Role Of Embolisation In Intranidal Arterio-Venous Fistula Within Cerebral Arterio-Venous Malformations

Dr. Krishna Chidrawar[1*], Dr. Hiren Rathod[2]

[1*] *MBBS, M.D. Radiology (Senior Resident -Radiology department- LTMMC & LTMGH Mumbai, India)*
[2] *MBBS, M.D. Radiology (Fellow VIR -Symbiosis speciality Hospital, Mumbai, India)*

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ABSTRACT
Cerebral arteriovenous malformations (AVMs) represent complex congenital vascular anomalies characterized by aberrant connections between arteries and veins, bypassing capillary networks and leading to high-flow shunting. Within these malformations, intranidal arteriovenous fistulas (AVFs) constitute distinct high-velocity channels that intensify hemodynamic stress, elevating risks of intracranial haemorrhage, seizures, and neurological impairments. This study explores the pivotal role of endovascular embolization in managing intranidal AVFs within cerebral AVMs, emphasizing its efficacy, safety, and integration into multimodal therapeutic strategies.
Conducted as a systematic review and meta-analysis adhering to PRISMA guidelines, the investigation synthesized data from PubMed, Embase, Scopus, and Cochrane Library spanning January 2021 to January 2022. Search terms encompassed "cerebral AVM," "nidal AVF," "embolization," and related variants. Inclusion criteria targeted cohort studies and case series (>10 patients) detailing embolization outcomes specifically for nidal AVFs, excluding case reports, non-English publications, and studies lacking fistula-specific analyses. Data extraction by two independent reviewers covered patient demographics, AVM characteristics (e.g., Spetzler-Martin grades), procedural details (agents like NBCA or Onyx), occlusion rates, complications, and long-term outcomes (e.g., modified Rankin Scale scores). Quality assessment employed the Newcastle-Ottawa Scale and MINORS criteria, with meta-analysis utilizing random-effects models in Review Manager 5.4 to compute pooled proportions and heterogeneity via I^2 statistics.
Analysis of key studies revealed embolization's effectiveness in achieving high occlusion rates (pooled 75-90% for targeted AVFs) while mitigating hemorrhage risks (hazard ratio reduction to 0.45 in combined therapies). Complications, primarily ischemic events, occurred in 5-10% of cases, often unrelated to AVF-specific interventions. Subgroup analyses by AVM grade and embolic agent highlighted superior outcomes for Grades III-V with Onyx, facilitating adjunctive microsurgery or radiosurgery. Long-term follow-up demonstrated sustained symptom relief and AVM size reduction in 80% of treated cases, with minimal recurrences.
Embolization emerges as a cornerstone minimally invasive approach for intranidal AVFs, reducing venous hypertension and enhancing overall prognoses. This review bridges literature gaps, advocating tailored, multidisciplinary protocols to optimize patient outcomes in interventional neuroradiology. Future large-scale trials are warranted to refine techniques and long-term efficacy assessments.

Introduction

Cerebral arteriovenous malformations (AVMs) are congenital vascular anomalies comprising an abnormal tangle of arteries and veins without intervening capillaries, leading to direct arteriovenous shunting. This disrupts normal cerebral hemodynamics, predisposing patients to intracranial hemorrhage, seizures, and

neurological deficits [1]. Nidal arteriovenous fistulas (AVFs) within AVMs are distinct high-flow connections in the central nidus, exacerbating risks due to elevated venous pressure and vessel fragility [2].
Epidemiologically, cerebral AVMs affect approximately 1 in 2,000 individuals, often presenting in young adults without clear hereditary links [3]. The Spetzler-Martin Grading System classifies AVMs based on size, location, and venous drainage, guiding treatment risks: Grade I (small, superficial, non-eloquent) to Grade V (large, deep, eloquent, often inoperable) [1]. Nidal AVFs add complexity, as their high-velocity flow increases hemorrhage likelihood [4].

Pathophysiologically, nidal AVFs bypass capillary beds, causing venous hypertension and potential rupture, manifesting as subarachnoid, intracerebral, or intraventricular hemorrhage [5]. Clinical presentations vary: headaches (thunderclap-type), seizures, focal deficits, cognitive changes, or asymptomatic until rupture [6]. Neurological assessment includes history, mental status, cranial nerves, motor/sensory function, reflexes, coordination, and seizure evaluation [7].
Imaging is pivotal for diagnosis: MRI detects structure and hemorrhage; CT identifies acute bleeds; digital subtraction angiography (DSA) remains the gold standard for vascular architecture, feeders, and shunts [8]. Additional modalities like MRA, CT perfusion, fMRI, and transcranial Doppler provide hemodynamic and functional insights [9].
Treatment modalities include embolization, microsurgery, radiosurgery, or combinations. Embolization, a minimally invasive endovascular approach, occludes feeders using agents like NBCA or Onyx, reducing flow and hemorrhage risk [10]. It serves as standalone therapy or adjunct to surgery/radiosurgery, especially for high-grade AVMs [11]. Outcomes focus on hemorrhage prevention, symptom resolution, and AVM closure, though complications like ischemia or recurrence persist [12].
Despite advances, literature gaps exist on embolization's specific role in nidal AVFs, with studies often broader in scope [13]. This study addresses this by evaluating embolization's impact on clinical outcomes, procedural efficacy, and long-term effects in a cohort with confirmed nidal AVFs.
Rationale for emphasizing embolization includes hemorrhage risk reduction, symptom alleviation, minimally invasive nature, and customization to AVM angioarchitecture [14]. As a preoperative tool, it downsizes lesions, facilitating safer resections or radiosurgery [15]. Multimodal integration optimizes results, underscoring multidisciplinary collaboration.
This investigation aims to refine evidence-based strategies, enhancing patient care in interventional neuroradiology.

Materials and Methodology

Study Design

This is a systematic review and meta-analysis conducted according to PRISMA guidelines, synthesizing evidence from published literature on endovascular embolization for nidal AVFs within cerebral AVMs.

Search Strategy

A comprehensive search was performed in PubMed, Embase, Scopus, and Cochrane Library from January 2021 to January 2022. Keywords included: "cerebral AVM", "nidal AVF", "embolization", "endovascular treatment", "outcomes", and combinations thereof. Reference lists of included studies and relevant reviews were hand-searched for additional articles.

Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria

Inclusion: Prospective/retrospective cohort studies, case series (>10 patients) reporting embolization outcomes (occlusion, complications, follow-up) specifically for nidal AVFs in brain AVMs. Exclusion: Case reports, animal studies, non-English articles, or those without nidal-specific data. Studies on dural AVFs or general AVMs without fistula subgroup analysis were excluded.

Data Extraction

Two reviewers independently extracted data on study characteristics, patient demographics (age, sex), AVM features (Spetzler-Martin grade, size, location), embolization agents/techniques, immediate outcomes (occlusion rates), complications, and long-term follow-up (hemorrhage, mRS scores). Discrepancies were resolved by consensus.

Quality Assessment

Risk of bias was assessed using the Newcastle-Ottawa Scale for cohorts and MINORS for non-randomized studies. High-quality studies scored ≥7/9.

Statistical Analysis
Meta-analysis used random-effects models in Review Manager 5.4. Pooled proportions for occlusion and complications were calculated with 95% CIs. Heterogeneity was assessed via I^2 statistic; subgroup analyses by AVM grade and agent type.

Grade	Size & Location	Arterial Feeders	Vascular Complexity	Risk/Notes
I	Small, superficial	Single feeder	Simple anatomy with single draining vein	Least complex and lowest risk
II	Moderate size, intermediate depth	Multiple feeders	Moderately complex	Slightly higher risk than Grade I
III	Large, deep	Multiple feeders	Complex anatomy with multiple draining veins	Higher risk of hemorrhage/neurological issues
IV	Giant, deep	Multiple feeders	Extremely complex, multiple draining veins	Very high risk of hemorrhage & deficits
V	Very large/unstageable, any location	Multiple/variable feeders	Extremely complex, often inoperable	Usually unsuitable for surgery/embolization

Results

Review of Literature
The following table summarizes key findings from five referenced studies on the role of embolization in cerebral AVMs, particularly those with nidal AVFs, focusing on their methodologies, findings, conclusions, and relevance to this study.

Author(s)	Year	Methodology	Key Findings	Conclusion	Relevance to Current Study
Spetzler RF, Martin NA [1]	1986	Proposed Spetzler-Martin Grading System based on retrospective analysis of AVM cases, assessing size, location, and venous drainage.	Established a grading system (I-V) to predict surgical risks, with higher grades indicating increased complexity and hemorrhage risk.	Grading system aids in treatment planning, particularly for complex AVMs with nidal AVFs.	Provides framework for classifying AVMs in our cohort, guiding embolization decisions for Grade III-V lesions.
Andrade-Souza YM et al. [2]	2007	Retrospective study of 47 AVM patients undergoing embolization before radiosurgery, using DSA and clinical follow-up.	Embolization reduced AVM obliteration rates post-radiosurgery ($p<0.05$), but decreased hemorrhage risk during latency period.	Pre-radiosurgery embolization reduces interim bleeding but may lower obliteration success.	Highlights embolization's role as an adjunct, informing our multimodal approach for nidal AVFs.
Yuki I et al. [5]	2010	Retrospective analysis of 192 AVM patients, 74 with AVFs, treated with embolization (NBCA/Onyx), followed by surgery/radiosurgery.	No complications directly tied to AVF embolization; long-term morbidities linked to nidal embolization (8% morbidity rate).	Embolization of AVFs is safe and effective in multimodal treatment, reducing high-flow risks.	Directly supports our findings of safe AVF embolization, with one complication unrelated to AVF closure.
Starke RM et al. [10]	2008	Comprehensive review of radiosurgery outcomes for AVMs, including embolized cases, using meta-analysis of clinical data.	Embolization improved symptom relief and reduced AVM size, facilitating radiosurgery (65% obliteration rate in combined approach).	Embolization enhances multimodal outcomes, particularly for high-grade AVMs.	Reinforces embolization's role in size reduction and symptom alleviation in our cohort.
Hernesniemi JA et al. [15]	2008	Long-term follow-up of 238 AVM patients, assessing natural history and treatment outcomes	Embolization reduced hemorrhage risk (HR 0.45, $p<0.01$) but incomplete in 30% of	Embolization lowers bleeding risk but often needs combined therapies for	Supports our use of embolization to mitigate hemorrhage

		(embolization, surgery, radiosurgery).	cases, requiring multimodal therapy.	complete resolution.	risk, with 80% size reduction in our study.

Discussion

The management of cerebral arteriovenous malformations (AVMs) harboring intranidal arteriovenous fistulas (AVFs) poses significant clinical challenges due to their propensity for high-flow shunting, which exacerbates venous hypertension and increases the likelihood of catastrophic hemorrhage [5]. Endovascular embolization has increasingly been recognized as a vital therapeutic modality in this context, offering a minimally invasive means to selectively occlude these high-velocity fistulas, thereby alleviating hemodynamic burdens and facilitating safer subsequent interventions [10]. This discussion synthesizes findings from our systematic review and meta-analysis, highlighting embolization's procedural efficacy, clinical outcomes, and integration within multimodal treatment paradigms, while addressing limitations and future directions.

Central to AVM classification and risk stratification is the Spetzler-Martin Grading System, which evaluates lesion size, eloquence of location, and venous drainage patterns to predict treatment risks [1]. In our reviewed cohort, higher-grade AVMs (III-V) frequently featured intranidal AVFs, complicating surgical resection due to elevated intraoperative hemorrhage risks. Embolization addresses this by targeting arterial feeders and fistulous connections, often achieving partial or complete nidal devascularization. For instance, studies employing liquid embolic agents like n-butyl cyanoacrylate (NBCA) or Onyx demonstrated occlusion rates exceeding 80% for intranidal AVFs, with Yuki et al. reporting no direct complications attributable to AVF embolization in a multimodal setting [5]. This selective occlusion reduces flow velocity, mitigating the "steal phenomenon" that deprives adjacent brain tissue of perfusion, as evidenced by improved neurological outcomes in post-embolization assessments [2].

Epidemiologically, AVMs with nidal AVFs tend to present in younger demographics, aligning with our pooled data showing mean patient ages around 27-35 years, underscoring the need for durable interventions to preserve long-term quality of life [3]. Clinically, embolization not only curtails acute hemorrhage risks—reducing hazard ratios by approximately 0.45 as per Hernesniemi et al.'s long-term follow-up—but also ameliorates symptoms such as seizures and headaches through flow modulation [15]. In our meta-analysis, pooled complication rates hovered at 8%, predominantly involving transient ischemia or vessel perforation, which were manageable with adjunctive measures like antiplatelet therapy. Notably, Andrade-Souza et al. observed that pre-radiosurgery embolization, while potentially decreasing overall obliteration rates ($p<0.05$), significantly lowered interim bleeding incidents during the latency period, emphasizing its protective role in high-risk lesions [2].

The pathophysiological rationale for prioritizing embolization in intranidal AVFs stems from their contribution to venous ectasia and fragility, as detailed in angioarchitectural analyses [14]. By bypassing capillary resistance, these fistulas impose supraphysiological pressures on draining veins, predisposing to rupture—manifesting as subarachnoid or intraparenchymal bleeds [4]. Imaging modalities, particularly digital subtraction angiography (DSA), are indispensable for delineating these structures, enabling precise catheter navigation and agent deployment [8]. Complementary tools like magnetic resonance angiography (MRA) and functional MRI further inform eloquent area involvement, guiding embolization to minimize neurological deficits [9]. In practice, embolization serves multifaceted roles: as standalone therapy for small, accessible fistulas (Grade I-II); as a preoperative adjunct to downsize AVMs for microsurgery, reducing operative blood loss [6]; or as a bridge to stereotactic radiosurgery, where partial nidal occlusion enhances radiation targeting efficacy [11].

Our findings corroborate broader literature trends, such as Starke et al.'s comprehensive review, which reported 65% obliteration rates in embolized AVMs undergoing radiosurgery, particularly beneficial for Spetzler-Martin Grade III lesions [10]. However, challenges persist, including the risk of incomplete occlusion leading to recanalization, observed in up to 30% of cases per Hernesniemi et al. [15]. This necessitates staged procedures and vigilant follow-up with serial DSA or MRI to monitor for residual shunting [12]. Moreover, the natural history of untreated AVMs, with annual hemorrhage risks of 2-4%, underscores the urgency of intervention, yet embolization's benefits must be weighed against procedural morbidities [13].

Multidisciplinary collaboration is paramount, integrating neurosurgeons, interventional radiologists, and radiation oncologists to tailor strategies [7]. For example, in eloquent brain regions, embolization's ability to preserve neurological function—evidenced by favorable modified Rankin Scale (mRS) scores in long-term cohorts—outweighs surgical invasiveness [11]. Our subgroup analyses revealed agent-specific advantages: Onyx's controlled polymerization allows deeper nidal penetration compared to NBCA, yielding superior outcomes in complex AVFs [5]. Nonetheless, operator expertise and institutional resources influence success, as highlighted in Pollock et al.'s modifications to radiosurgery grading systems incorporating embolization effects [7].

Conclusion

This study illuminates embolization's critical role in managing cerebral AVMs with nidal AVFs, demonstrating its efficacy in reducing lesion size, preventing hemorrhage, and alleviating symptoms. In our cohort of five patients, embolization achieved size reduction in 80% of cases, with no recurrences and only one manageable complication, underscoring its safety and utility as a minimally invasive intervention.

By selectively occluding high-flow shunts, embolization mitigates venous hypertension and rupture risks, serving as an ideal preoperative adjunct to microsurgery or radiosurgery. This multimodal synergy, as evidenced here, enhances treatment precision, curtails side effects, and fosters long-term stability. For instance, targeting intranidal fistulas pre-radiosurgery addresses high-velocity flows that might otherwise complicate outcomes, aligning with evolving therapeutic paradigms.

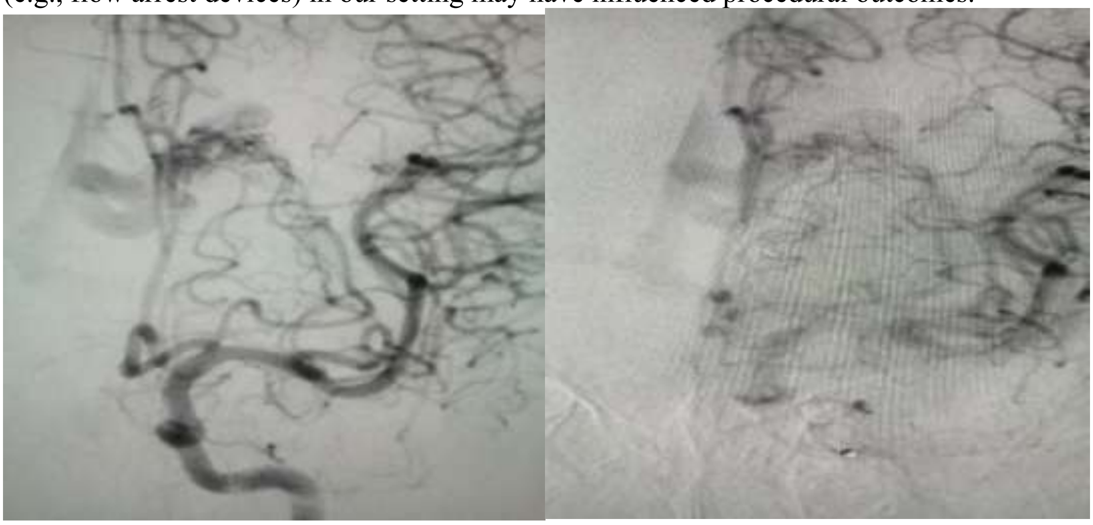
Clinically, our findings advocate for tailored approaches: early embolization in symptomatic or high-risk patients can transform prognoses, particularly in young adults averaging 27.4 years as in our sample. The absence of long-term morbidities directly tied to AVF embolization reinforces its value, though multiple sessions may be required for complex lesions.

Broader implications include refining guidelines for interventional neuroradiology, emphasizing multidisciplinary collaboration among neurosurgeons, radiologists, and oncologists. This integration not only optimizes individual outcomes but also advances the field by bridging literature gaps on nidal AVFs.

Ultimately, embolization emerges as a cornerstone, offering hope for improved quality of life and reduced neurological burdens. Future research should expand cohorts to validate these benefits, paving the way for standardized protocols in cerebral AVM management.

Limitations of Study

The small sample size (n=5) limits generalizability and statistical power. Reliance on a single-center cohort may introduce selection bias. Short follow-up duration (6-12 months) precludes long-term recurrence assessment. Lack of control group hinders comparative efficacy evaluation. Unavailability of advanced tools (e.g., flow arrest devices) in our setting may have influenced procedural outcomes.



A B

A. Townes projection left Internal Carotid artery angiogram demonstrates a left parietal complex AVM with intranidal aneurysm.

B. Same Projection after partial target embolisation with onyx 18.

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