



## **Extracorporeal Life Support Organization (ELSO)**

### **General Guidelines for all ECLS Cases**

#### **Introduction**

This guideline describes prolonged extracorporeal life support (ECLS, ECMO). Related guidelines with more specific discussion for categories of patients follow the same outline. These guidelines describes useful and safe practice, but these are not necessarily consensus recommendations. These guidelines are not intended as a standard of care, and are revised at regular intervals as new information, devices, medications, and techniques become available.

The background, rationale, and references for these guidelines are found in "ECMO: Extracorporeal Cardiopulmonary Support in Intensive Care (The Red Book)" published by ELSO. These guidelines address technology and patient management during ECLS. Equally important issues such as personnel, training, credentialing, resources, follow up, reporting, and quality assurance are addressed in other ELSO documents or are center-specific.

The reference is:

ELSO Guidelines for Cardiopulmonary Extracorporeal Life Support  
Extracorporeal Life Support Organization, Version 1.3 November 2013  
Ann Arbor, MI, USA  
[www.elsonet.org](http://www.elsonet.org)

## Table of Contents

### Contents

I.	Patient condition.....	4
A.	Indications .....	4
B.	Contraindications.....	4
C.	Specific patient considerations .....	4
II	Extracorporeal Circuit .....	4
A.	Criteria for selecting circuit components.....	4
1.	Blood flow for cardiac support .....	4
2.	Blood flow and gas exchange for respiratory failure (VA or VV) .....	5
B.	Circuit Components.....	5
C.	Pump.....	5
1.	Inlet (suction) pressure.....	5
2.	Outlet pressure .....	5
3.	Power failure .....	5
4.	Hemolysis .....	6
D.	Membrane lung.....	6
E.	Sweep gas .....	6
F.	Priming the Circuit.....	7
G.	Heat exchanger .....	7
H.	Monitors .....	8
I.	Alarms .....	8
J.	Blood tubing.....	9
K.	Elective vs. emergency circuits .....	9
III	Vascular Access .....	9
A.	The modes of vascular access are.....	9
B.	Cannulas .....	10
C.	Cannulation.....	10
1.	Methods.....	10
2.	Cannulation technique .....	10

3.	Management of the distal vessels .....	11
4.	Adding or changing cannulas.....	11
IV	Management during ECLS .....	12
A.	Circuit related .....	12
1.	Blood flow .....	12
2.	Oxygenation.....	12
3.	CO2 clearance.....	12
4.	Anticoagulation.....	13
5.	Circuit monitors and alarms and safety .....	14
6.	Component and circuit changes .....	16
7.	Traveling.....	16
B.	Patient related .....	17
1	Hemodynamics .....	17
2.	Ventilator management.....	17
3.	Sedation.....	19
4.	Blood volume, fluid balance and hematocrit .....	19
5.	Temperature .....	20
6.	Renal and Nutrition management .....	20
7.	Infection and Antibiotics.....	20
8.	Positioning .....	21
9.	Bleeding .....	21
10.	Procedures.....	23
V	Weaning, trials off, discontinuing ECLS for futility .....	23
A.	Weaning.....	23
B.	Trial off.....	23
C.	Decannulation.....	24
D.	Stopping support for futility .....	24
VI	Patient and Disease specific protocols.....	24
VII	Expected results (per patient and disease category) .....	24

ECLS is the use of mechanical devices to temporarily (days to months) support heart or lung function (partially or totally) during cardiopulmonary failure, leading to organ recovery or replacement.

## **I. Patient condition**

### **A. Indications**

Acute severe heart or lung failure with high mortality risk despite optimal conventional therapy. ECLS is considered at 50% mortality risk, ECLS is indicated in most circumstances at 80% mortality risk. Severity of illness and mortality risk is measured as precisely as possible using measurements for the appropriate age group and organ failure. See patient- specific protocols for details.

### **B. Contraindications**

Most contraindications are relative, balancing the risks of the procedure (including the risk of using valuable resources which could be used for others) vs. the potential benefits. The relative contraindications are: 1) conditions incompatible with normal life if the patient recovers; 2) preexisting conditions which affect the quality of life (CNS status, end stage malignancy, risk of systemic bleeding with anticoagulation); 3) age and size of patient; 4) futility: patients who are too sick, have been on conventional therapy too long, or have a fatal diagnosis. See patient-specific protocols for details.

### **C. Specific patient considerations**

See patient-specific protocols

## **II Extracorporeal Circuit**

### **A. Criteria for selecting circuit components**

The circuit is planned to be capable of total support for the patient involved, unless the intent is specifically partial support (i.e. CO<sub>2</sub> removal for asthma)

#### **1. Blood flow for cardiac support**

Access is always venoarterial. The circuit components are selected to support blood flow 3 L/m<sup>2</sup>/min (neonates 100 cc/kg/min; pediatrics 80 cc/kg/min; adults 60 cc/kg/min.) The best measure of adequate systemic perfusion is venous saturation greater than 70%. Achieving a desired flow is determined by vascular access, drainage tubing resistance, and pump properties.

## **2. Blood flow and gas exchange for respiratory failure (VA or VV)**

The membrane lung and blood flow should be capable of oxygen delivery and CO<sub>2</sub> removal at least equal to the normal metabolism of the patient ((i.e. an oxygen delivery of 6cc/kg/min for neonates; children 4-5 cc/kg/min; adults 3cc/kg/min), This will usually equate to VV blood flows of 120ml/kg/min for neonates down to 60-80 ml/kg/min for adults. Oxygen delivery capability is determined by blood flow, hemoglobin concentration, inlet hemoglobin saturation, and membrane lung properties. Carbon dioxide removal always exceeds oxygen delivery when the circuit is planned for full support.

If the circuit is planned for CO<sub>2</sub> removal only, access can be venoarterial, venovenous or arteriovenous. Typical blood flow is approximately 25% of cardiac output, which is sufficient to remove the CO<sub>2</sub> produced by metabolism (3-6 cc/Kg/min). CO<sub>2</sub> removal is determined by the blood flow and the sweep gas rate, the inlet PCO<sub>2</sub> and the membrane lung properties.

## **B. Circuit Components**

The basic circuit includes a blood pump, a membrane lung, and conduit tubing. Depending on the application additional components may include a heat exchanger, monitors, and alarms.

## **C. Pump**

The pump should be able to provide full blood flow for the patient, as defined above. Any pump which meets the specifications can be used (modified roller with inlet pressure control; centrifugal or axial rotary pump with inlet pressure control; peristaltic pump).

### **1. Inlet (suction) pressure**

With the inlet line occluded the suction pressure should not exceed minus 300 mmHg. The inlet pressure can be very low (minus 300 mmHg) when the venous drainage is occluded (chattering) which causes hemolysis. Inlet pressure in excess of minus 300 mmHg can be avoided by inherent pump design or through a servocontrolled pressure sensor on the pump inlet side.

### **2. Outlet pressure**

With the outlet line occluded the outlet pressure should not exceed 400 mm/Hg (inherent in the pump design or by a servocontrolled system).

### **3. Power failure**

The pump should have a battery capable of at least one hour operation, and a system to hand crank the pump in the event of power failure.

The pump and circuit should have a mechanism to alarm for or **prevent reverse flow** (arterial to venous in the VA mode) if the power fails.

#### **4. Hemolysis**

The plasma hemoglobin should be less than 10 mg/dl under most conditions. If the plasma hemoglobin exceeds 50 mg /dl, the cause should be investigated.

#### **D. Membrane lung**

The gas exchange material in membrane lung may be solid silicone rubber, a microporous hollow-fibre (polypropylene for example), or a solid hollow-fibre (PMP, polymethyl pentene for example )membrane. Membrane surface area and mixing in the blood path determine the maximum oxygenation capacity (the rated flow).

When used for total support the membrane, lung should provide full O<sub>2</sub> and CO<sub>2</sub> exchange for the patient as defined in II.A. The gas exchange capability of a specific membrane lung is described as “rated flow” or “maximal oxygen delivery” These are 2 ways of describing the amount of desaturated (75%) blood that can be nearly fully saturated (95%) per minute

**Rated flow** is the flow rate at which venous blood (saturation 75%, Hb 12mg%) will be fully saturated (95%) at the outlet of the membrane lung. **Maximal O<sub>2</sub> delivery** is the amount of oxygen delivered per minute when running at rated flow. This is calculated as outlet minus inlet O<sub>2</sub> content (typically 4-5cc/dL, same as the normal lung) times

blood flow... For example, a specific device has a rated flow of 2 L/min, (max O<sub>2</sub> 100ccO<sub>2</sub>/min). If the blood flow required for total support of a patient is 1 L/min (O<sub>2</sub> about 50 cc/min) this membrane lung will be adequate. If the blood flow required for total support is 4 L/min, this membrane lung is not adequate and the circuit will need two of these membrane lungs in parallel, or a larger membrane lung rated at 4 L/min.

In venovenous mode, recirculation of infused blood may occur, raising the inlet saturation well above 75%. In this situation the outlet-inlet O<sub>2</sub> difference per unit of blood flow is decreased, and higher blood flow, cannula repositioning, increased patient volume or higher hematocrit is/are required to provide the desired amount of O<sub>2</sub> delivery.

#### **E. Sweep gas**

For most applications, the sweep gas will be 100% oxygen or carbogen (5%CO<sub>2</sub>, 95% O<sub>2</sub>).at a flow rate equal to the blood flow rate (1:1). Increasing the sweep flow will increase CO<sub>2</sub> clearance but will not affect oxygenation. Water vapor can condense in the membrane lung and may be cleared by intermittently increasing sweep gas flow to a higher flow.

For CO<sub>2</sub> clearance only, blood flow can be as low as 0.5L/min/m<sup>2</sup>. The membrane lung can be smaller than that required for full support, and the sweep gas flow is typically oxygen at 10:1. (Gas: Blood).

**Avoiding air embolism** via the membrane lung: Air or oxygen bubbles can pass through the membrane into the blood if the sweep gas pressure exceeds the blood pressure, or if the blood pressure is subatmospheric (this occurs when there is no blood flow or blood pressure, and blood drains from the membrane lung into the tubing by gravity, entraining air through the membrane lung). This is a specific problem with microporous hollow fibre devices but can also occur with Silicone or polymethyl-pentene lungs are due to minor defects which can allow air entrainment. Prevention is achieved by maintaining the blood side pressure higher than the gas side pressure. This is accomplished by including a pressure pop off valve or pressure servo regulation control in the sweep gas supply, and by keeping the membrane lung below the level of the patient, so that if the pump stops the risk of entraining air from the room will be minimized. Even with silicone and PMP lungs it is safest to maintain the membrane lung below the level of the patient

#### **F. Priming the Circuit**

The assembled circuit is primed under sterile conditions with an isotonic electrolyte solution resembling normal extracellular fluid including 4-5 MEq/L potassium. The prime is circulated through a reservoir bag until all bubbles are removed. This can be expedited by filling the circuit with 100% CO<sub>2</sub> before adding the prime. Microporous membrane lungs are quick to prime because gas in the circuit can be purged through the micropores. The circuit can be primed at the time of use, or days before. It is not recommended to use a primed circuit after 30 days.

Before attaching the circuit to the patient the water bath is turned on to warm the fluid. ECLS is usually instituted with crystalloid prime. Many centers add human albumin (12.5 gm) to “coat” the surfaces before blood exposure. For infants packed RBCs are added to bring the hematocrit to 30-40. When blood is added to the prime, heparin is added to maintain anticoagulation (1 unit per cc prime) then calcium is added to replace the calcium bound by the citrate in the bank blood. If time allows it is helpful to verify the electrolyte composition and ionized calcium before starting flow. For emergency cannulation the prime can be crystalloid with dilutional effects treated after initiating flow.

#### **G. Heat exchanger**

A heat exchanger is needed if it is necessary to control the blood and the patient temperature at a specific level. Heat exchangers require an external water bath which circulates heated (or cooled) water through the heat exchange device. In general, the temperature of the water bath is maintained < 40° Celsius, and usually at 37°. Contact between the circulating water and the circulating blood is very rare, but should be considered if small amounts of blood or protein are present in the circulating water, or if unexplained hemolysis occurs. The water in the water bath is not sterile and may

become contaminated. The water bath should be cleaned and treated with a liquid antiseptic from time to time.

## **H. Monitors**

Monitors are designed to measure circuit function and to alarm the operator of abnormal conditions. Most circuits will include:

1. Blood flow is commonly monitored by direct measurement of blood flow using an ultrasonic detector, or can be calculated based on pump capacity and revolutions per minute for a roller pump using standardized tubing.

2. Pre and post membrane lung blood pressure measurements can include maximum pressure servo regulation control to avoid over pressuring.

3. Pre pump venous drainage line pressure (to avoid excessive negative suction pressure by the pump)... Can be used as a servo regulation system to prevent excessive suction.

4. Pre and post membrane lung oxyhemoglobin saturation measurements: The venous oxyhemoglobin saturation is a valuable parameter for managing and monitoring the circuit. The post membrane lung saturation monitor will determine if the membrane lung is working at rated flow, and if function is deteriorating. Blood gases are measured from pre oxygenator and post oxygenator sites either by continuous on line monitoring or batch sampling. The primary purpose of measuring blood gases (as opposed to online saturation) is to determine the inlet and outlet PCO<sub>2</sub> to evaluate membrane lung function, and blood Ph to determine metabolic status.

5. Circuit access for monitors and a blood sampling and infusions. Luer connectors and stopcocks provide access to the blood in the circuit. The number of access sites should be minimized, but at least two are necessary (pre-and post membrane lung). Blood access sites should be avoided between the patient and the inlet of the pump because of the risk of entraining air. It is acceptable to use the circuit for all blood sampling and infusions, although some centers prefer to give infusions directly to IV lines in the patient.

## **I. Alarms**

Pre and post membrane lung pressure and alarms: these measurements will determine the transmembrane lung pressure gradient. Clotting in the oxygenator is represented by increasing membrane lung pressure gradient.

Many centers use a bubble detector on the blood return line. Pressure and bubble detector alarms can be used to clamp lines and turn the pump on or off to automate these safety factors.



## **J. Blood tubing**

Tubing length and diameter will determine the resistance to blood flow. Tubing is chosen to allow free venous drainage, and avoid high resistance pressure drop on the blood return side. . The blood flow through 1 meter of tubing at 100 mm Hg pressure gradient for common internal diameter in inches is: 3/16:1.2L/min; ¼:2.5 L/min; 3/8:5L/min; ½:10L/min

A “bridge” between the arterial and venous lines close to the patient is a useful circuit component, particularly for periods off bypass, during weaning or during an emergency. However, when clamped the bridge it is a stagnant area which can contribute to thrombosis and possibly infection. In general, if a bridge is used, it should be maintained closed during most of the ECLS run, with a system for purging the bridge of stagnant blood when it is not in use

## **K. Elective vs. emergency circuits**

The characteristics of individual components are listed above. Emergency circuits should be available within minutes of the call to a patient, and should be fully primed with crystalloid and ready to attach as soon as the patient is cannulated. They should also include safety factors to prevent high negative pressure on the inlet side and high positive pressure on the outlet side to avoid errors during emergent cannulation and attachment. The emergency circuit may include a microporous membrane lung (easy to prime), and a centrifugal pump (high-pressure limited, does not require monitors or alarms during initial set up).

## **III Vascular Access**

Vascular access is usually achieved by cannulation of large vessels in the neck or the groin. The blood flow resistance of the venous drainage cannula will determine the amount of total blood flow that can be delivered by the circuit. The resistance of the blood return cannula will determine the pressure in the post membrane lung blood return line, related to blood flow. Variations can be used for specific patient at conditions (see patient protocols).

### **A. The modes of vascular access are**

- 1. Venoarterial** (required for cardiac support, appropriate for respiratory support)
- 2. Venovenous** (no hemodynamic support, preferred for respiratory support because it avoids using a major artery and avoids potential systemic embolism)
- 3. AV-arteriovenous** (limited to low blood flow, specifically for CO<sub>2</sub> removal)

## B. Cannulas

The term “cannula” refers to the catheter that goes directly into the vessel for ECLS, to differentiate that device from all other catheters. The blood flow resistance of vascular access cannulas is directly proportional to the length and inversely proportional to the radius to the fourth power. Therefore the internal diameter of the catheter is the most important factor controlling blood flow resistance. Other factors such as side holes and tapering sections also affect resistance, and the resistance increases at higher flows, so the characteristics of each cannula must be known before cannulation. Blood flow at 100 mm Hg gradient for commonly used cannulas is described in the patient -specific protocols. Cannulas are chosen to provide the desired blood flow (section II A) above.

## C. Cannulation

### 1. Methods

Cannulas can be placed by via: 1) cut down, 2) percutaneously by a vessel puncture, guide wire placement and serial dilation (Seldinger technique), 3) by a combination of cut down exposure and Seldinger cannulation, or 4) by direct cannulation of the right atrium and aorta via thoracotomy. **Cut down cannulation** of the neck vessels is usually necessary in neonates and small children .**Percutaneous cannulation** is commonly used for VV ECMO in children over two and in adults. Direct **cardiac cannulation** is usually used for patients who cannot come off CPB in the OR, using the CPB cannulas.

VV access can be gained with a double lumen cannula, or two separate venous cannulas.

### 2. Cannulation technique

A bolus of heparin (typically 50-100 units per kilogram) is given just before cannula placement, even if the patient is coagulopathic and bleeding.

**Direct cut down cannulation:** Cannulation is usually done in the ICU with full sterile preparation and OR team. Deep sedation/anesthesia with muscle relaxation is essential to prevent spontaneous breathing which can cause air embolus. Local anesthesia may be used for the skin. Dissection exposes the vessels. Direct handling of the vessels is minimized as much as possible to avoid spasm. Topical lidocaine or papavervine is helpful to avoid spasm. Ligatures are passed around the vessels above and below the cannulation site. Heparin is given IV (50-100 units per kilogram) and the distal vessels are ligated. The proximal vessel is occluded with a vascular clamp, the vessel opened, and the cannula placed. If the vessels are very small, if there is difficulty with cannulation, or if spasm occurs, fine stay sutures in the proximal edge of the vessel are very helpful. The vessel is ligated around the cannula, often over a plastic “boot” to facilitate later cannula removal. In the femoral artery a non-ligation technique can be used (see semi-Seldinger technique below) which may ensure sufficient flow past the cannula to ensure distal perfusion

**Percutaneous cannulation:** Cannulation is done in the ICU with full sterile preparation. The OR team is not essential but there should be a plan for direct cutdown access if there are complications with percutaneous placement. The safest technique is to place small conventional intravascular catheters first. . The position of these preliminary catheters is verified by blood sampling or measuring the blood pressure. After full sterile preparation a guide wire is passed into the small catheter and the small catheter is removed followed by serial dilators. The final large dilator acts as an obturator for the cannula itself. With current equipment, two people are necessary to do percutaneous

access: one to load of the dilators on the wire and pass the dilators, and one to occlude the vessel between dilators to avoid bleeding. When using the Seldinger technique with a large dilator and cannulas, it important to check the wire after each dilator. If the wire is kinked or bent it must be removed and replaced with a new wire. The use of the ultrasound or fluoroscopy can help with cannula positioning. The heparin bolus can be given any time after the main wire is placed.

**Semi-Seldinger Technique:** Performed in the ICU under anaesthesia with aseptic precautions .The vessel is exposed by cut down but not dissected., A small (20G ) IV catheter is passed into the vessel through the skin distal to the incision. Correct placement can be confirmed by aspiration and then heparin is administered. This catheter is then used to place the large guide wire. Dilator exchanges lead to placement of the ECMO cannula. The wound is then closed over the cannula, which is then treated like a standard percutaneous cannula. The advantages of this technique over a pure percutaneous approach are speed, accurate assessment of vessel size and flexibility of approach.

### **3. Management of the distal vessels**

If the neck cutdown access is used, the vein and artery are ligated distally relying on collateral circulation to and from the head. Some centers routinely place cephalad venous cannulae but this is an institutional preference and is not mandatory. If the access is via the femoral vessels the venous collateral is adequate but the femoral artery is often significantly occluded. If distal arterial flow to the leg is inadequate a separate perfusion line is placed in the distal superficial femoral artery by direct cutdown, or in the posterior tibial artery for retrograde perfusion.

### **4. Adding or changing cannulas**

If venous drainage is inadequate and limited by the blood flow resistance of the drainage cannula, the first step is to add another venous drainage cannula through a different vein. It may be possible to change the cannula to a larger size, but removing and replacing cannulas can be difficult. If a vascular access cannula is punctured, kinked, damaged, or clotted, the cannula must be changed. If the cannula was placed by direct cutdown, the incision is opened, the vessel exposed, and the cannula replaced, usually with the aid of stay sutures on the vessel. If the cannula was placed by

percutaneous access, a Seldinger wire is placed through the cannula to facilitate cannula change.

## **IV Management during ECLS**

### **A. Circuit related**

Circuit components are selected based on patient size (II.A)

#### **1. Blood flow**

After cannulation blood flow is gradually increased to mix the circulating blood with the prime, then, blood flow is increased until maximum flow is achieved. This is done to determine the maximum flow possible based on the patient, and the cannula resistance. After determining maximum possible flow, the blood flow is decreased to the lowest level that will provide adequate support. Ideally for VA access, the pump flow is decreased until the arterial pulse pressure is at least 10 mm Hg (to assure continuous flow through the heart and lungs during ECLS), but this is often not possible when the heart function is very poor. For VV access, adequate support is defined as arterial saturation greater than 80% and venous saturation greater than 70%. For VV access, flow is decreased from maximal until the arterial saturation is at the desired level (greater than 80%). The physiologic goals (mean arterial pressure, arterial and venous saturation) are set and blood flow is regulated to meet the goals.

#### **2. Oxygenation**

As long as the blood flow is below rated flow for that membrane lung (and the inlet saturation is 70% or higher) the oxyhemoglobin saturation at the outlet of the membrane lung should be greater than 95%. Usually the outlet saturation will be 100% and the P O<sub>2</sub> will be over 300. If the outlet saturation at or below the rated flow is less than 95%, the membrane lung is not working at full efficiency (due to irregular flow, clotting, water in the gas phase)... It may be necessary to change the membrane lung.

Oxygen delivery from the circuit should be adequate for full support (systemic saturation greater than 95% (VA) or over 80% (VV) at low ventilator settings and FiO<sub>2</sub>). Maintaining the hematocrit over 40% will optimize oxygen delivery while allowing the lowest reasonable blood flow.

#### **3. CO<sub>2</sub> clearance**

CO<sub>2</sub> transfer across the membrane lung will exceed oxygen transfer. CO<sub>2</sub> clearance is controlled by the sweep gas. Initially the gas to blood flow ratio is set at 1:1 and titrated to maintain the pCO<sub>2</sub> in the desired range. An alternative is to use carbogen (5% CO<sub>2</sub>/95% O<sub>2</sub>) as the sweep gas. If CO<sub>2</sub> clearance is decreased but oxygenation is adequate the cause is usually water accumulation in the gas phase. If the initial PaCO<sub>2</sub> is greater than 70, the PaCO<sub>2</sub> should be normalized over several hours

rather than immediately in order to avoid swings of cerebral perfusion related to CO<sub>2</sub> and Ph.

#### 4. Anticoagulation

**4 a: Heparin** (regular or “unfractionated “heparin, not low molecular weight heparin) is given as a bolus (50-100 units per kilogram) at the time of cannulation, and by continuous infusion during ECLS

**4a1: Measuring heparin effect:** Heparin infusion is regulated to keep the whole blood activated clotting time (ACT) at a designated level (usually 1.5 times normal for the ACT measurement system). ACT is the time (in seconds) in which whole blood clots in response to a fibrin activating reagent. Each ACT device has a specific upper limit with normal blood (120 to 140 seconds for most systems). ACT is measured hourly and more frequently if the ACT is changing. ACT is measured at the bedside (not sent to the laboratory) because heparin dosing decisions are often required immediately.

Partial thromboplastin time (PTT) is the time (in seconds) in which calcium-free plasma clots in response to a fibrin activating reagent combined with calcium. PTT is more convenient than ACT because it can be measured in the laboratory at any time. However it is less reliable than whole blood ACT because platelets and blood cells affect the activity of heparin. For a normal person, 10 units of heparin per kilogram per hour will result in ACT approximately 1.5 times normal. However ECLS patients are not normal and there is no standard dose of heparin, and no standard concentration of heparin in the blood during ECLS. If the patient has a high platelet or white cell count, or is “hypercoagulable”, a large amount of heparin may be required to maintain the target ACT. If the patient is thrombocytopenic, in renal failure, or has circulating fibrin split products a small amount of heparin may be required.

Other measures of coagulation such as heparin concentration or thromboelastogram are used in some centers.

**4a2:** Heparin acts by “activating” a plasma molecule called **antithrombin** (usually called AT3). If the AT3 concentration in plasma is low, clotting can occur even when large doses of heparin are given. AT3 levels should be maintained in the normal range (80-120% of control), but AT3 assay is not available in all hospital laboratories. If clotting occurs in the circuit despite a normal or high dose of heparin, and AT3 assay is not easily available, give fresh frozen plasma to replace AT3 (inexpensive) or give concentrated AT3 (very expensive) until clotting is controlled. Circuit clotting can progress to a consumptive syndrome similar to DIC. The treatment of circuit clotting is to change to a new circuit.

**4b: Thrombocytopenia** (platelet count less than 150,000) is common in ECLS patients. It may be a consequence of the primary disease, drugs and other treatment, or caused by blood surface exposure. Circulating platelets adhere to the plastic surfaces, and undergo a “release reaction” which attracts other platelets. These aggregates of

“effete” platelets circulate in the blood and are removed by the liver and spleen. If the platelet count is less than 20,000 spontaneous bleeding can occur. The usual practice is to transfuse platelets to keep the count greater than 80,000. Even though the platelet count is over 80,000, platelet function may be impaired. A kallikrein inhibitor (Aprotinin or tranexamic acid) may improve platelet function if bleeding is a problem (see bleeding:IVB).

**4c: HITT:** There is a very rare condition called heparin induced thrombotic thrombocytopenia, characterized by multiple white arterial thrombi and platelet count less than 10,000. A simple assay for HITT is available, but it has a very high false positive rate. ECLS patients are all on heparin and all are thrombocytopenic for many reasons. The HITT assay is often positive in these patients, although they do not have the rare disease of heparin induced thrombocytopenia. If an ECLS patient has true HITT, the platelet count will be consistently less than 10,000 despite platelet infusions. In such a case, if there are no other explanations for thrombocytopenia, it is reasonable to use a different anticoagulant than heparin. Argatroban is usually the next choice.

**4d: Fibrinogen:** Even though fibrin formation is inhibited by heparin, fibrinogen can become depleted during ECLS. Fibrinogen levels are measured daily and maintained within the normal range (250 to 300 mg/dl) by infusion of fresh frozen plasma or fibrinogen. The primary disease, or clots in the circuit, may cause fibrinolysis resulting in circulating fibrin split products. These molecules act as anticoagulants and can add to the risk of bleeding. If fibrin split products are detected and/or if bleeding is excessive, fibrinolysis can be inhibited with anti-fibrinolytics (see bleeding).

**4e: Surface coatings:** Extracorporeal circuits and devices are available with surface heparin coating or coating with other polymers intended to minimize blood surface interaction. These modified surfaces may decrease blood surface interaction somewhat, but systemic heparinization is still required when using the surface coatings currently on the market. It is possible to manage ECMO without systemic anticoagulation if bleeding cannot be controlled by other measures. Blood flow should be maintained high, Nonthrombogenic coated circuits have an advantage, and a primed replacement circuit should be available if the patient circuit clots.

## 5. Circuit monitors and alarms and safety

**5a: High-pressure:** The higher the perfusion pressure, the higher the risk of leak or blow out. 400 mm Hg is typically the highest safe level. If the post pump pressure is greater than 300 mm Hg at the desired flow rate, the cause might be high systemic blood pressure in the patient (in VA mode), high resistance in the blood return access cannula, high resistance in the conduit tubing from the membrane lung to the cannula, or high resistance in the membrane lung. If the pressure suddenly increases setting off the high-pressure alarm, the cause is usually temporary occlusion of the infusion tubing or cannula. If this occurs stop the pump, then gradually return flow while determining the cause of the sudden increase in resistance.

**5b: Air in the circuit** might be seen directly or detected by a bubble detector. If air is detected in the circuit stop the pump, clamp the lines near the patient, and put the patient on support settings. Because the patient is often totally dependent on ECLS, it is necessary to find and repair the cause of air in the circuit very quickly. The most common cause is aspiration of air into the venous drainage line at the site of cannulation or through a connector or open stopcock. Another common cause is air bubbles in the intravenous infusion lines going into the patient. When air is entrained on the drainage side it is usually as small bubbles, and usually is caught in the membrane lung or bubble trap before getting into the patient. Air on the infusion side is a much more serious problem. The most common cause is air entrainment in the membrane lung. This can occur if the membrane lung is higher than the patient and if the blood side pressure drops below the gas side pressure.

**5c: Clotting in the circuit** is detected by careful examination, using a flashlight to go over all the extracorporeal circuit. Clots are seen as very dark non-moving areas on the surfaces. Every circuit will have some small clots at the site of connectors, infusion lines, or in areas of low flow in the pre-pump bladder or the membrane lung. These clots are in the range of 1 to 5 mm, do not require circuit changes, and are simply observed. Clots larger than 5 mm or enlarging clots on the infusion side of the circuit should be removed by removing the that section of the circuit or by changing the entire circuit if there are many such clots. Platelet/fibrin thrombi appear as white areas on the circuit at connectors and stagnant sections. These are clots which have not accumulated red cells, usually because they are in areas of very high flow. As with dark clots., no intervention is necessary unless the white thrombi are greater than 5 mm or growing.

**5d: Electrical power failure.** The circuit should be designed to automatically switch to battery operation if the main source of electricity is lost. An alarm should sound when the circuit switches to battery operation. The battery will operate the circuit for 30-60 minutes while the cause of the problem is being identified. The major power requirement is the water bath for the heat exchanger. When operating on battery power, it is wise to turn off the water bath. If the electrical circuit and the battery fails, the alarm will be a low flow alarm or alarms attached to the patient (saturation or blood pressure). In that case it will be necessary to crank the pump by hand.

**5e: Decannulation** is a life-threatening emergency identified by bleeding at the cannulation site, air in the circuit if the drainage cannula is removed, and loss of volume and perfusion pressure if the infusion cannula is lost. Decannulation is prevented by securing the cannulas to the skin in at least two locations, and checking the position of the cannulas and cannula fixation at frequent intervals and adequately sedating the patient. If decannulation occurs, come off bypass immediately by clamping the lines close to the patient, control bleeding by direct pressure, and reinsert the cannula as soon as possible.

**5f: Hemolysis** is suspected if the urine has a pink tinge ( which could be due to bladder bleeding, not hemolysis) and verified by plasma Hb measurement.. Normally plasma hemoglobin should be less than 10 mg/dl Higher plasma hemoglobin can be

caused by a condition primary to the patient, or by circuit components. The pump itself will not cause hemolysis unless inlet (suction) pressures are greater than minus 300 mm Hg, which can happen if the pump suction exceeds the blood drainage. The pump can also cause hemolysis if there are clots in the pump chamber (which can occur in centrifugal pumps). Hemolysis can occur if blood is flowing at a high rate through a very small orifice. This can occur if the blood return cannula has a very high resistance, or if there is a high level of occlusion in the post pump circuit. Hemolysis can also occur if a hemofilter or plasmapheresis device is attached to the circuit and run at high flows.

**5g: Emergency drills** addressing all these problems should be conducted by the team at regular intervals

**5h: Safety:** ECMO is a technology dependent therapy utilized in critically ill patients. A successful outcome is highly dependent on repetitive safe practices by a diverse team (physicians, ECMO specialists, perfusionists, nurses, etc). Policies that support a safe ECMO program include: regular emergency skills lab sessions, team training, using a pre-procedure “time out” to verify key elements and post-ECMO debriefings.

## **6. Component and circuit changes**

It may be necessary to stop ECLS (come off bypass) to remove and replace small components such as stopcocks and connectors, large components such as the pump chamber or membrane lung, or the entire circuit. If the patient is totally dependent on ECLS, this can be done in less than one minute as follows: Put the patient on maximal ventilator and drug support settings. Get at least one helper and assemble all the clamps and components. Clamp the lines near the patient, and clamp the lines above and below the component to be changed. With sterile technique, cut out the component and insert the new component, filling the tubing with saline and eliminating all bubbles. When changing or adding a membrane lung, the lung must be primed with crystalloid solution before attaching to the circuit.

## **7. Traveling**

Traveling poses risks. Do procedures in the ICU whenever possible.

**In hospital:** It may be necessary to travel to radiology, the operating room, or the cath lab as follows: Be sure that the battery is fully charged and the hand crank is available for the pump. Turn off the water bath to save electricity. Use a small full tank of oxygen for the sweep gas. Switch the circuit to battery power and portable oxygen before moving the patient from the bed. Before moving the patient switch the patient monitors to a portable monitor for EKG, blood pressure, and SaO<sub>2</sub>. Minimize the number of intravenous infusions as much as possible. Bring an Ambu bag, separate oxygen tank, and emergency drugs. Plan the trip before leaving the ICU. Hold elevators, clear hallways, and be sure the receiving unit is ready. When moving the patient and the ECLS cart, one person is assigned to keep one hand on the gurney and the other on the cart to reduce tension on the tubing.



**Hospital to hospital:** In addition to all the details listed above, the transport team must be totally self-contained for hospital to hospital transfer. This includes spare parts for all components, a variety of cannulas and sizes, operating instruments, and medications. Arrange for hospital privileges in the referral hospital. Send instructions to the referral hospital regarding family, consent, and blood, platelets, and plasma preparation, OR team if necessary, etc.

## **B. Patient related**

### **1 Hemodynamics**

During **VV support** the patient is dependent on his own hemodynamic physiology. Appropriate medications and infusions are used to control cardiac output, blood pressure and resistance.

During **VA support** hemodynamics are controlled by the blood flow (pump flow plus native cardiac output), and vascular resistance. Because the pulse pressure is low the mean systemic arterial pressure will be somewhat lower than normal pressure (40 to 50 mmHg for a newborn, 50 to 70 mmHg for a child or adult). In addition, patients placed on ECLS for cardiac support are on high doses of pressors when ECLS is begun. As these drugs are titrated down, resistance falls and systemic pressure falls proportionately. If the systemic perfusion pressure is inadequate (low urine output, poor perfusion) pressure can be increased by adding blood or low doses of pressor drugs. Systemic vasodilatation requiring pressor drugs is common in patients in septic shock. Although the mean arterial pressure may be low, systemic perfusion may be completely adequate. Systemic perfusion is best measured by mixed venous blood saturation. If venous saturation is greater than 75% systemic oxygen delivery is adequate even though the pressure may be low. If systemic oxygen delivery is not adequate (venous saturation less than 70%) increase the pump flow until perfusion is adequate. If extra blood volume is required to gain extra flow, consider the relative advantages of blood and crystalloid solution.

### **2. Ventilator management**

Whether the patient is on either VV. or VA mode, the ventilator should be managed at low settings to allow lung rest. For patients with respiratory failure, a common mistake is to try to recruit lung volume during the acute inflammatory stage early in ECLS. Typical rest settings include low rate with long inspiratory time, low plateau inspiratory pressure (under 25 cm H<sub>2</sub>O) low FiO<sub>2</sub> (under 30%). The end-expiratory pressure (PEEP) can be set at any level. In fact, the ventilator can be managed as APRV with continuous positive pressure and occasional pressure release. Using high PEEP levels, however, will inhibit venous return and have the usual negative effect on hemodynamics when the patient is managed in the VV mode. PEEP is usually set between 5-15 cmH<sub>2</sub>O. An alternative is to extubate the patient and allow

spontaneous breathing with the patient awake. This is the preferred approach for patients bridging to elective lung transplant.

If there is a major pulmonary air leak or interstitial emphysema the ventilator pressure can be reduced or turned off altogether for hours or days until the leak seals. This will lead to significant atelectasis in addition to the primary lung disease, and lung recruitment will be necessary when returning to mechanical ventilation. If the patient develops a pneumothorax, placement of a chest tube is not an automatic response. Even placing a small tube may result in significant bleeding ultimately requiring thoracotomy. A small pneumothorax (less than 20%) with no hemodynamic compromise is best treated by waiting for absorption. An enlarging pneumothorax or a pneumothorax causing hemodynamic compromise requires external drainage. This is best done using the technique most familiar to the operator. This could be a small catheter placed by Seldinger technique, or a surgical thoracostomy with placement of a chest tube. (see procedures, section 9 below)

Lung recruitment maneuvers (prolonged inflation at 25 to 30 cm of water for one to two minutes) can be used when acute inflammation has subsided. When lung recovery begins spontaneous breathing will enhance recovery. Adjusting the sedation drugs to allow spontaneous breathing, adjusting the sweep gas to maintain the infusion blood PCO<sub>2</sub> 40-45 mmHg, and putting the ventilator in assist mode may speed lung recovery.

If the patient is on VA ECLS for cardiac support, and lung function is adequate, the patient can be extubated and managed awake with spontaneous breathing. **Patient arterial blood gases** are the result of infusion blood mixing with the blood in the aorta (VA) or right atrium (VV). The infusion blood is typically PCO<sub>2</sub> 40 mmHg, PO<sub>2</sub> 500mmHg, saturation 100%, oxygen content 22 ccO<sub>2</sub>/dL.

In **VV mode** infusion blood mixes with systemic venous return blood. At typical blood flow, the ratio of infusion blood to deoxygenated right atrial blood is usually around 3:1. This results in PCO<sub>2</sub> 41, PO<sub>2</sub> 40, sat 80%, content 17ccO<sub>2</sub>/dL in the pulmonary artery. If there is no native lung function, this will be the composition of gases in the arterial blood. It is important to realize that systemic arterial saturation around 80% is typical during VV support. As long as the hematocrit is over 40% and cardiac function is good, systemic oxygen delivery will be adequate at this level of hypoxemia. (Don't increase vent settings from rest settings because of hypoxemia). Any native lung function will increase oxygenation over 80% sat.

In **VA mode** infusion blood mixes with blood in the aorta. The ratio of infusion to native aortic blood flow is typically 8:1. If native lung function is normal (i.e., in cardiac support) and the FiO<sub>2</sub> is 0.2, this results in PCO<sub>2</sub> 40, PO<sub>2</sub> 200, sat 100%, content 21ccO<sub>2</sub>/dL. If there is no native lung function this mixing results in PCO<sub>2</sub> 40.5, PO<sub>2</sub> 100, sat 98%, content 20ccO<sub>2</sub>/dL. NOTE: The forgoing is true if infusion blood goes to the aortic root (as in subclavian, carotid or direct arch perfusion). If the infusion blood is going into the femoral artery and flow is retrograde, the mixing will occur somewhere in the mid aorta, the higher the flow rate, the higher the level of mixing.

During severe respiratory failure, at typical VA flow rate ( 80% of full cardiac output) this can result in desaturated blood from the left ventricle perfusing the aortic arch and coronaries and fully saturated infusion blood perfusing the lower 2/3 of the body. This can occur in large children and adults. This can be managed by including SVC blood in the venous drainage, or by infusing some infusion blood into the right atrium (VVA). See patient specific protocols for further discussion.

### 3. Sedation

The patient should be thoroughly sedated to the point of light anesthesia during cannulation and management for the first 12 to 24 hours. The purpose is to avoid spontaneous breathing which might cause air embolism during cannulation, to minimize the metabolic rate, to avoid movement which might make cannulation difficult, and for patient comfort. It is rarely necessary to paralyze the patient, except to avoid spontaneous breathing during venous cannula placement.

After the patient is stable on ECLS all sedation and narcotics should be stopped long enough to allow a thorough neurologic examination. Then sedation and analgesia may be resumed depending on patient's level of anxiety and discomfort. The primary reason for sedation during the VV ECLS is to tolerate endotracheal intubation. Conversion to tracheostomy should be considered early in the course in patients over 5 years of age to allow decreasing sedation. Sedation should be minimal, but it is important to be sure the patient does not pull on cannulas and tubes running the risk of decannulation or occluding the perfusion line. If the venous blood drainage is limited for any reason, blood flow may not be adequate to support systemic perfusion or gas exchange. This is often the case if the patient is anxious, moving about, or coughing. Sedation should be sufficient to avoid increasing the native metabolic rate, and systemic paralysis and cooling may be necessary if venous drainage cannot be achieved. Holding sedation and analgesia long enough to do a neurologic exam should be done daily (a daily drug holiday)

### 4. Blood volume, fluid balance and hematocrit

As with any critically ill patient, the ultimate goal of management is adequate hematocrit, normal body weight (no fluid overload), and normal blood volume. During ECLS the **blood volume** is increased by the volume of the extracorporeal circuit. Because the extracorporeal circuit is not compliant, this doubling or tripling of the blood volume has no hemodynamic effect; each milliliter of blood removed is immediately replaced by an identical volume. The extracorporeal circuit is primed with crystalloid solution (perhaps with red blood cells in infants) and the priming solution will equilibrate with the native blood volume during the first several minutes of ECLS. This will dilute blood cells, platelets and proteins depending on the ratio between the native blood volume and the extracorporeal prime. This dilution is caused by an increase in the crystalloid component of the plasma which will equilibrate into the extracellular space causing edema.

The blood volume should be maintained at a level high enough to keep right atrial pressure in the range of 5- 10 mmHg. This will assure adequate volume for venous drainage, as long as the resistance of the drainage cannula is appropriate

The goal of fluid management is to return the **extracellular fluid volume** to normal (dry weight) and maintain it there. The reason is that edema caused by critical illness or iatrogenic crystalloid fluid infusion causes lung and myocardial failure, adding to the primary problem. Achieving normal ECF status can be difficult in a patient who is septic and has active capillary leakage from the plasma into the extracellular space. During the acute inflammatory stage early in ECLS capillary leak will occur, and is exacerbated by excessive crystalloid infusion. When the patient is hemodynamically stable (typically 12 hours) diuretics are instituted and continued until dry weight is achieved. If the diuretic response is not sufficient to achieve negative fluid balance, or if the patient is in overt renal failure, continuous hemofiltration is added to the extracorporeal circuit to maintain fluid and electrolyte balance.

## **5. Temperature**

Temperature can be maintained at any level by adjusting the temperature of the water bath. Temperature is usually maintained close to 37° C. If the patient was cannulated under conditions which could lead to hypoxic ischemic brain injury, it is reasonable to maintain mild hypothermia (32 to 34°) during the first 24 to 72 hours to minimize brain injury. Hypothermia will require sedation or paralysis to avoid shivering, and may exacerbate bleeding. Hyperthermia (from fever or inflammation) is controlled with the heat exchanger to avoid hypermetabolism.

## **6. Renal and Nutrition management**

As mentioned above spontaneous or pharmacologic diuresis should be instituted until patient is close to dry weight and edema has cleared. This will enhance recovery from heart or lung failure and decrease the time on ECLS. If renal failure occurs it is related to the primary disease and is treated by continuous hemofiltration (CVVHD). As with all critically ill patients, full caloric and protein nutritional support is essential.

## **7. Infection and Antibiotics**

The cannula sites are cleaned frequently in with antiseptic solution and may be covered with an antiseptic cream or ointment. Appropriate antibiotics should be given for documented infection. There is no standard policy regarding prophylactic antibiotics simply because the patient is on ECLS. Bacteremia during ECLS may be related to bacterial growth on a component of the circuit, but is usually related to another source in the patient. Unlike suspected “line sepsis” in the usual critically ill patient, it is usually not possible to change the access cannulas if contamination is suspected, and it may be dangerous to change the circuit. If all other sources of bacteremia have been ruled out the entire circuit up to the cannulas can be changed expeditiously.

## 8. Positioning

Patient positioning should be as mobile and normal as possible depending on the primary condition. There is a tendency to allow the patient to be anesthetized and lay supine for days at a time. In older children and adults, this will lead to posterior lung compression and atelectasis and should be avoided. If the primary problem is respiratory failure, posterior consolidation can be prevented and even treated by prone positioning for several hours each day. An alternative is a sitting position although it may be difficult to maintain ECLS flow in the sitting position. If the patient is on the ECLS for cardiac support it is often possible to extubate the patient and to allow the patient to move about spontaneously in bed. Obviously this is not recommended for patients with trans-thoracic cannulation and an open chest.

## 9. Bleeding

Bleeding is the most common complication during ECLS because of systemic anticoagulation, thrombocytopenia, and thrombocytopathia. **Prevention** of bleeding is important throughout the ECLS course. Care providers may forget that simple venipuncture, fingersticks, endotracheal suctioning, passage of a catheter through the nose or urethra, can lead to uncontrollable bleeding. Because of ample blood access there is very rarely any need for needle punctures in ECLS patient. Suctioning and passage of catheters should be done with caution, and only after assuring that the anticoagulation status is optimal (low ACT, adequate platelet counts). If invasive procedures are necessary appropriate preparation is essential. Management of anticoagulation is discussed in section IV.A.4 above. Particular attention should be paid to fibrinogen and AT3 levels.

**Management** of bleeding begins with **returning coagulation status to normal** as much as possible. This involves decreasing the heparin infusion until the ACT or PTT is 1.4 to 1.5 times normal, transfusing platelets until the platelet count is greater than 100,000, and giving antifibrinolytics if fibrinolysis is documented or suspected (particularly after a recent major operation). Fresh frozen plasma or specific clotting factors may be indicated if deficiencies are demonstrated. Often these maneuvers will stop bleeding. If not, it is reasonable to turn the heparin off altogether, however this may result in major circuit clotting and should not be done until and unless **site specific** measures are completed. Using a thrombo-resistant coated circuit may allow withholding heparin for a longer period of time with less risk of clotting complications.

**Cannulation site:** This is the most common site of bleeding, particularly if access has been gained by direct cutdown. Bleeding can be minimized by doing the dissection without systemic heparin, then waiting a few minutes before cannulation if the patient condition permits. Bleeding at the cannulation site may be an indication that the cannula is loose or pulling out. The possibility of decannulation should always be considered. Usually cannula site bleeding is slow oozing related to disruption of small vessels in the skin or subcutaneous tissue. Topical pressure will often control the bleeding although care must be taken to avoid compressing the cannula. If bleeding persists after direct cutdown access the wound should be re-explored.

**Recent operation:** The second most common site of bleeding is related to recent operations, particularly thoracotomy if the patient is on ECLS for postoperative cardiac failure. In this circumstance (particularly when going directly from CPB to ECLS) the first step is to place suction catheters in the operative site, seal the site with an occlusive plastic drape, collect the blood to quantitate the rate of bleeding. Drainage blood can be collected with a “cell saver” for reinfusion . When going directly from CPB to ECLS in the OR, it is reasonable to wait until the ACT is normal or bleeding stops before starting heparin. When the platelet count, ACT, and other medications are optimal, the operative site should be re-explored for active bleeding. When an operative site is explored for bleeding it is best to leave the site open with active drainage and a plastic seal closure, rather than surgical closure of the skin. (Cutdown cannulation site is an exception) Reexploration may be necessary many times before bleeding is controlled. There is a moderate risk of wound infection, but that risk is much lower than the risk of ongoing bleeding. See patient specific guidelines for post cardiotomy and other conditions.

**Mucous membranes:** Bleeding from the nasopharynx, mouth, trachea, rectum, or bladder commonly occurs with minor trauma associated with patient care. It is difficult to control bleeding in these areas by direct pressure but full nasal packing or traction on a Foley catheter with a large balloon in the bladder may stop major bleeding.

**Uterus:** Women in the childbearing years may experience a menstrual period during ECLS (although that is rare in critically ill patients). However uterine bleeding is usually not severe and subsides spontaneously. When ECLS is used in a recent postpartum patient, uterine bleeding can be a significant problem. After ruling out retained products of conception, the bleeding may be controlled by oxytocin, or creating a balloon tamponade within the uterus. Very rarely hysterectomy may be necessary.

**GI bleeding** can occur from esophagitis, gastritis, duodenal ulcer, or other sources. It is important to determine the site of bleeding by endoscopy or angiography. If the site of bleeding can be reached by an endoscope or arterial catheter local measures should be attempted. The decision to operate to control bleeding or excise the bleeding organ is the same as in any patient with GI bleeding and a systemic coagulopathy. The coagulopathy is corrected as much as possible, and then operation is indicated if uncontrolled bleeding persists. The same is true for spontaneous bleeding into other solid organs (liver, kidney, retroperitoneal tissue) or bleeding into the thorax or peritoneal space.

**Bleeding into the head or brain parenchyma** is the most serious ECLS complication. It is usually extensive and fatal. If it is possible to take the patient off ECLS on high ventilator and drug settings, it is reasonable to operate on the skull to drain the blood, if such a procedure is indicated

If bleeding persists despite all of these procedures and maneuvers it is reasonable to **stop heparinization altogether** until the bleeding stops. The best way to do this is to come off bypass on high flow high ventilator/inotrope settings if the

patient's condition will permit it. If the patient will not tolerate coming off bypass it is reasonable to stop the heparin altogether and allow the ACT to return to the normal range for hours. This may stop the bleeding but may also result in clotting in the circuit, so whenever heparin is turned off a primed circuit should be immediately available.

## **10. Procedures**

Procedures from venipuncture to liver transplantation can be done with success during ECLS. When an operation is necessary, coagulation should be optimized (anti-coagulation minimized) as described above. Even small operations like chest tube placement are done with extensive use of electrocautery. For the surgeon, the procedure is like operating on any coagulopathic patient.

## **V Weaning, trials off, discontinuing ECLS for futility**

### **A. Weaning**

When management is carried out as described in section IV (using the lowest flow to provide adequate support at low ventilator settings and pressor doses), weaning is automatic. Extracorporeal support is decreased as native organ function improves. When ECC support is less than 30% of total, native heart or lung function may be adequate to allow coming off ECLS, and a trial off is indicated. Note: As long as ECC support is more than 30 to 50%, there is no indication to trial off, except in special circumstances such as uncontrolled bleeding.

### **B. Trial off**

Trial off **during VV access** is very simple. Cardiac function is adequate and only native gas exchange is tested. Adjust ventilator to settings you would accept off ECLS (rate, plateau pressure, PEEP, FiO<sub>2</sub>). Maintain blood flow and anti-coagulation, stop the sweep gas and cap off the oxygenator. Follow the patient SaO<sub>2</sub> and pCO<sub>2</sub>. If lung function is adequate at acceptable ventilator settings for an hour or more the patient is ready for decannulation.

Trial off **during VA access** requires clamping of the drainage and infusion blood lines and circulating the circuit slowly through the AV bridge. Adjust the dose of inotropes and pressors, and the ventilator settings, to acceptable levels. Then clamp off the extracorporeal circuit and follow perfusion and gas exchange. Echocardiography is very helpful to assess cardiac function during a trial off. Anti-coagulation is continued during the trial off, and the blood lines and access cannulas are unclamped periodically to avoid stagnation. If the trial off is successful, circuit lines can be cut and access cannulae "locked" with heparinized saline, awaiting decannulation. If the trial off is successful but the patient is precarious, the circuit can be cut away and access cannulas left in place in case the patient needs to be returned it to ECLS support with a new circuit. In this circumstance the usual practice is to infuse low dose heparinized saline into the cannulas and reassess frequently. Access cannulas can be left in place for 24

hour or more. If there is no uncertainty about the need for further ECLS, it is better to remove the cannulae after the trial off has finished successfully.

### **C. Decannulation**

The cannulas can be removed whenever the patient is ready, but ideally after the heparin has been turned off for 30 to 60 minutes. Cannulas placed by direct cutdown are removed by direct cutdown. The cannulae are removed and the vessels simply ligated (or occasionally repaired). If the femoral artery has been cannulated by cut down vascular repair will be required. Venous and arterial cannulae placed by percutaneous access can be removed directly and bleeding controlled by topical pressure.

When removing a venous cannula, air can enter the venous blood through the side holes if the patient is breathing spontaneously. This is prevented by a valsalva maneuver on the ventilator, or by short-term pharmacological paralysis when removing the venous cannula.

### **D. Stopping support for futility**

ECLS should be discontinued promptly if there is no hope for healthy survival (severe brain damage, no or heart or lung recovery, and no hope of organ replacement by VAD or transplant). The possibility of stopping for futility should be explained to the family before ECLS is begun. The definition of irreversible heart or lung damage depends on the patient and the resources of the institution. In each case a reasonable deadline for organ recovery or replacement should be set early in the course. For cardiac failure, for example, three days of no cardiac function in a patient who is not a VAD or transplant candidate is considered futile in most centers. For lung failure, for example, two weeks of no lung function in a patient who is not a transplant candidate is considered futile in many centers, although there are cases of lung recovery after 50 days of ECLS. Fixed pulmonary hypertension in a patient with respiratory failure after several weeks of support on VV ECMO may also an indication of futility, or at least an indication to convert to VA access.

## **VI Patient and Disease specific protocols**

These guidelines are written to apply to all ECLS cases, but there are many circumstances where the guidelines are adapted, or additional guidelines are required for specific patients. Patient and disease specific guidelines are written for respiratory and cardiac support, for neonates, children and adults. Additional guidelines will be written for special conditions such as asthma, pulmonary embolism, sepsis, ECPR, etc.

## **VII Expected results (per patient and disease category)**

**See patient specific guidelines.** The outcome for ECLS patients is described in the semi- annual report of the ELSO registry.