Use of Double Stiff Wire Allows Successful Transfemoral Transcatheter Aortic Valve Implantation Through Extreme Thoracic Aorta Tortuosity

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A 80-year-old man affected by symptomatic (New York Heart Association III) aortic stenosis was referred to our center. Transthoracic echocardiogram showed low-flow low-gradient aortic stenosis (mean gradient 30 mm Hg, valve area 0.6 cm², ejection fraction 35%). His past medical history included liver cirrhosis in chronic hepatitis C infection (Child-Pugh A6) and severe osteoporosis with chest deformation and restrictive pulmonary disease. His EuroSCORE was 15.4% and Society of Thoracic Surgeons score was 4.8%.

Preoperative computed tomography revealed significant tortuosity of the descending thoracic aorta, with a double curve (Figure 1A–1C; Movie I in the Data Supplement) and a narrowest lumen diameter of 18 mm. Significant kinking was also present at the level of the right femoroliliac axis (Figure 1B) with a minimum diameter was 9.1 mm at both sides. His aortic annulus size was calculated at 25×27 mm (area 540 mm²). After Heart Team discussion, in view of his multiple comorbidities, he was submitted to transcatheter aortic valve implantation. Transfemoral route was deemed the most suitable access route because of the presence of restrictive pulmonary disease and increased associated risk with transapical access. An Edwards Sapien 3 (Edwards LifeSciences, Irvine, CA) prosthesis was used in view of his multiple comorbidities, he was submitted to transcatheter aortic valve implantation with mild paravalvular regurgitation. The postoperative course was uneventful.

**Discussion**

The transfemoral route for transcatheter aortic valve implantation procedures is usually preferred because of advantages associated with it being less invasive. Unlike small caliber vessels and heavy circumferential calcification, tortuosity of the arterial route has not been clearly associated with increased vascular complications because the arteries usually become less tortuous in the presence of a stiff wire. Tortuosity remains difficult to define, and there are currently no objective parameters or guidelines to define tortuosity that is prohibitive to transfemoral transcatheter aortic valve implantation to aid in optimal patient selection. Anatomy that was thought to be prohibitive even a few years ago now can be overcome as a result of advances in delivery system technology, improved procedural planning, and operator experience. The double stiff wire approach helped to overcome extreme tortuosity by increasing the support for the valve delivery system and facilitating its advancement without the occurrence of prolapse, which limited the first attempt. Additionally, by changing the arterial anatomy more favorably, the procedure was less traumatic and enabled optimal valve positioning to increase the likelihood of an optimal outcome. Careful preoperative assessment of the access route is mandatory to achieve procedural success in such cases: tortuosity, degree, and...
distribution of calcium and minimal lumen area are all important in determining the suitability of the femoral route. In our case, computed tomography enabled recognition of anatomic difficulties, which operators could therefore be prepared to deal with. Caution should always be taken in such extreme cases because tortuosity can predispose to arterial dissection or rupture that can be a dramatic albeit rare event when the aorta is involved. In particular, the presence of calcification (that was not severe in this case) can increase risks of rupture because of the reduction in compliance of the aortic wall. By the utilization of a buddy wire, this procedure can be made substantially safer and reduce the likelihood of procedural complication in these high-risk patients.

Disclosures

Dr Colombo is a minor shareholder in DirectFlow Medical Inc (Santa Rosa, CA). The other authors report no conflicts.

References


Key Words: complication • transcatheter aortic valve implantation

Figure 1. Preoperative computed tomography reconstruction of the arterial tree. A, 3D view of the aortic arch and the thoracic descending aorta tortuositites as seen in the exact implantation fluoroscopic projection. B, Posterior 3D view of all the arterial kinkings to be overcome from the femoral access to the aortic annulus. C, Maximum intensity projection of thoracic aorta showing relationship between aortic tortuosity and calcium distribution.

Figure 2. Intraprocedural fluoroscopy steps. A, Delivery system prolapse and failure to advance beyond the aortic arch because of the multiple aortic curves. B, Two Lunderquist stiff wires in place: the first delivers the valve, whereas the second (inserted into a multipurpose catheter) straightens the aorta and gives enhanced support to the delivery system. C, Successful valve delivery in the aortic annulus past the thoracic aorta tortuositites.
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*Circ Cardiovasc Interv*. 2015;8:
doi: 10.1161/CIRCINTERVENTIONS.114.002331
*Circulation: Cardiovascular Interventions* is published by the American Heart Association, 7272 Greenville Avenue, Dallas, TX 75231
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Print ISSN: 1941-7640. Online ISSN: 1941-7632

The online version of this article, along with updated information and services, is located on the World Wide Web at:
http://circinterventions.ahajournals.org/content/8/4/e002331

Data Supplement (unedited) at:
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