simulation training (“dry” practice runs with a nurse or man-
equin acting as the patient) can help to practice specific work-
flow steps, identify latent safety threats, and familiarize new team
members with their new tasks.3 Simulation team training has also
been shown to improve team functioning—communication and
Coordinating care among multiple 不想表示

![Table 4: Take-home points for new staff and unique-versus-generic aspects of stroke care on the stroke unit](image)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Most Important Teaching Points (Take-Home Points for New Team Members)</th>
<th>Unique Characteristics of the Stroke Unit Environment (Not Ideal Tasks for New Team Members)</th>
<th>Generic Aspects of the Stroke Unit Environment Similar to Other Medical Areas (Appropriate Initial Tasks for New Team Members)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Recognizing an acute stroke, recurrent stroke, and abrupt neurologic deterioration of recent ischemic or hemorrhagic stroke</td>
<td>Monitoring a patient in the unit after receiving IV alteplase (involves watching for angiogenesis, bleeding, frequent neurologic vital sign monitoring, close blood pressure control, and so forth)</td>
<td>Obtaining/interpreting scheduled vital signs (temperature, blood pressure, heart rate, respiratory rate, oxygen saturation) and point-of-care blood glucose in patients</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Managing infusions of alteplase for stroke or of heparin (eg, for intraluminal thrombosis, venous sinus thrombosis)</td>
<td>Being part of the acute stroke thrombolysis team (being comfortable with the “code stroke” and mixing alteplase)</td>
<td>Foley catheter insertion, urinary dipstick testing, and identification of potential urinary tract infection</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grossly identifying patients who are potentially aspirating versus those safe to swallow</td>
<td>Managing a patient at risk of malignant middle cerebral artery or cerebellar stroke (involves closely watching for neurologic deterioration and liaising with stroke/neurosurgery team for potential decompressive craniectomy)</td>
<td>Managing the patient’s routine medications and reconciling them with those taken preadmission</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NG insertion, feeding, and NG medication administration</td>
<td>Managing a patient with a major intracranial hemorrhage (involves watching for emerging symptoms of hydrocephalus or major hematoma expansion that may warrant neurological intervention or ICU transfer)</td>
<td>Caring for a patient in the subacute-to-chronic poststroke period with/without medical issues like urinary tract infection, cellulitis, or pressure ulcers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Performing a NIHSS bedside examination</td>
<td>Receiving a patient after thrombectomy (involves monitoring the groin puncture site or managing hematoma)</td>
<td>Evaluation and initial management of a patient with chest pain or shortness of breath (eg, poststroke myocardial infarction, aspiration pneumonia)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pager or phone numbers and schedule of stroke fellows and neurologists on call</td>
<td>Receiving a patient after carotid endarterectomy (involves watching for reperfusion complications, lower cranial neuropathies interfering with swallowing)</td>
<td>Evaluation and initial management of a patient with deep vein thrombosis</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Understanding basic stroke mechanisms for early secondary prevention</td>
<td>Defining a stroke mechanism through a sophisticated understanding of neurovascular anatomy, localization, and cerebrovascular syndromes</td>
<td>Working with patient and pharmacy to ensure proper dosing and administration of early secondary stroke prevention (eg, antithrombotics, statin therapy, blood pressure regimen, smoking cessation)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Note:** NG indicates nasogastric tube.

**Table 3**: Take-home points for new staff and unique-versus-generic aspects of stroke care on the stroke unit

- **Most Important Teaching Points (Take-Home Points for New Team Members)**
- **Unique Characteristics of the Stroke Unit Environment (Not Ideal Tasks for New Team Members)**
- **Generic Aspects of the Stroke Unit Environment Similar to Other Medical Areas (Appropriate Initial Tasks for New Team Members)**
Maintaining timely and comprehensive endovascular stroke care at a high quality during a health care crisis such as the COVID-19 pandemic is of utmost importance. Of note, the framework that was outlined in this article for integration of new members into existing stroke teams is based on personal experience of the American Heart Association/American Stroke Association Stroke Council Science Subcommittee members rather than objective data. Nevertheless, we would like to encourage individual stroke teams and their hospitals to collect data from their COVID-19 experience and publish them, because this would provide valuable information.
to stroke teams and help them to further improve EVT workflows and post-EVT care in similarly challenging situations.

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