

# Volumetric Blood Flow in Transjugular Intrahepatic Portosystemic Shunt Revision Using 3-Dimensional Doppler Sonography

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**Objectives**—Three-dimensional (3D)/4-dimensional (4D) sonographic measurement of blood volume flow in transjugular intrahepatic portosystemic shunt revision with the intention of objective assessment of shunt patency.

**Methods**—A total of 17 patients were recruited (12 male and 5 female; mean age, 55 years; range, 30–69 years). An ultrasound system equipped with a 2.0–5.0-MHz probe was used to acquire multivolume 3D/4D color Doppler data sets to assess prerevision and postrevision shunt volume flow. Volume flow was computed offline based on the principle of surface integration of Doppler-measured velocity vectors in a lateral-elevational c-surface positioned at the color flow focal depth (range, 8.0–11.5 cm). Volume flow was compared to routine measurements of the prerevision and postrevision portosystemic pressure gradient. Prerevision volume flow was compared with the outcome to determine whether a flow threshold for revision could be defined.

**Results**—Linear regression of data from revised transjugular intrahepatic portosystemic shunt cases showed an inverse correlation between the mean-normalized change in prerevision and postrevision shunt volume flow and the mean-normalized change in the prerevision and postrevision portosystemic pressure gradient ( $r^2 = 0.51$ ;  $P = .020$ ). Increased shunt blood flow corresponded to a decreased pressure gradient. Comparison of prerevision flows showed preliminary threshold development at 1534 mL/min, below which a shunt revision may be recommended ( $P = .21$ ; area under the receiver operating characteristic curve = 0.78).

**Conclusions**—Shunt volume flow measurement with 3D/4D Doppler sonography provides a potential alternative to standard pulsed wave Doppler metrics as an indicator of shunt function and predictor of revision.

**Key Words**—color flow; Doppler sonography; portal hypertension; power Doppler sonography; transjugular intrahepatic portosystemic shunt revision; vascular ultrasound; volume flow

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## Abbreviations

4D, 4-dimensional; 3D, 3-dimensional; TIPS, transjugular intrahepatic portosystemic shunt

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Transjugular intrahepatic portosystemic shunts (TIPSs) are used in the management of portal hypertension and related portal hypertensive complications such as variceal hemorrhage and ascites.<sup>1–6</sup> Thrombosis or stenosis of the shunt is a principal concern, as demonstrated by primary shunt patency rates: 25% to 66%, 5% to 42%, 21%, 13%, and 13% at years 1 through 5, respectively.<sup>3,4,7–13</sup> Primary shunt patency rates have been updated by the introduction of covered stents, which show lower rates of

failure than uncovered stents. A recent study by Bureau et al<sup>14</sup> compared outcomes in 39 patients with covered stents and 41 patients with uncovered stents. Covered-stent shunt dysfunction was shown in 13% of patients based on the criteria of greater than 50% stenosis or a portosystemic pressure gradient of greater than 12 mm Hg after a median follow-up of 300 days. Other investigators have shown covered stent dysfunction rates between 8% and 20% at 1 year.<sup>15–19</sup> However, approximately 20% of TIPS procedures in the United States still use uncovered stents.<sup>20</sup>

Interventional revision prolongs patency and if performed before complete occlusion yields increased primary-assisted patency rates: 80% to 85%, 61% to 79%, 46% to 87%, 42%, and 36% at years 1 through 5, respectively.<sup>4,7–11,13</sup> Therefore, shunt dysfunction must be identified promptly and managed appropriately to define a therapeutic window for revision.

Transjugular intrahepatic portosystemic shunt screening identifies cases that require revision, but current sonographic assessment techniques have variable sensitivity and specificity, and venography, the reference standard for detecting shunt dysfunction, is invasive and unsuitable for routine use.<sup>4,6</sup> Doppler sonography is the primary imaging modality used for TIPS patency screening.<sup>4,6</sup> Although several flow velocity criteria for defining TIPS failure have been proposed in the literature, each has proponents and detractors, and a nonuniform association exists between flow velocity and shunt patency.<sup>4,6,21–27</sup> Literature has also demonstrated a poor correlation ( $r = -0.11$ ) between flow velocity and the portosystemic pressure gradient.<sup>28</sup> Variability in the flow velocity estimate is motivated by several objective and subjective factors: resistance of the overall flow path, Doppler angle, cylindrically asymmetric flow profile, internal aliasing, and shunt morphologic features such as overlapping stents and curves in the shunt. Individually or collectively, these factors can yield velocity fluctuation along the length of the shunt.

Volume flow is an alternative metric to flow velocity that may be used to assess shunt patency.<sup>29–31</sup> In a TIPS, since there is only one inflow and one outflow, volume flow is conserved and thus equivalent everywhere along the path of the shunt. Therefore, volume flow provides a potentially robust metric for evaluating shunt patency.

The proposed 3-dimensional (3D)/4-dimensional (4D) volume flow measurement technique—based on surface integration of Doppler-measured velocity vectors—is noninvasive, objective, and independent of all traditional pulsed wave Doppler assumptions.<sup>32–37</sup> Measurement of TIPS volume flow is demonstrated in patients undergoing revision and compared to standard measurements of the

revision portosystemic pressure gradient. Volume flow measurements are also evaluated on the basis of prerevision shunt flow and outcome to determine whether a flow threshold for revision could be defined. The hypothesis of this study was that the proposed 3D/4D sonographic volume flow measurement technique provides straightforward, objective, and reliable assessment of shunt flow as a means for determining patency and defining a therapeutic strategy for revision.

## Materials and Methods

### Clinical and Experimental Procedures

A total of 17 patients admitted for TIPS revision were consecutively enrolled from the University of Michigan Medical Center's interventional radiology service in this prospective study. This patient population was selected because prerevision and postrevision portosystemic pressure gradient measurements would be available as a reference standard for comparison with the volume flow estimates. Patient demographics and clinical characteristics are summarized in Tables 1 and 2. Table 2 shows a total prospective patient count of 19 because patient 3 was scanned 3 times on separate hospital visits (3A, 3B, and 3C). Patients included in the study were referred to interventional radiology with clinical signs of shunt dysfunction (reaccumulation of ascites and hepatic hydrothorax) or sonographic findings showing a temporal change in shunt velocities or flow patterns. Each patient provided fully informed written consent to an Institutional Review Board–approved protocol involving transcutaneous measurement of blood volume flow using sonography. Patients unwilling to sign consent were excluded from the study.

**Table 1.** Patient Demographics

Characteristic	Value
Male/female, n	12/5
Mean age (range), y	55 (30–69)
Etiology of cirrhosis, n	
Alcohol	4
Hepatitis C	3
Sclerosing cholangitis	1
Nonalcoholic steatohepatitis/cryptogenic	6
Budd-Chiari	1
Mesenteric thrombosis	1
Congenital hepatic fibrosis	1
Indication, n	
Varices	6
Ascites	10
Both	1

From the 17-patient population, a total of 20 TIPS cases were obtained because patient 5 had 2 TIPSs and patient 3 was scanned 3 times on separate hospital visits. The 20 cases can be categorized as follows: 12 TIPSs revised, 3 TIPSs not revised, and 5 TIPS cases omitted. Cases were omitted for one of the following reasons, none of which was due to the surface integration of Doppler-measured velocity vector volume flow technique, but to unrelated factors: (1) data acquisition error, (2) inadequate color flow image quality, (3) high body mass index (ie, poor acoustic access), and (4) fully thrombosed shunt (ie, lack of a prerevision pressure gradient). These cases are marked with an asterisk in Table 2. In addition, 2 revised cases (patients 5 and 11) were excluded, as described in “Results.”

Shunt volume flow was assessed twice for each patient with one flow measurement immediately before revision (<2 hours) and one flow measurement immediately subsequent to revision (<2 hours). All patients received nothing by mouth for at least 6 hours before prerevision volume flow measurement and maintained receiving nothing by mouth for the postrevision scan.

Transjugular intrahepatic portosystemic shunt revision followed the standard interventional radiology protocol at the University of Michigan Medical Center (P.M.N., with 11 years of experience). The decision for angioplasty was

based on venographically visible stenosis. Stents were dilated with a 4-cm-long balloon equal in diameter to the original stent. Viatorr stents (Gore Medical, Flagstaff, AZ) were dilated to 10 mm. Angioplasty was followed by stent revision if venographic success was not achieved. A peak systolic gradient between the right portal vein and right atrium of greater than 12 mm Hg defined TIPS dysfunction. Venography was performed in all patients to document the stent luminal caliber, flow reversal in the portal circulation, and antegrade flow in hepatic portal venous branches. Pressure measurements were made under quiet tidal respiration and averaged over 20 seconds.

A LOGIQ 9 ultrasound system (GE Healthcare, Milwaukee, WI) equipped with a 2.0–5.0-MHz probe (4D3CL) was used to acquire multivolume 4D (near real-time 3D) color Doppler data sets. Each multivolume data set consisted of 30 image volumes acquired sequentially at a rate of 1 volume every 10 seconds. This sequence corresponded to an acquisition rate of 0.1 Hz, although the acquisitions were not continuous. Patients held their breath during a volume acquisition and breathed between acquisitions. There was also a time delay for the 3D reconstruction between acquisitions. Since TIPS flow can be respiratory phase dependent,<sup>38</sup> patients were instructed to simply stop breathing with no bias toward inspiration or expiration. Multi-

**Table 2.** Patient Clinical Characteristics

Patient	Time After TIPS Creation, mo	Time After Most Recent Revision, mo	Stent Type	Clinical Indication for Revision	Morphologic Indication for Revision	Abnormal Sonographic Findings <sup>a</sup>	Revision Type
1*	68	62	VSG	Asymptomatic	None	Yes	None
2*	1		VSG	Refractory ascites	None	Yes	None
3 (3A)	17	6	VSG	Refractory ascites	Stenosis	Yes	Balloon angioplasty
4	143		BMS	Asymptomatic	Stenosis	Yes	Balloon angioplasty
5	60		VSG	Refractory ascites	Occlusion	Yes	Balloon angioplasty
6*	27		VSG	Refractory ascites	None	Yes	None
7*	1		BMS	Refractory ascites	Occlusion	Yes	Stent graft implantation
8*	20	6	VSG	Refractory ascites	Occlusion	Yes	Bare stent implantation
9	24		VSG	Refractory ascites	Stenosis	No	Balloon angioplasty
10	24		VSG	Refractory ascites	Stenosis	Yes	Bare stent implantation
11	112	104	BMS	Refractory ascites	Stenosis	Yes	Balloon angioplasty
12	12		VSG	Refractory ascites	Stenosis	Yes	Bare stent implantation
13	126	81	VSG	Asymptomatic	None	Yes	None
14	42	14	VSG	Refractory ascites	Stenosis	Yes	Balloon angioplasty
15 (3B)	23	5	VSG	Refractory ascites	Stenosis	Yes	Balloon angioplasty
16	166		VSG	Asymptomatic	None	Yes	Balloon angioplasty
17	12		VSG	Refractory ascites	None	No	Balloon angioplasty
18	12		VSG	Asymptomatic	None	Yes	None
19 (3C)	28	5	VSG	Refractory ascites	Stenosis	Yes	Bare stent

BMS indicates bare metal stent; 3A, 3B, and 3C, multiple studies in patient 3; and VSG, Viatorr stent-graft.

<sup>a</sup>Abnormal sonographic findings consisted of 1 or more of the following criteria: (1) changes in baseline velocities, (2) reversal of flow in the left or right portal vein away from the TIPS, and (3) absence of flow in the TIPS.

\*Omitted for reasons described in “Materials and Methods.”

volume data sets were processed offline by exporting LOGIQ 9 4D duplex mode raw DICOM data (Digital Imaging and Communications in Medicine) (Medical Imaging & Technology Alliance, Arlington, VA) and the associated scanner acquisition settings for prospective analysis.

Figure 1 illustrates the imaging geometry required for the proposed volume flow technique. The position and tilt angle of the probe must be adjusted to visualize the shunt cross section in the lateral-elevational imaging surface. Although the shunt is required to intersect the c-surface in cross section (Figure 1A), the volume flow method is independent of the angle at which the shunt intersects the c-surface. For example, the shunt cross section can vary from circular to ellipsoidal (Figure 1B), and each geometry will yield an identical volume flow estimate. The c-surface was typically positioned near the middle of the stent and as close as possible to the color flow focus, which ranged in depth from 8.0 to 11.5 cm (14.5 cm in 1 case) depending on the position of the shunt, patient's body mass index, and presence of overlying ascites. For the 8.0- to 11.5-cm depth range, the c-surface consisted of a lateral pixel size range of 1.2 to 1.5 mm and an elevational pixel size range of 1.5 to 2.0 mm.

Volume flow for each multivolume data set was computed offline (S.Z.P.) using custom algorithms written in MATLAB (The MathWorks, Natick, MA), which implemented the principle of surface integration of Doppler-measured velocity vectors.<sup>32,34</sup> The computation c-surface was defined at, or near, the color flow focus of the acquired

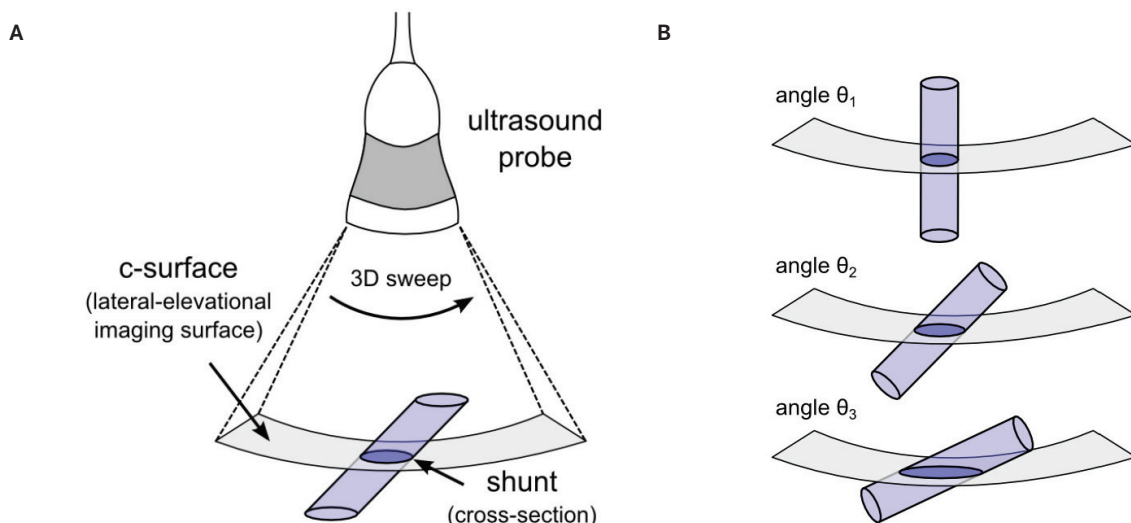
3D volume. Power Doppler data were used as a correction factor to compensate for partial volume effects by weighting flow estimates in reference to pixels containing 100% blood.<sup>33,35,36</sup> Principles of the volume flow computation method are described later in this section.

For each 30-volume data set, volume flow was computed on a volume-by-volume basis to yield 30 individual estimates that were subsequently averaged to produce the overall flow in the shunt. Volume-by-volume flow computation is advantageous because it allows for shunt motion (respiration, bulk motion, and probe movement) within the scanning volume of interest between acquisitions. In some data sets, however, a few individual volumes were discarded due to movement during an acquisition.

Two segmentation methods were used to exclude unrelated vasculature and local color flow artifacts from the c-surface. First, directional criteria were used to automatically differentiate shunt flow from any adjacent arterial flow. Second, manual segmentation (S.Z.P.) placed a broad outline around the shunt and excluded extraneous vessels and artifacts in the volume of interest.

Prerevision and postrevision shunt volume flow measurements made by sonography were compared to routine prerevision and postrevision portosystemic pressure gradients measured via a catheter using an electronic manometer. The volume flow metric was defined as the mean-normalized change in prerevision and postrevision shunt volume flow ( $\Delta Q/Q_{avg}$ ), and the portosystemic pressure gradient metric was defined as the mean-normalized

**Figure 1. A,** Imaging geometry required for the proposed volume flow measurement technique. The probe is oriented such that the TIPS intersects the c-surface (lateral-elevational surface) in cross section. **B,** The angle of c-surface intersection is an independent variable. The TIPS can intersect the c-surface at angles that yield circular ( $\theta_1$ ) to ellipsoidal ( $\theta_2$  and  $\theta_3$ ) geometries, and all cases would yield an identical volume flow estimate.





change in the prerevision and postrevision portosystemic pressure gradient ( $\Delta P/P_{avg}$ ). Data were also evaluated on the basis of prerevision shunt volume flow and the outcome to determine whether a flow threshold for revision could be defined. Clinical outcomes and portosystemic pressure gradient measurements were abstracted from the medical records of the recruited patients.

### Statistical Methods

Linear regression analysis was performed between the volume flow and portosystemic pressure gradient metrics and plotted with a 95% confidence interval. The  $\Delta Q/Q_{avg}$  volume flow metric was reported as mean and standard deviation, where the standard deviation was computed by using the standard rules of error propagation for an up to 30-volume data set. Groups were compared by the *t* test for independent samples and reported with 2-tailed *P* values. Individual groups were reported as mean and standard error. All statistical analyses were performed with Prism 5 software (GraphPad, La Jolla, CA). *P* < .05 was considered a statistically significant difference.

### Power-Weighted Surface Integration of Doppler-Measured Velocity Vectors

Surface integration of Doppler-measured velocity vectors is based on the Gauss divergence theorem. Volume flow, *Q*, can be defined as the total flux through a surface, *S*, that completely transects a vessel:

$$(1) \quad Q = \oint_S \vec{v} \cdot d\vec{A},$$

where *v* is the Doppler-measured velocity vector, and *A* is the surface area element. The scanning geometry illustrated in Figure 1 ensures that normality is maintained between the local velocity vector and the local surface area element; therefore, the dot product in Equation 1 simplifies to a multiplication. With this simplification and in the discrete case, mean volume flow through a c-surface can be redefined as:

$$(2) \quad Q = \sum_{i \in S} v_i \cdot A_i,$$

where  $v_i$  is the mean local Doppler-measured velocity vector for a single pixel *i*;  $A_i$  is the local surface area of the corresponding pixel *i*; and *i* is taken over all pixels in the c-surface. The velocity vector and surface area element must be normal (ie, perpendicular) for the application of Equation 2.

Figure 2 illustrates the principle of power-weighted surface integration of Doppler-measured velocity vectors

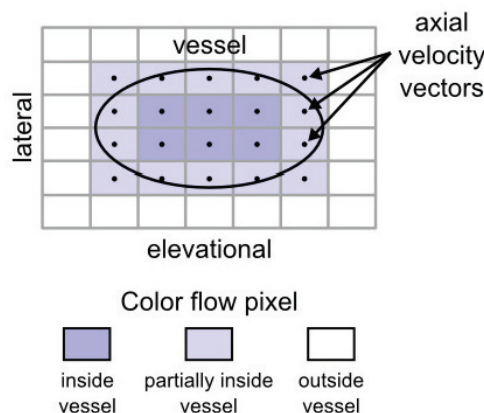
for a single vessel with an ellipsoidal cross section in the c-surface. For color flow pixels that fully intersect the vessel (6 dark blue pixels in Figure 2), volumetric flow through the pixel c-surface can be computed by using Equation 2. However, a subset of color flow pixels in Figure 2 only partially intersect the vessel (14 light blue pixels in Figure 2) and thus contribute only partially to the flow estimate. The extent of partial contribution is determined by the power Doppler signal, which is assumed as directly proportional to the number of scattering red blood cells.<sup>33</sup> A weighting factor, *w*, computed in reference to the power in pixels containing 100% blood, reflects the fraction of blood intersected by the pixel and is applied to the volume flow estimate as follows:

$$(3) \quad Q = \sum_{i \in S} v_i \cdot (A_i \times w_i),$$

where  $0 \leq w_i \leq 1$ , and *i* is taken over all pixels in the c-surface. For example,  $w_i = 0.5$  indicates a pixel area that contains, or intersects, only 50% blood. Power weighting automatically identifies the vessel boundary because the weighting factor is 0 outside the vessel. Only a broad vessel outline is required to exclude extraneous flow and artifacts.

The following describes the steps for determining the weighting factor. A histogram is generated using Doppler power values corresponding to each velocity measurement

**Figure 2.** Power-weighted surface integration of Doppler-measured velocity vectors illustrated on a vessel with an ellipsoidal cross section (black outline) in the lateral-elevational imaging surface (c-surface). Each color flow pixel that intersects the vessel possesses a Doppler-measured axial velocity vector that is normal for the area element. Axial velocity vectors are indicated. Color flow pixels positioned inside the vessel correspond to 100% blood; those outside the vessel correspond to 0% blood; and those partially inside the vessel correspond to values between 0% and 100% blood. Integration of flow over the c-surface yields volume flow through the shunt.



on the *c*-surface. The Doppler power value that corresponds to the peak in the histogram is selected automatically and defined as  $p_{\max}$ . A power threshold,  $p_{\text{thres}}$ , is chosen as 90% of  $p_{\max}$  and identifies the minimum power value of those pixels positioned fully inside the vessel. This power threshold represents the minimum power value of 100% blood. Color flow pixels associated with Doppler power values greater than or equal to  $p_{\text{thres}}$  are set to possess a weighting factor  $w = 1$ . The remaining Doppler power values, all of which are greater than or equal to 0 but less than  $p_{\text{thres}}$ , are linearly scaled to possess a weighting factor between  $0 \leq w < 1$ . The weighting factor is assigned irrespective of the color pixel spatial position. Evaluation of Equation 3 yields the total flow through the shunt while correcting for the partial volume effect.

## Results

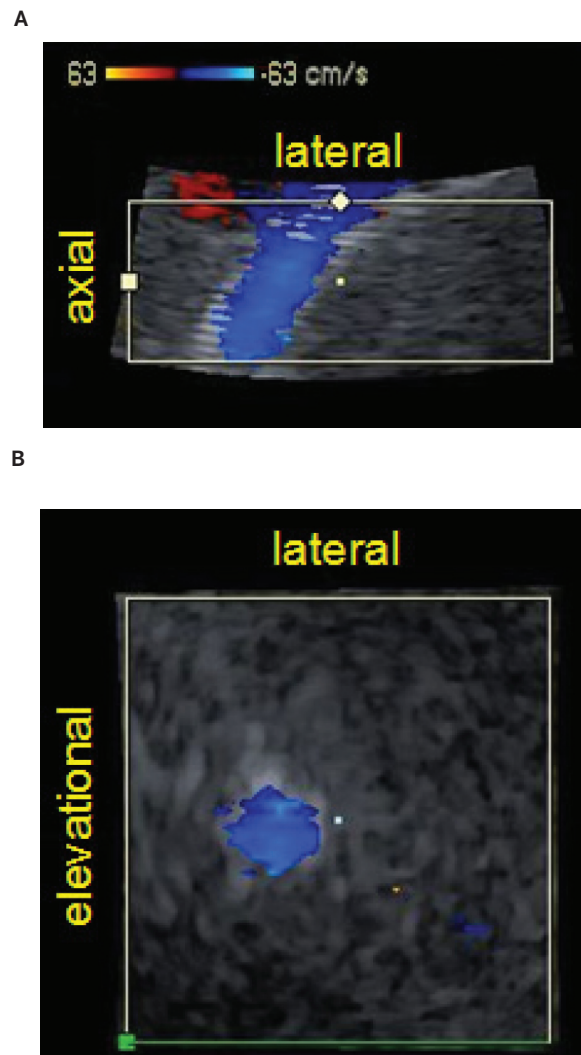
Figure 3 shows representative axial-lateral (Figure 3A) and elevational-lateral (Figure 3B) color flow images of a single volumetric TIPS scan for patient 4 after revision. Shunt volume flow can be assessed by the proposed method as long as the elevational-lateral surface, or constant depth *c*-surface, can be positioned to fully intersect the shunt in cross section, as shown in Figure 3B. This cross-sectional orientation was achieved for each recruited patient and demonstrates the broad applicability of the method.

Figure 4 shows the relationship between the  $\Delta Q/Q_{\text{avg}}$  volume flow metric and the  $\Delta P/P_{\text{avg}}$  portosystemic pressure gradient metric. The 12 of 20 TIPS cases for which a revision was performed are included in the linear regression of Figure 4A, which demonstrates an inverse correlation between TIPS volume flow and the portosystemic pressure gradient. An increase in shunt volume flow corresponds to a decrease in the portosystemic pressure gradient.

An updated linear regression is presented in Figure 4B, in which 2 specific revised cases were excluded from the data set. Patient 5 (\*) had 2 TIPSs, of which 1 shunt was revised and the other was not revised. After revision, increased flow was observed in both shunts; therefore, the volume flow and portosystemic pressure gradient metrics could not be reliably computed. Given that the 2 shunts are components in a complex parallel vascular flow circuit,<sup>39</sup> the flow path through a 2-TIPS structure is not clearly understood. Patient 11 (+) had an atypical breathing pattern that was required to observe flow within the shunt lumen. Given the circumstances described, these 2 cases can be justifiably excluded, and the updated linear regression shows a stronger correlation between the volume flow and portosystemic pressure gradient metrics.

Figure 5 provides a prerevision TIPS volume flow comparison between cases not revised or revised with an unchanged portosystemic pressure gradient and cases revised with a decreased portosystemic pressure gradient. All 15 TIPS cases (12 revised and 3 not revised) are included in the comparison of Figure 5A. An updated comparison is presented in Figure 5B, in which the same 2 cases (patients 5 and 11), as described above, were excluded from the data set.

**Figure 3.** Color flow images of a TIPS in axial-lateral (**A**) and elevational-lateral (*c*-surface; **B**) views for patient 4 after revision. **A** and **B** coincide at the center point marked in each view. The color flow focus depth is 11.25 cm and is positioned at the axial center of **A**. The elevational-lateral surface intersects the shunt at a depth of 11.25 cm. B-mode image striations in **A** represent the stent mesh boundary. The color bar indicates velocity in centimeters per second.



Overall, 3 data points are excluded from Figure 5B because patient 5 had 2 TIPSs, and both the revised (\*) and non-revised (+) prerevision flow measurements were omitted.

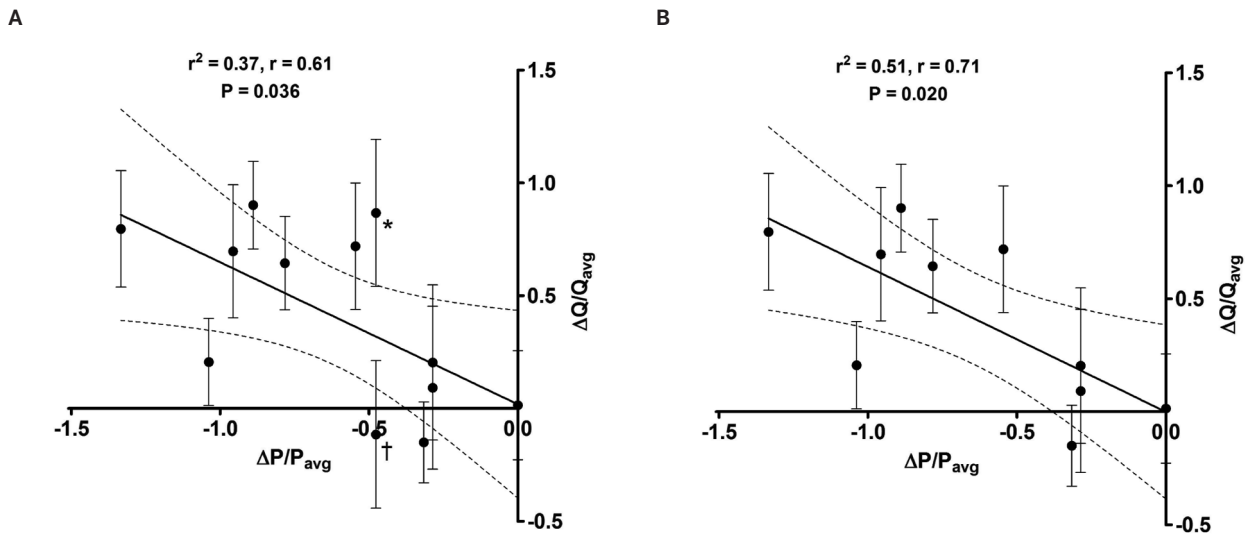
Comparison of prerevision flow shows a developing threshold below which a TIPS revision may be recommended. A volume flow threshold of 1534 mL/min yields sensitivity of 66.7% and specificity of 100%. A less conservative volume flow threshold of 1873 mL/min yields sensitivity of 66.7% and specificity of 66.7%. The abilities of shunt volume flow to discriminate between individuals

requiring a revision and those not requiring a revision are 73% (area under the receiver operating characteristic curve = 0.73) and 78% (area under the receiver operating characteristic curve = 0.78) for Figure 5, A and B, respectively.

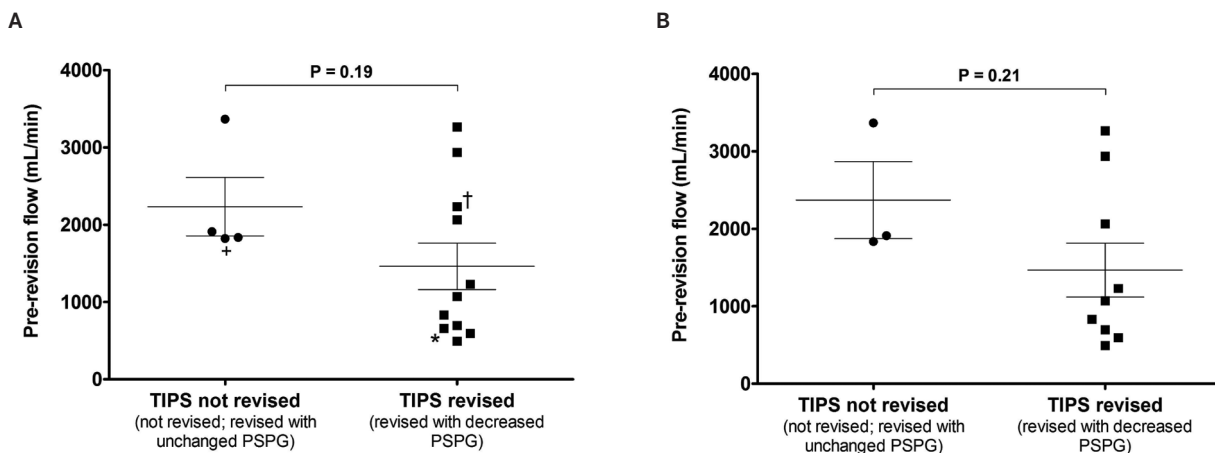
### Discussion

Doppler sonography has traditionally been the primary mode for TIPS evaluation and is generally accepted as an excellent method for detecting complete shunt occlusion.<sup>4,21,22,24–26</sup>

**Figure 4.** Relationship between the mean-normalized change in prerevision and postrevision shunt volume flow ( $\Delta Q/Q_{avg}$ ) and the mean-normalized change in the prerevision and postrevision portosystemic pressure gradient ( $\Delta P/P_{avg}$ ) for all TIPS cases for which a revision was performed (**A**) and excluding 2 revised TIPS cases (\* and †; **B**) for reasons described in “Results.” Solid lines represent the linear regression, and dashed lines represent 95% confidence intervals. Error bars indicate standard deviation in the flow metric for an up to 30-volume data set.



**Figure 5.** Prerevision TIPS volume flow comparison between cases not revised or revised with an unchanged portosystemic pressure gradient (PSPG) and cases revised with a decreased portosystemic pressure gradient for all TIPS cases (**A**) and excluding 2 TIPS cases (ie, 3 data points; \*, +, and †; **B**), for reasons described in “Results.” Error bars indicate standard error of the mean.



However, a completely occluded shunt is typically more difficult to revise, so a failing TIPS must be identified promptly and revised before this time. Current Doppler methods have demonstrated an opportunity for improvement.

Given the complexity in the parallel vascular flow circuit,<sup>39</sup> shunt flow velocity depends on several factors in the overall circuit, and one can conceive of situations in which local blood flow velocities can increase, decrease, or remain unchanged in a failing TIPS. In the presence of a relative stenosis, the shunt cross-sectional area will decrease. If the TIPS behaves identically to a blood vessel that supplies an autoregulating organ, flow velocity at the stenosis would increase to maintain constant volume flow (this principle is used to estimate stenoses in carotid and renal Doppler examinations). However, a TIPS does not autoregulate and is simply intended to function as a low-resistance short circuit that diverts blood flow away from a cirrhotic liver or varices. Therefore, in a TIPS, a stenosis produces an increase in local flow resistance and may cause diversion of blood flow to other parts of the vascular flow circuit. If the decrease in blood flow equally compensates for the decrease in the cross-sectional area, the local flow velocity will remain unchanged even though a TIPS stenosis exists. In addition, the flow velocity can vary along the path of the shunt and even fluctuate with time.<sup>4,40</sup>

Variability in the flow velocity estimate is apparent in recent studies that have shown unreliable Doppler measurements when assessing TIPS function.<sup>27,41,42</sup> In fact, updated recommended guidelines for evaluating TIPS function have reverted to recurrence of the problem for which the TIPS was originally placed as grounds for revision.<sup>43</sup> In contrast, changes in volume flow are straightforward to interpret. For example, if TIPS flow decreases and cardiac output is presumed unchanged, blood must be shunted elsewhere such as varices, which suggests a TIPS stenosis. In this case, decreased TIPS flow would be a realistic measure of TIPS failure.

Assessment of TIPS flow and function has been demonstrated by using a 3D/4D sonographic volume flow technique that provides an alternative objective measure of shunt patency and overcomes many limitations associated with traditional pulsed wave Doppler imaging. Traditional pulsed wave Doppler imaging is unable to reliably estimate volume flow due to subjective measurement of the vessel diameter, an assumption of circular shunt geometry, subjective Doppler angle correction, and an assumption of a cylindrically symmetric flow profile. Volume flow measurements with the proposed method are independent of the vessel geometry, angle, and flow profile. Bench-top determinations of accuracy with the proposed

method showed an error within 5% achieved after acquisition of 15 volumes under pulsatile flow conditions.<sup>36</sup> Volume flow is expected to be a more robust metric for patency than flow velocity because flow must be conserved along the path of the shunt; therefore, a measurement can be made anywhere along the TIPS.

Results of this preliminary study show an inverse correlation between the mean-normalized change in pre-revision and postrevision shunt volume flow and the mean-normalized change in the pre-revision and postrevision portosystemic pressure gradient, which indicates that an increase in shunt volume flow corresponds to a decrease in the portosystemic pressure gradient ( $r^2 = 0.51$ ;  $P = .020$ ). Therefore, a relative change in shunt blood flow appears to be an acceptable surrogate for a change in the shunt portosystemic pressure gradient for TIPS revision cases. Variability in the flow metric (error bars in Figure 4) is presumed to be due to biological variability in shunt flow.

Blood flow has an advantage over pressure in that one can perform the measurement in a standard diagnostic environment. A feasible clinical implementation would involve measurement of volume flow immediately after a successful TIPS revision: ie, an achieved portosystemic pressure gradient of less than 12 mm Hg. Screening would then involve straightforward quantitative comparison of subsequent volume flow measurements to the baseline value to assess TIPS function.

Transjugular intrahepatic portosystemic shunt volume flow measurements with the proposed 3D/4D method are in line with those presented in the literature.<sup>29-31</sup> Comparison of pre-revision shunt flow for all 15 TIPS cases shows a preliminary threshold developing at 1534 mL/min, below which a TIPS may be recommended for revision depending on complementary clinical criteria. All normal TIPS cases in this study had flow above this threshold. The group comparison in Figure 5 illustrates promise for the proposed method given published sensitivities for standard Doppler methods (eg, 35%).<sup>27</sup> For a representative example, consider the results from patient 9, whose pre-revision flow was measured as  $1910 \pm 298.9$  mL/min (mean  $\pm$  SD), which suggests that a revision may be unnecessary. On the basis of traditional criteria, this patient was referred for revision. However, the postrevision portosystemic pressure gradient was unchanged, and this outcome was reflected in postrevision flow, which was measured as  $1938 \pm 355.9$  mL/min. Follow-up sonography 1 month after revision showed a patent TIPS. This patient died of cardiac-related issues 5 months after revision.

An upper-bound threshold above which all TIPSs are considered normal could not be defined from the prelim-



inary results in this study. Figure 5B shows 3 false-negative cases at the 1534-mL/min threshold defined above. Identifying such an upper-bound threshold requires further study with a larger patient population. A patient with TIPS flow above the 1534-mL/min threshold will require additional clinical criteria to confirm normal TIPS function. In contrast, TIPS flow below the threshold would by itself suggest that a TIPS revision may be necessary. However, initial measurements with the proposed volume flow method should be used as a complementary or additive clinical criterion.

Although the proposed method is independent of all traditional pulsed wave Doppler assumptions, the operator must still recognize the correct color/power gain and Doppler pulse repetition frequency to avoid aliasing. In addition, the operator must ensure that the lateral-elevational c-surface fully intersects the shunt in the cross-section. Correct selection of the color/power gain and pulse repetition frequency is necessary for any Doppler quantification and is therefore not unique to the proposed method.

This study had a few limitations. First, 2 revised cases were excluded from the linear regression analysis (Figure 4), and 2 cases (ie, 3 data points) were excluded from the pre-revision volume flow comparison (Figure 5). Reasons for excluding these cases were justified due to a 2-TIPS structure and unusual contingencies in their data acquisition. Fortunately, results from these cases were outside the expected range; therefore, the resultant linear regression showed a stronger correlation ( $r^2 = 0.51$ ; Figure 4B). Including these cases reduces the correlation, and although the regression is less compelling, the correlation is still significant ( $P = .036$ ; Figure 4A).

Second, the total acquisition time for a complete color Doppler data set consisting of 30 3D/4D image volumes required approximately 6 to 10 minutes, with each transducer sweep requiring a breath hold. This was a technical limitation because a mechanically swept 3D ultrasound probe was used. However, 30 volumes were acquired because this study was interested in estimating reproducibility. In a clinical setting, an operator might be willing to make a measurement consisting of fewer acquisitions. For example, 10 acquisitions might only require 2 to 3 minutes. Furthermore, a 2D electronic ultrasound array can acquire 3D image volumes more rapidly than a mechanically swept 3D probe, and the acquisition of 30 image volumes could be completed in seconds (ie, 1 or 2 breath holds).

Third, there were limitations with the study inclusion criteria. Only patients scheduled for revision were recruited; therefore, only 3 cases with nonrevised TIPSs were enrolled in the study. Future studies intend to include addi-

tional control cases to help strengthen statistical conclusions. In addition, study inclusion criteria should consider the patient's body mass index. Acoustic access to the TIPS is limited in overweight patients, which causes an increased imaging depth and reduced Doppler power at depth.

In conclusion, volume flow measurement in TIPS cases using 3D/4D Doppler sonography provides a potential alternative to standard pulsed wave Doppler metrics for evaluating shunt patency and identifying cases requiring revision. With further refinements, volume flow estimates can be incorporated as part of routine TIPS screening and evaluation. Ultimately, volume flow measurements could be applied to other vascular conditions, such as portal hypertension in the liver and liver transplants, to assess therapeutic outcomes.

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