

Hemodynamics of “critical” venous stenosis and stent treatment

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Background: The concept of “critical” stenosis at which there is a sharp reduction in forward flow is derived from arterial disease. The critical element in venous stenoses is upstream pressure, not downstream flow. Many venous symptoms and microvascular injury are related to venous hypertension. We studied the effect of venous stenosis on upstream pressure using a mechanical model and with clinical measurements after stenting of iliac vein segments (common and external).

Methods: The experimental model consisted of a Starling Resistor – Penrose tubing enclosed in a pressurized plastic chamber to simulate abdominal venous flow. Clinical measurements included time-averaged velocity, area, rate of flow, and quantified phasic flow volume in the common femoral vein before and after iliac vein stenting. Traditional air plethysmography and occlusion plethysmography were also performed.

Results: The mechanical model showed that upstream pressure varied based on (1) volume of venous inflow, (2) abdominal pressure, (3) outflow pressure, and (4) outflow stenosis. Upstream pressure changes were inverse to flow as kinetic energy was converted to pressure as required. A venous stenosis of as little as 10% raised upstream pressure in the model when the abdominal pressure was low, but high grades of stenosis

had no contribution when abdominal pressure was high.

Stenting of the Penrose moderated or nullified upstream pressure changes related to abdominal pressure. There was significant decompression of the common femoral vein, implying pressure reduction after stenting; median area reduction was 15% and 10% in erect and supine, respectively. Air plethysmography showed improvement in venous volume and in other parameters in confirmation of venous decompression. There was significant prolongation of phasic flow duration and quantitative phasic flow increased (median, 16%) after stenting in the erect position. There was no increase in arterial inflow.

Conclusions: The criticality of iliac vein stenosis is based on peripheral venous hypertension, which is controlled by more confounding factors than in arterial stenosis. The experimental model clarifies the interplay of the many variables. Clinical measurements indicate that iliac vein stenting results in decompression of the limb veins and, by inference, a reduction in venous pressure. Venous flow is improved less consistently and, in part, is related to an increase in duration of phasic flow. Limb arterial flow is not increased, and the venous flow changes are likely the result of rearrangement of the velocity and pressure components of venous flow. (*J Vasc Surg: Venous and Lym Dis* 2013;■:1-8.)

The concept of “critical” stenosis is derived from arterial work. It is the particular degree of stenosis when there is a sharp drop in pressure and flow curves in the stenotic segment and in the perfusion downstream. Since flow and pressure are tightly interconnected, “critical” stenosis varies with flow but is generally in the 60% to 80% range for many clinical arterial stenoses. However, these values cannot be extrapolated to venous stenosis because numerous governing factors such as collapsibility, velocity/pressure profiles, and pulsatility are different and the Reynold’s number is lower. Most importantly, the critical element relevant to venous symptoms is elevation of upstream pressure, not deprivation of downstream flow. Venous edema is related to elevated pressure. Microvascular damage, which underlies chronic venous disease, is now known to be triggered

or sustained by venous hypertension.¹⁻⁵ In addition, lower limb venous outflow is susceptible to external compression (Starling Resistor) as it transits through the abdomen. The purpose of this article is to clarify the many variables that determine “criticality” of iliac vein stenoses using a mechanical venous model. We also analyzed clinical measurements in patients undergoing iliac vein stenting to confirm that pressure-related parameters improve after stenting as suggested by model results.

METHODS

The basic model described by Starling⁶ and later Holt⁷ (Fig 1, A and B) consisted of a venous conduit of 10-inch-long Penrose drain (1/2 inch inside diameter [ID], similar in size to the iliac vein) positioned horizontally between short large-bore (1/2 inch ID) rigid connectors (to minimize end effects) and enclosed within an airtight transparent rigid PVC cylinder capped by rubber stoppers on either end. Pressurization (Starling pressure) to the cylinder was provided by water fed by gravity from a reservoir. Inflow to the Penrose was also from a gravity-fed reservoir constantly replenished to maintain a constant level and pressure head. Water, a Newtonian fluid (viscosity independent of shear rate), was the flow medium; blood, a particulate suspension that exhibits anomalous viscous properties in certain flow regimens, nevertheless behaves like a Newtonian fluid in

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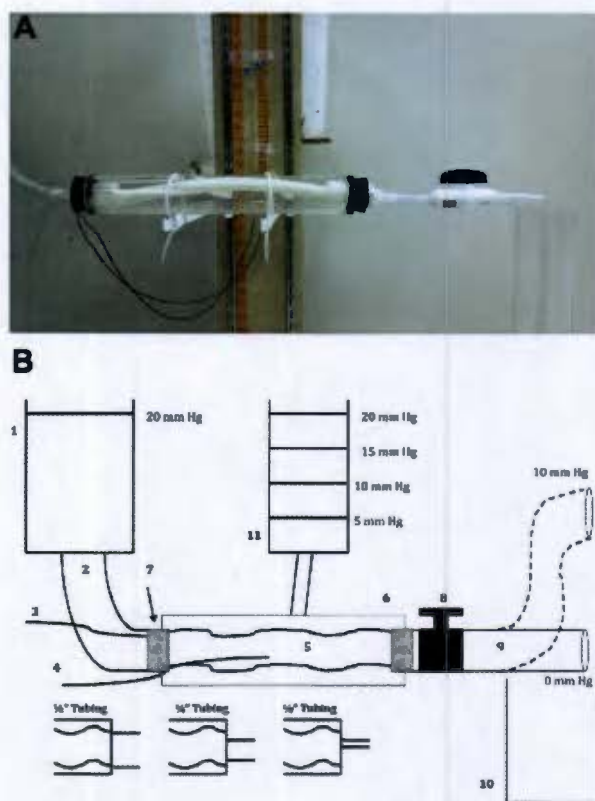


Fig 1. Mechanical venous model. **A**, Shows the Penrose enclosed within a Plexiglas cylinder. Various parts are shown in the schematic (**B**): 1, Inflow reservoir; 2, Inflow tubing; 3, Upstream pressure monitoring catheter; 4, Penrose pressure monitoring catheter; 5, Penrose tubing; 6, Plexiglas cylinder; 7, Short connector in between Penrose and tubing; 8, Ball valve used to simulate outflow stenosis; 9, Outflow tubing; level of outflow orifice could be varied; 0 mm Hg and 10 mm Hg are shown. The outflow tubing size varied from 1/2 inch to 1/8 inch (shown at the bottom) to simulate outflow stenosis; 10, Outflow tank; 11, Pressurizing reservoir for the Starling Resistor.

large conduit flows,^{8,10} meaning that model results will qualitatively reflect biologic flow. Volumetric flow at constant input pressure from the reservoir into the Penrose setup (Starling Resistor) could be varied by using rigid plastic tubing of variable known diameters connecting them. Although static pressure at the Penrose when flow is stopped will be the same (reservoir input pressure) for all tubing sizes, smaller tubing will carry smaller flows with lower pressures (Poiseuille equation) into the Penrose, simulating vasoconstriction. The outflow tubing emptied above the water level (no siphon effect) into an effluent tank. Outflow stenosis could be simulated by using smaller outflow tubing. Rate of flow through the conduit was manually measured outflow into the graduated effluent tank. Lateral pressures within the Penrose (Penrose pressure) and immediately upstream (upstream pressure) were measured by water manometers through appropriately positioned catheters inserted through small side holes in the rigid end

connectors. The heights of the input reservoir, the pressurizing reservoir, and the end orifice of the outflow tube were each adjusted relative to the Penrose to provide the range of pressures tested. Pressures are shown as mm Hg using standard conversion from water pressure in cm. They approximate known physiological ranges (resting, vasoconstriction, hyperemia) in lower limb venous flow. Resting lower limb flow approximates ≈ 1000 mL/minute, often increasing up to four times with peripheral vasodilatation and decreasing by 80% with vasoconstriction.⁹ Peripheral supine venous pressure is in the 10- to 12-mm range.⁸ Capillary pressure at the venular end is estimated to be 15 to 20 mm Hg.¹¹

In some experiments, a high-precision adjustable ball valve, graduated by timed volumetric flows to simulate varying degrees of stenosis, was mounted between the Starling Resistor and the outflow tube.

In a final set of experiments, 14-mm-diameter Wall-stents (Boston Scientific, Natick, Mass) were inserted into the Penrose to cover one-third and two-thirds of its length from the inflow connector or its entire length to assess their effect on upstream pressure.

Each run was repeated two or more times, and the results were averaged. Variance within each run set was <1%.

Patients and clinical measurements. Preoperative and postoperative duplex measurements were extracted from clinical records of patients who underwent iliac vein stenting in the last 2 years (11 years for air plethysmography [APG; ACI Medical, Los Angeles, CA]) for relief of obstruction. All patients in whom both preoperative and postoperative data sets were available were included. Ninety-six of 230 and 551 of 1980 stented limbs were available for analysis of duplex and air plethysmography data, respectively. The ratio of nonthrombotic to post-thrombotic limbs in the data set was 1:3.

Flow data were obtained with a duplex scanner (Logiq9, GE Medical Systems, Waukesha, WI). Time-averaged flow velocity (TAV), vessel diameter, and duration of forward flow during the respiratory cycle (T) were recorded in the supine and erect positions in the common femoral vein 1 cm above the saphenofemoral junction before and after stenting; this site is at least 1 to 3 cm below the lower end of the stent. Calculated parameters from the above basic data included area of the vessel ($A = \pi r^2$), volumetric rate of flow ($Q = A \cdot TAV$), and absolute phasic flow volume ($Q \cdot T$) in the common femoral vein that egressed out during each respiratory cycle (Fig 2).

APG. Standard parameters including venous volume (VV), ejection volume, ejection fraction, residual volume, and residual volume fraction were measured. The APG instrument was also used to obtain the following parameters with occlusion plethysmography¹²: (1) the rate of arterial inflow calculated from the slope of the initial steep segment of the volumetric curve; (2) duration of arterial inflow curve to the plateau; and (3) outflow fraction (OF) at 1 and 2 seconds. All are supine measurements.

All postoperative measurements were made at least 6 weeks after the procedure to mitigate any related

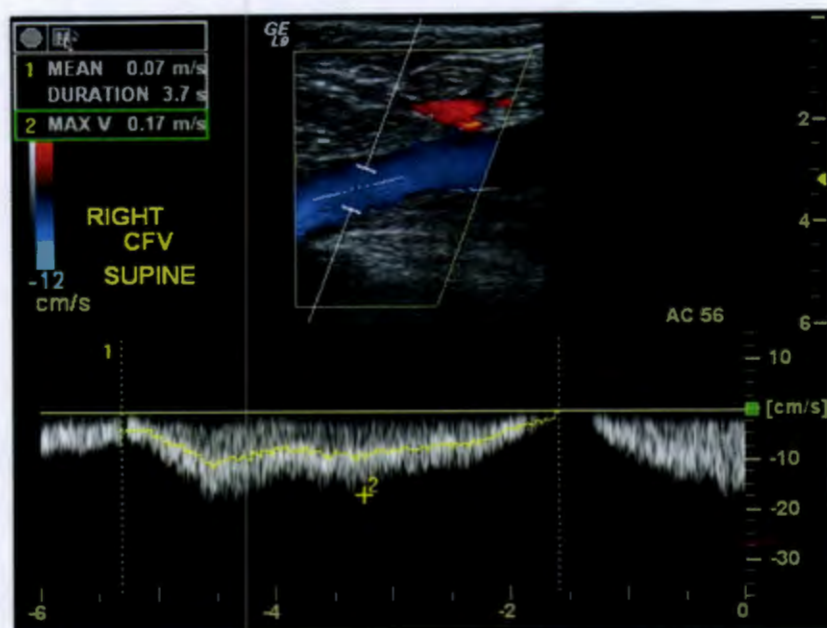


Fig 2. Color flow with phasic waveform in the common femoral vein (CFV). Phase duration is marked by technologist. Time average velocity is machine calculated based on phase duration.

short-term perturbation such as hematoma, limb edema, and cardiovascular effects of perioperative medications.

Statistics. Individual data are given as median with range, unless otherwise indicated. Paired values were analyzed by nonparametric, two-tailed Wilcoxon rank test. Statistical significance was defined as a *P* value less than .05. All analysis was performed using Prism software (Irvine, Calif). Graphics were generated using Prism software and Microsoft Excel (Redmond, Wash).

RESULTS

Mechanical venous model. Upstream pressure was found to be related to (1) volume of inflow and for any given inflow, (2) Starling pressure, (3) outflow pressure, and (4) outflow stenosis. This is illustrated in experiments where only the tested variable changed with others set at zero or basal settings. Upstream pressure is defined (and named) as the pressure at the Penrose inlet and would broadly reflect peripheral venous pressure; pressure gradient in the limb venous flow is estimated to be very small (<5 mm Hg).^{8,13} In the experimental setup, the pressure head at the inflow tank (20 mm Hg) simulates the pressure at the venular end of the capillary. This pressure never can exceed 20 mm Hg in the setup and in the quiescent resting limb, as no new energy is added. In vivo, calf, and foot muscle pumps can impart additional motive energy (and pressure).

Inflow volume. Upstream pressures are shown for a range of volumetric inflows (Fig 3). Upstream pressure increases nonlinearly with inflow volume represented in the figure by cross-sectional area of inflow tubing.

Outflow pressure. Upstream pressures are shown for a range of outflow pressures (Fig 4). It is a gentle curve. The

inflow/outflow pressure gradient remains roughly constant. Flow volume decreases as upstream pressure increases due to conversion of part of the flow velocity to pressure energy.

Starling pressure. Upstream pressures are shown for a range of Starling pressures (Fig 5). Upstream pressure increases in a linear fashion as the flow decreases in a curvilinear fashion elevating the upstream pressure. As a result, the transmural pressure (upstream pressure - Starling pressure) remains at a near constant level.

Outflow stenosis. Upstream pressures are shown for a range of outflow stenoses (Fig 6). Outflow tubing size of 1/2 inch ID represented 0% stenosis, as inflow tubing was also the same size. Ten percent to 30% stenoses (volumetric) values were obtained with the ball valve setup at the outflow end. For 45% to 95% stenosis, outflow tubing varying from 3/8 inch to 1/8 inch ID provided calculated area stenosis. Since diameter/flow relationship is nonlinear, the two stenosis scales are different but yielded empirically stepwise reduction in flows.

Combinations. Upstream pressures are shown for various combinations of Starling pressure, outflow pressure, and outflow stenosis (Table 1). Reference pressure is upstream pressure and is derived data in Figs 3-6, where individual components of the various combinations were tested against zero setting for other components of the various combinations. It can be seen that the upstream pressure is largely influenced by the highest reference pressure in the combination mix (ie, upstream pressure is not additive but reflects the value of that single component with the highest reference pressure).

Effect of stenting. The effect of stenting on the influence of Starling pressure on upstream pressure is

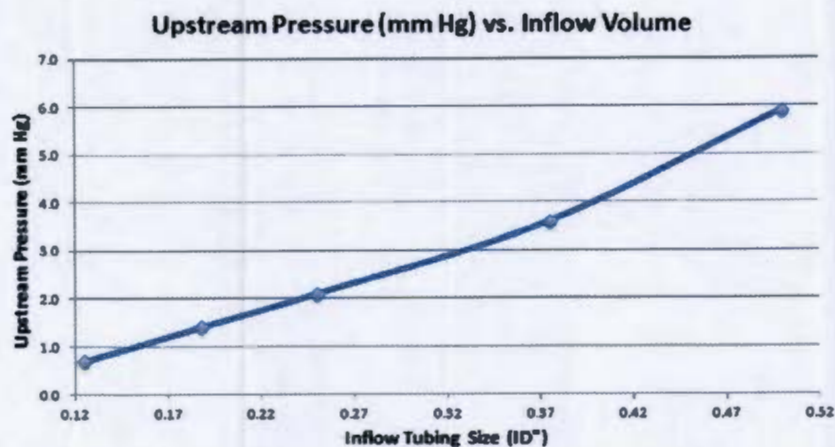


Fig 3. Relationship between upstream pressure and inflow volume. In this graph, volume is indicated by inflow tubing size (x axis). ID, Inside diameter.

shown (Fig 7). Partial stenting of one-third length of the Penrose had no effect; stenting two-thirds length prevented upstream pressure rise with Starling pressure rise of up to 10 mm Hg, and stenting the full length of the Penrose was protective up to 20 mm Hg Starling pressures. Full-length stenting in effect converts the collapsible Penrose into a rigid tube, rendering it immune to Starling pressure effects on upstream pressure.

There were no experiments to correct outflow stenosis with stents because of the nature of mechanical simulation of outflow stenosis. The effect of stent correction of outflow stenosis can be assumed to yield pressure values similar to zero stenosis in Fig 6.

Clinical studies

Duplex measurements. Common femoral vein flows are shown before and after iliac vein stenting in the supine and erect positions (Table II). The most striking change is in reduction in the common femoral vein area

(decompression), of median 15% and 10% in erect and supine, respectively, after stenting. Median velocities (TAV) increased significantly as a result, by 25% in erect and 37% in supine position. Rate of flow/sec is unchanged ($P = NS$) after stenting in either position. However, the duration of phasic flow (T) and phasic flow volume increased significantly by median 18% and 16%, respectively, after stenting in the erect position. T and phasic flow volume showed a trend toward increase (median, 11% and 14%, respectively) in the supine position after stenting, which did not reach statistical significance in the sample size.

Venoarteriolar reflux. There are significant (Table I footnote) decreases in flow parameters on changing the position from supine to erect. Preoperatively, the duration of phasic flow (T), rate of flow, and phasic flow volume declined on postural change by a median 28%, 37%, and 52%, respectively, all of which were significant decreases. Poststent, these postural declines were similar, and there was no improvement in venoarteriolar reflux ($P = NS$).

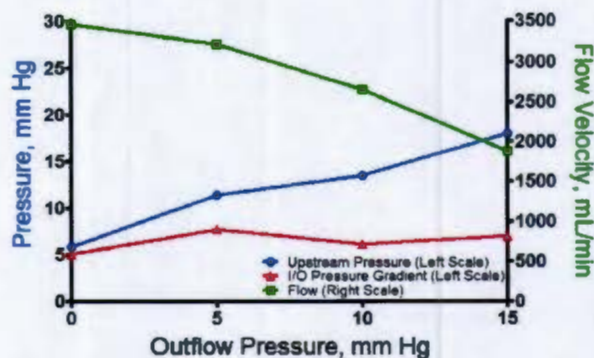


Fig 4. Relationship between outflow pressure (X axis), upstream pressure with I/O pressure gradient (left Y axis), and flow velocity (right Y axis). Upstream pressure increases with increasing outflow pressure, and flow declines. I/O pressure gradient remains nearly the same. I/O, Inflow/outflow pressure.

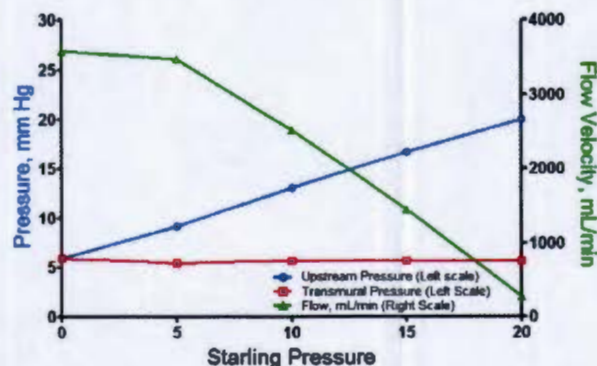


Fig 5. Relationship between Starling pressure (X axis), upstream pressure with transmural pressure (left Y axis), and flow velocity (right Y axis). With increasing Starling pressure, upstream pressure increases in a linear fashion, as flow declines in a curvilinear fashion. Transmural pressure remains constant.

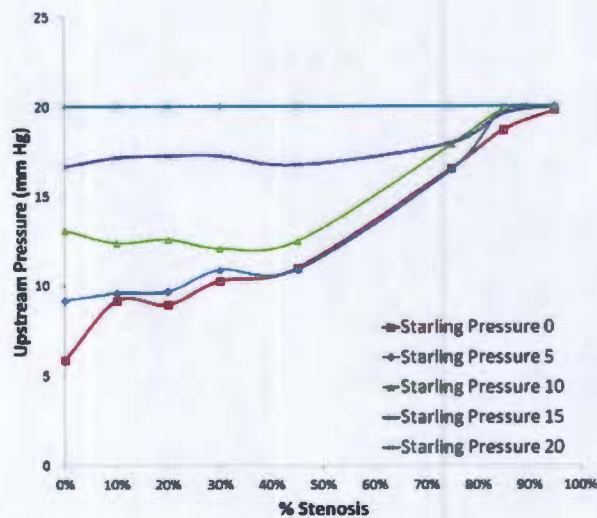


Fig 6. Relationship between outflow stenosis and upstream pressure for a variety of Starling pressures. Note the sharp increase in upstream pressure with as little as 10% stenosis when Starling pressure is 0 mm Hg. Outflow stenoses of $\geq 42\%$ show progressive increase in upstream pressure when Starling pressure is 1 to 10 mm Hg. When Starling pressures are ≥ 15 mm Hg, the upstream pressure curve is flat (ie, increasing the degree of stenosis has little effect on the already high upstream pressure [see text]).

APG. APG parameters are given before and after stenting, showing improvement in all of the displayed parameters (Table III).

Occlusion plethysmography. Occlusion plethysmographic data were obtained in the supine position (Table IV). There was no change in arterial flow parameters after venous stenting. Volumetric outflow fractions also did not change.

DISCUSSION

Pressure, specifically upstream pressure, is the critical element in venous stenoses. Flow may be related to venous claudication but is not critical and seldom leads to tissue loss.

Upstream pressure is influenced by (1) outflow stenosis, (2) volume of inflow, (3) Starling pressure, and (4) atrial pressures. Clinical analogues resulting in limb edema from

the last three biomechanical factors in whole or part are high cardiac output states such as septicemia or arteriovenous fistula, venous edema from increased abdominal pressure in morbid obesity, and edema of congestive heart failure respectively. When there is a combination of these factors, the model results suggest that the highest contributing factor (not an additive combination) sets the upstream pressure. Of the four factors, stenosis, specifically iliac vein stenosis, is important as it appears to be a ubiquitous lesion.^{14,15} Significant stenosis ($\geq 50\%$) is present in one-third, and lesser degrees of stenosis in an additional third of the general population in silent form. Therefore, a diagnostic search is worthwhile even if one of the other three causative factors is clinically apparent. This approach has yielded clinical relief in selected symptomatic patients.¹⁶

What degree of stenosis should be considered critical? In Fig 6, there is a sharp rise in upstream pressure with as little as 10% stenosis when Starling pressure is at 0 mm Hg and at 45% stenosis when Starling pressure is 10 mm Hg. At higher Starling pressures, increasing stenosis has little effect on upstream pressure, as the former sets the pressure. While these quantitative stenotic thresholds cannot be precisely extrapolated to clinical practice, this means there is no single "critical stenosis," and all of the factors contributing to venous hypertension have to be considered. Of these, only the intra-abdominal pressure/stenosis combination was adequately studied in the model.¹¹

"Normal" intra-abdominal pressure averages about 6.5 mm Hg,¹¹ with a wide range from <1 mm Hg to 16 mm Hg with a positive correlation to body mass.¹⁷ Lesser degrees of stenosis may be symptomatic in patients with low intra-abdominal pressure than in patients with higher pressures. Intra-abdominal pressure can be clinically monitored via bladder pressure.¹⁷ Elevated intra-abdominal pressure in obese patients has been implicated in chronic venous disease.¹⁸ Most obese patients with advanced venous disease harbor iliac vein stenosis, but increased abdominal pressure alone may be the main factor in a small fraction.^{18,19} Although the model suggests that stenting may be helpful even in the latter subset, the extent of stenting required is unclear, as there is no provision for differential wall thickness of vena cava (thicker) and iliac veins (thinner) in the model design.

Table 1. Upstream pressure for various combinations of setup pressures

Setup pressure combinations			Upstream pressure, mm Hg	Reference pressure		
Inflow, mm Hg	Starling, mm Hg	Stenosis, %		Inflow, mm Hg	Starling, mm Hg	Stenosis, %
20	15	0	16.7	5.9	16.7	5.9
20	15	95	20.0	5.9	16.7	19.8
20	10	0	13.1	5.9	13.1	5.9
20	20	30	20.0	5.9	20.0	10.3
20	5	79	16.5	5.9	9.2	16.6
20	5	42	10.9	5.9	9.2	11.0
20	10	10	12.4	5.9	13.1	9.2
20	15	89	19.6	5.9	16.7	18.7

Reference pressure is for particular setup parameter when others are zero. Upstream pressure approximates highest reference pressure (bold).

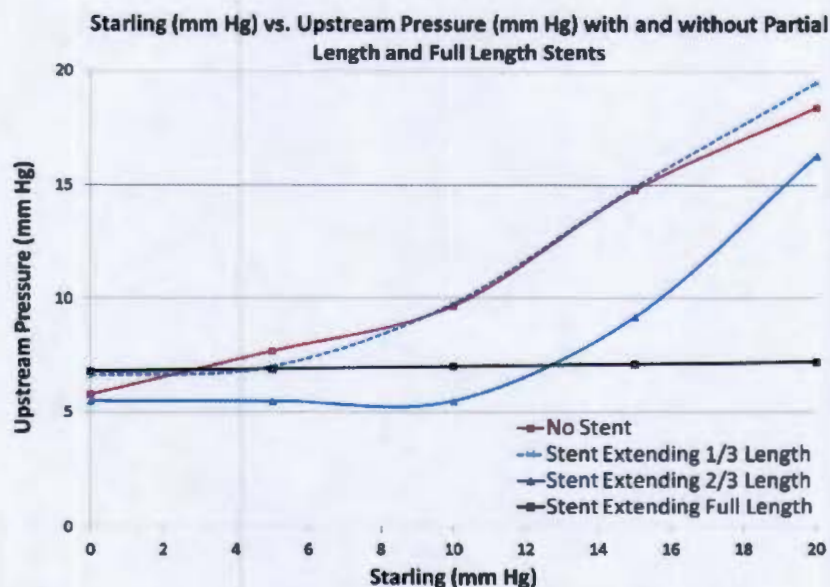


Fig 7. The effect of stenting the Penrose in the Starling Resistor on upstream pressure. Stenting the full length of the Penrose keeps upstream pressure low and nearly constant, despite increasing Starling pressures. Stenting two thirds of the length of the Penrose is effective for Starling pressure # 10 mm Hg. Stenting only one third of the length of the Penrose has little pressure shielding effect.

In post-thrombotic and nonthrombotic limbs with symptoms, the stenosis itself is likely the dominant factor in peripheral venous hypertension. Three-quarters of limbs in the data set were post-thrombotic. In our clinical practice, symptomatic iliac vein stenoses in these subsets have averaged $\leq 50\%$ on intravascular ultrasound,²⁰ although stenting lesser degrees of stenoses has led to clinical relief occasionally.

The various flow/pressure relationships are best understood from flow energetics. Peripheral venous flow energy (E) is the sum of pressure (P) and velocity components (v)

according to Bernoulli theorem: $E = P + 1/2 \rho v^2$. The gravity component need not be considered in the supine subject. Since velocity is near zero at the venular end of the capillary, all of the energy is represented by pressure estimated to be 15 to 20 mm Hg. Depending on downstream flow conditions, some portion of the pressure energy is converted to velocity. For conversion, 1 mm Hg = 1330 dynes/cm² (using velocity in cm per second).⁸ When there is an increase in Starling pressure, outflow pressure, or stenosis, the upstream pressure increases with a slowing of the flow (ie, velocity is converted to pressure energy). The pressure

Table II. Common femoral vein flow velocity data before and after stenting (erect and supine positions)

Erect duplex (n = 96)	Erect pre-stent	Erect post-stent	% Change (+ / -)	P value
TAV, cm/sec	0.04 (0.01 0.12)	0.05 (0.01 0.10)	+25	.006 ^a
Diameter, mm	13.60 (8.90 19.20)	12.55 (7.50 22.50)	8	.0001 ^a
Area, mm ²	145.28 (62.21 289.53)	123.70 (44.18 397.61)	15	.0001 ^a
Phasic duration, T, sec ^b	1.95 (0.19 4.10)	2.30 (0.30 5.30)	+18	.02 ^a
Flow volume rate, mL/min ^b	5.90 (1.54 16.66)	5.98 (0.65 19.88)	+1	.8
Phasic flow volume, mL ^b	11.15 (0.92 43.30)	12.89 (0.92 53.68)	+16	.049 ^a
Supine duplex (n = 61)	Supine pre-stent	Supine post-stent	% Change (+ / -)	P value
TAV, cm/sec	0.08 (0.02 0.18)	0.11 (0.05 0.25)	+38	.0009 ^a
Diameter, mm	11.90 (5.70 18.10)	11.30 (5.30 19.30)	5	.05
Area, mm ²	111.22 (25.52 257.30)	100.29 (22.06 292.55)	10	.045 ^a
Phasic duration, T, sec ^b	2.70 (0.15 5.10)	3.10 (0.60 5.10)	+15	.1
Flow volume rate, mL/min ^b	9.29 (1.79 94.77)	9.29 (2.64 35.11)	0	.1
Phasic flow volume, mL ^b	23.17 (1.19 94.77)	26.47 (6.04 137.62)	+14	.1

TAV, Time-averaged velocity.

^aSignificant.

^bValues for phasic duration, flow volume rate, and phasic flow volume were all significantly different ($P < .0001$) between supine and erect positions (venoarteriolar reflux) before stenting. It remained the same after stenting.

Table III. Air plethysmography data

<i>n</i> = 551	<i>Pre</i> stent	<i>Post</i> stent	95% Confidence interval	<i>P</i> value
Ejection volume	68 (4 287)	69 (6 302)	6.14, 1.39	.0007*
Venous volume	49 (1 215)	48 (0 192)	7.12, 2.21	.0001*
Residual volume fraction	13 (0 128)	12 (0 153)	3.00, 0.07	.0009*
Ejection fraction	50.7 (4 118.8)	53.4 (2 128.1)	0.96, 5.11	.0005*

*Significant.

will raise enough from energy conversion to overcome the highest of the three impediments to flow (no additive effect) as illustrated in Table I. There is a ceiling on how high the pressure can rise in the resting limb. That ceiling is the prevailing capillary pressure, which represents all of the fluid energy available. Only vasodilatation (relaxation of precapillary sphincters) can allow for additional fluid energy in the resting limb.

There are no collaterals or heart pump in the flow model. Collaterals may moderate the described pressure changes as they function as pressure relief (surge) valves,²¹ opening up only after a set pressure is exceeded. After iliac vein stenting, collaterals often dramatically "disappear," indicating that higher pressure had prevailed despite collateral function. The influence of abdominal pressure on collaterals is unknown. There is no heart pump in the model. It can increase or decrease central venous pressure. However, there will be opposite effects in the periphery. The model does not allow for modulation of microcirculation by precapillary sphincters.

The duplex findings show that there is decompression of the common femoral vein (meaning lowered pressure) following iliac vein stenting. This is evident in the supine and erect positions. We have previously shown that supine foot venous pressure decreases after iliac vein stenting.²⁰ In the erect position, peripheral venous decompression will be less evident as a gravity component of about 70 to 85 mm Hg is superimposed on resting venous pressure at the calf and foot levels, respectively. Therefore, APG measures VV in the erect position at a higher point in the volume pressure curve, which is sharply nonlinear (much less unit volume per unit pressure than in supine). Nevertheless, a small but significant improvement in VV was noticed (Table III). We interpret this as restoration of venous tone not only from decompression but also from improved calf function (ejection volume, ejection fraction, residual volume fraction) from unobstructed iliac vein flow. Resting venous flow rate (volume flow/minute) remains unchanged after stenting both in the supine and

erect positions (ie, the same volume of flow per minute is carried through a smaller aggregate flow channel at a lower pressure but faster velocity). Outflow fractions (Table III), which are volumetric rate of flow indices in the supine position, remain unchanged in confirmation. Phasic flow volume, which takes into account duration of flow during the respiratory cycle, is increased in the erect position with possibly a trend (nonsignificant) in the supine position. The phasic flow increase in the erect position is related to prolongation of the flow phase (T). Assuming an 18/minute respiratory rate, the respiratory flow phase is about 2 seconds flow, with 1 second cessation in the erect position before stenting (Table II). In the supine position, inspiratory flow occurs much longer (2.7 seconds) with a very brief cessation of only ≈0.3 seconds, which is one-third of the erect value. T increases significantly in the erect but not supine position after iliac vein stenting. Nevertheless, the ratio of erect to supine flow parameters (arteriolar-venous reflux) remained unchanged after venous stenting. This, however, relates only to postural velocity changes. Postural change in pressure component of flow was not measured and is not measurable because it is obscured by the gravity component in the erect position.

The question arises whether iliac vein stenting increases arterial inflow. There is no increase in the supine arterial inflow measured by occlusion plethysmography (Table IV) after stenting. Erect measurements were not taken. For reasons mentioned below, it seems likely that increment in venous phasic flow volume is due to rearrangement of pressure and flow components (and possibly recruitment of prior collateral flow) rather than a true increase in arterial inflow.

The arterial flow (hence, pressure) to the postcapillary venules is primarily set by the precapillary sphincters in response to local tissue metabolism.¹¹ There is a view that the arterial and venous circulations are separated by a "vascular waterfall" at the capillary level.^{22,23} Like in a waterfall, the river level at the bottom will have little influence on the waterfall discharge. Even if there is no such

Table IV. Occlusive plethysmography data

<i>n</i> = 110	<i>Pre</i> stent	<i>Post</i> stent	<i>P</i> value
Arterial inflow, mL/min	2 (0.03 16.2)	2 (0.5 10)	.23
Duration to plateau, seconds	55 (0.7 396)	54 (2.4 342)	.92
Outflow fraction 1 second, %	37.5 (3 86)	39 (8 92)	.69
Outflow fraction 2 seconds, %	67 (7 131)	70 (14 128)	.56

waterfall break, venous stenoses are in tandem with the powerful precapillary constrictors. In line with flow principles across tandem stenosis,¹³ such venous stenosis will have very little influence on arterial inflow unless the resistance of the venous stenosis exceeds that of the precapillary sphincters. Because of the large network of veins, this only happens rarely (phlegmasia cerula dolens, for example). Iliac vein stenting for chronic stenoses therefore will only have a minor impact, if any, in improving arterial inflow.

On assuming orthostasis, the precapillary sphincters undergo powerful vasoconstriction^{23,24} to maintain homeostasis. As a result, arterial inflow is reduced from supine levels,²⁴ which is reflected in halving of the common femoral vein phasic flow from supine to erect (Table II). The marked reduction in rate of flow and phasic flow duration (T) when erect is likely due to this as well. There is evidence that orthostatic venous pressure increase triggers the arteriolar constriction (venoarteriolar reflux).^{25,26} The dose-response curve, however, appears highly non-linear.²⁴ The venous pressure reduction after iliac vein stenting is dwarfed by the gravity component in the erect position, and therefore appears unlikely to relieve the arteriolar vasoconstriction to increase arterial inflow.

The experimental and clinical findings suggest that the main effect of iliac vein stenting is venous decompression, with secondary changes in the character of the flow pattern likely due to reapportioning between pressure and velocity components of flow energy.

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AUTHOR CONTRIBUTIONS

- Conception and design: SR
- Analysis and interpretation: SR, MD
- Data collection: SR, OK, MD
- Writing the article: SR
- Critical revision of the article: SR
- Final approval of the article: SR
- Statistical analysis: OK, JO
- Obtained funding: SR
- Overall responsibility: SR

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