

# Specific Risk Factors for Development Cerebrovascular Disorders in Patients with Chronic Kidney Disease

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## **Abstract:**

Cerebral vascular disorders are one of the leading causes of disability and mortality in patients with chronic kidney disease (CKD). The article presents the currently available data on risk factors (RF) for the development of cerebrovascular disorders in pre-dialysis patients with CKD. Two groups of RF are identified: traditional and non-traditional (specific). Traditional RF, which include arterial hypertension, diabetes mellitus and hypercholesterolemia, independently affect the cerebral vascular bed and get worse against the background of CKD. Specific RF is associated with features of the CKD pathogenesis. It includes increased blood levels of homocysteine,  $\beta$ 2-microglobulin, impaired calcium-phosphorus metabolism, accumulation of uremic toxins and toxins of intestinal bacteria, anemia and other factors. In the present review, special attention is paid to specific RF and pathogenetic mechanisms of the development of cerebrovascular disorders in predialysis patients with CKD.

**Keywords:** chronic kidney disease, cerebrovascular disorders, stroke, hyperhomocysteinemia, uremic toxins, intestinal bacteria toxins, impaired calcium-phosphorus metabolism.

Chronic kidney disease (CKD) is associated with alterations of vascular functions, blood chemistry, and red blood cell production [1]. These dysfunctions impair blood perfusion, and this can subsequently affect brain functions. Indeed, cerebrovascular diseases are common in CKD patients, who display an increased rate of cognitive disorders and dementia [2,3] and a greater burden of abnormal brain white matter disease [4]. Cognitive impairments in CKD can be partly related to vascular dementia, as dialysis patients with cognitive disorders also present numerous cortical ischemic lesions [5–7]. Indeed, the risk of transient ischemic attack and stroke increases with

progressive kidney function decline [8–12] and stroke in these patients is associated with more severe neurological deterioration, poorer functional recovery [13,14], and increased mortality [15,16].

Endothelial dysfunction (ED), one of the first steps in the development and progression of atherosclerosis, is considered a non-traditional CV risk factor in CKD and its prevalence progressively increases as the disease progresses to end stage kidney disease. ED is evident at an early stage in CKD patients, occurs independently of hypertension development and contributes to arterial stiffness and to renal interstitial fibrosis [15–17]. In addition to chronic inflammation and oxidative stress, hemodynamic disturbances, and the continuous exposure to uremic toxins in CKD, may result in an imbalance between endothelial injury and repair that progressively worsens as renal function deteriorates [18]. The assessment of ED was found to be useful to predict cardiovascular events, not only in the general population but also in high-risk groups [9,10]. Forearm reactive hyperemia has been considered a gold-standard measure of macrovascular endothelial function that proved to correlate well with invasively measured coronary ED [11,12]. However, this technique has been criticized for lack of reproducibility because it is highly operator dependent. Recently, reactive hyperemia index (RHI) derived from peripheral arterial tonometry (PAT) has gained wide acceptance in the scientific community because it is a noninvasive and non-operator dependent method for assessment of microvascular function, that has been validated for stratification in both low-risk and high-risk populations [17,19]. The occurrence of cerebrovascular disorders may be linked to the presence of traditional and non-traditional cardiovascular risk factors in CKD. Here, we review current knowledge on the epidemiological aspects of CKD-associated neurological and cognitive disorders and discuss putative causes and potential treatment. CKD is associated with traditional (hypertension, hypercholesterolaemia, diabetes etc.) and non-traditional cardiovascular risk factors such as elevated levels of oxidative stress, chronic inflammation, endothelial dysfunction, vascular calcification, anaemia and uraemic toxins. Clinical and animal studies indicate that these factors may modify the incidence and/or outcomes of stroke and are associated with white matter diseases and cognitive impairment. However, direct evidence in CKD patients is still lacking. A better understanding of the factors responsible for the elevated prevalence of cerebrovascular diseases in CKD patients may facilitate the development of novel treatments. Very few clinical trials have actually been performed in CKD patients, and the impact of certain treatments is subject to debate. Treatments that lower LDL cholesterol or blood pressure may reduce the incidence of cerebrovascular diseases in CKD patients, whereas treatment with erythropoiesis-stimulating agents may be associated with an increased risk of stroke but a decreased risk of cognitive disorders. The impact of therapeutic approaches that reduce levels of uraemic toxins has yet to be evaluated. [23].

Among dialysis patients, stroke risks are particularly high. One study that leveraged the National Health Insurance program database in Taiwan compared more than 80,000 dialysis patients with general population controls; these investigators described a nearly threefold increased risk of ischemic stroke and a six-fold increased risk of hemorrhagic stroke as compared with the general population after controlling for risk factors[26]. Within the dialysis population, peritoneal dialysis patients were at slightly lower risk of hemorrhagic stroke than matched hemodialysis patients. This study, however, may have limited generalizability because stroke rates may be higher among Asian populations. In a large single-center study of 2,384 hemodialysis patients in the United Kingdom, the incident stroke rate was 15 per 1000 patient years, an incidence similar to that seen in the Taiwan study, with major risk factors including diabetes and hypertension. Cerebrovascular disease is unlikely to be the only contributing factor to cognitive impairment in individuals with CKD because cognitive performance steadily worsens as kidney function declines<sup>5</sup> and then often improves with kidney transplantation.[22,23] Longitudinal studies evaluating cognitive function pre- and posttransplantation show improvement in cognitive function within the first 6 to 12 months posttransplantation, with improved function still apparent several years later, though such

improvement may be modified by frailty.[22–24] The potential explanations of this finding are 2-fold: first, successful transplantation restores crucial functions of the kidney, such as filtration, secretion, tubular function, hormonal balance (that are not replicated by dialysis), and clearance of medications, both of which may be essential for optimal cognitive function; and second, transplantation eliminates the need for dialysis and the associated complications that may promote cognitive impairment, particularly with hemodialysis, such as sudden hemodynamic shifts, routine use of anticoagulation that may predispose to microbleeds, and intermittent rather than continual solute clearance.

Several observations suggest that CKD and kidney replacement therapy are associated with chronic inflammation. Plasma concentrations of C-reactive protein, fibrinogen, interleukin-6, and other inflammatory markers occur in patients with CKD and in those with ESRD.<sup>18</sup> CKD is also associated with activation of platelet adhesion molecules and alterations in the structure and concentration of lipoproteins.<sup>18</sup> Often chronic inflammation is associated with evidence of malnutrition, particularly in ESRD patients maintained on dialysis.[34] However, because systemic inflammation is a risk factor for stroke risk in other populations, it is plausible that systemic inflammation by itself also contributes to the higher risk of stroke in patients with CKD.[35]

Chronic kidney disease independently increases the risk of stroke and the burden of ischemic small vessel disease. In this study, the presence of stage 3 or higher CKD was associated with increased distal resistance in the anterior cerebral circulation of post-stroke patients. Anterior circulation and posterior circulation distal resistive indices also correlated with the degree of SVD on MRI. Prospective TCD studies assessing intracranial PI and MFV changes and white matter disease burdens in larger samples may be helpful for noninvasive screening and informing risk factor modification in patients with CKD at high risk for neurovascular disease

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