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RULES OF IMAGING IN CEREBRAL ISCHEMIC STROKE; REVIEW

[1]Wael saad Alzahrani , [2]Fayez shawan Alotaibi, [3]Raed Humod Alrowily, [4]Mohammed Maqed Al-Otaibi, [5]Abdulrahman kuzaim Alasmari, [6]Hassan Awaadh Alzahrani , [7]Jahaz raja Alharbi, [8]Abdulaziz Ali Qassim al-Safhi, [9]Sultan Fahad Alsanea, [10]Abdulhadi Mutli AL Mutairi

[1]MRI technician, Al Iman General Hospital
[2]Radiology Technologist, Al Iman General Hospital
[3]X-ray Specialist, Al Iman General Hospital
[4]Technician Radiology, Alkharj maternity and children hospital
[5]Radiology Technologist, Al Iman General Hospital
[6]Technician X-ray, Al Iman General Hospital
[7]X-ray Technician, Ministry of Health
[8]X-ray Technicia, Al-iman general hospital
[9]X-ray Technicia, Al-iman general hospital
[10]Radiology, Riyadh First Health Cluster

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Abstract:

Over 80% of strokes are caused by ischemic brain injury caused by a sudden decrease in blood supply. Large artery blockage occurs in 25-35% of strokes, and patients in this category frequently have severe neurological impairments. We conducted a narrative review due to 2021 for all relevant studies that were shown in one of the electrical databases such as; Medline. Recent advancements in stroke imaging enable near-real-time knowledge on several aspects of stroke pathology. The primary function of imaging is to rule out cerebral hemorrhage, characterize the ischemic zone, differentiate between infarct core and penumbra, and portray vascular health. CT and MRI are both reliable imaging modalities, each with their own set of advantages and disadvantages. Although CT is more readily available, MRI provides more information and is more sensitive to tiny infarctions.

Corresponding author:
Wael saad Alzahrani,
MRI technician, Al Iman General Hospital

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INTRODUCTION:

Stroke is a major cause of death and long-term impairment. More than 80% of strokes are caused by ischemia damage to the brain caused by a sudden decrease in blood supply. It has been calculated that 1.8 million neurons are destroyed every minute that suitable treatment is not provided [1].

The early revascularization of at-risk but potentially salvageable brain tissue, which can be viable for a length of time due to collateral perfusion, is a significant component of acute ischemic stroke (AIS) therapy [2]. The role of imaging in AIS is thus to detect afflicted brain parenchyma and designate any areas of potentially recoverable tissue with the goal of early intervention and reperfusion. With the success of recent endovascular therapy trials, there has been a paradigm shift away from the use of IV tPA alone and toward the addition of early endovascular therapy in adequately selected patients. IV tPA alone is often superior to big proximal occlusions for reperfusion of tiny distal vascular occlusions [3,4]. Rapid multimodal imaging is thus vital for identifying individuals who may benefit the most from endovascular therapy. Recent big stroke trials have included the use of various fast imaging techniques [5]. In several investigations, the use of advanced computed tomography (CT) imaging technologies did not significantly increase the time from stroke onset to first reperfusion [6].

DISCUSSION:

Rapid examination of acute stroke patients will become more common as the population ages and acute remedies become more available. Imaging is an important feature in the evaluation of individuals with acute ischemic stroke. Noncontrast computed tomography (CT) is the primary imaging modality for the initial examination of patients with suspected stroke in the United States (**Figure 1**) [7]. The CT symptoms of stroke are classified into three categories: acute (less than 24 hours), subacute (24 hours to 5 days), and chronic (weeks). Acute stroke is characterized by cytotoxic edema, and the changes can be minor but severe. They are also known as "early ischemic alterations" and were previously known as "hyper-acute." It is caused by intracellular edema and results in the loss of the normal gray matter/white matter interface (differentiation) as well as the effacement of the cortical sulci. In the acute phase, a thrombus in the proximal middle cerebral artery (MCA) can cause hyperattenuation. Subacute stroke is characterized by vasogenic edema, which has a higher mass effect, hypoattenuation, and well-defined borders. At this stage, the mass effect and risk of herniation are greatest [7,8].

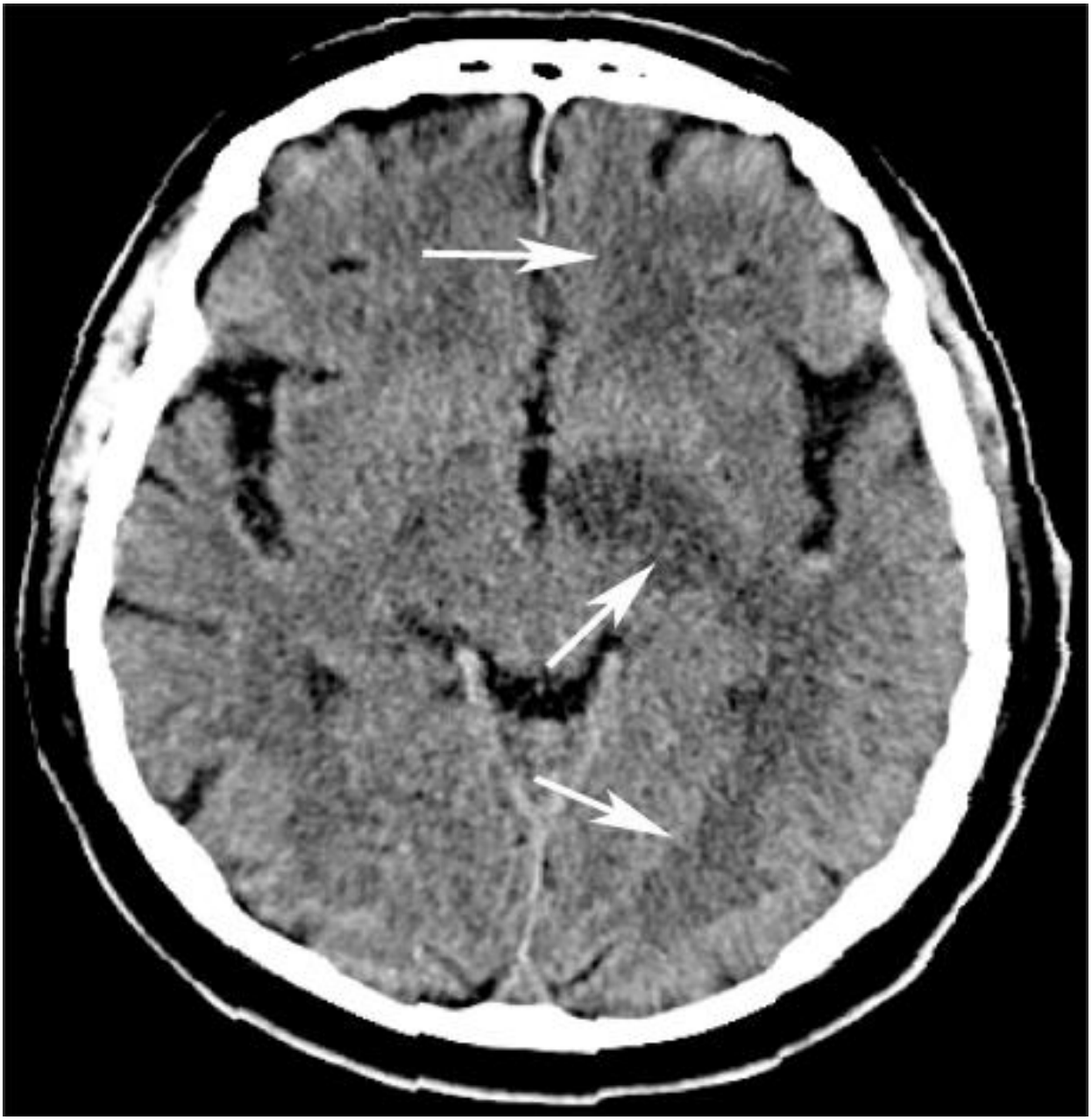

Figure1: Left middle cerebral artery (MCA) infarction. Axial nonenhanced computer tomography demonstrates hypoattenuating foci throughout the left sided white matter (arrows).

A noncontrast head CT may detect early stroke symptoms, but it will also rule out intracerebral hemorrhage and lesions that may mimic acute ischemic stroke, such as tumors or intracerebral hemorrhage. Noncontrast CT is also utilized to assess acute cerebral bleeding because it provides good contrast between the high attenuating ("bright") clot and the low attenuating ("dark") cerebrospinal fluid (CSF) (Figures 2) [8].

Exclude intracranial hemorrhage (ICH) and other mass lesions that take up space in the brain, such as neoplasms. Acute ICH is traditionally detected as a lesion with high CT density (60-90 HU) and sensitivity. T2-gradient-MRI sequences detect ICH extremely well [9].

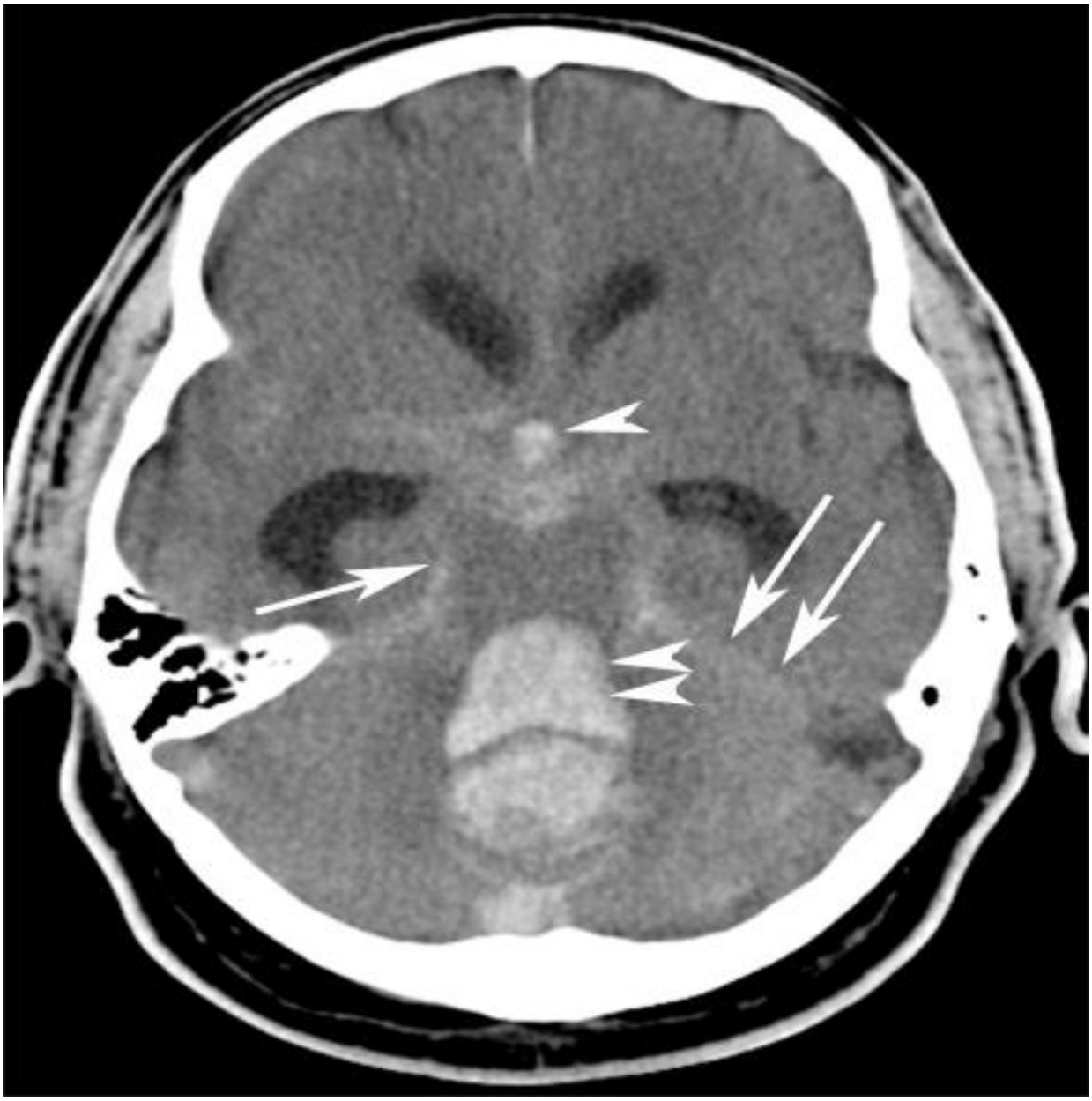

Figure 2: Massive subarachnoid and intraventricular hemorrhage. Axial nonenhanced computer tomography demonstrates a large "bright" or hyper attenuating dense subarachnoid hemorrhage throughout the perimesencephalic cistern (arrow) and along the tentorium (double arrows).

Beyond the immediate impact of physical alterations in the artery system leading to brain tissue, the pathophysiology of cerebral ischemia is complex. In contrast to localized ischemia and ischemic stroke, cerebral hypoperfusion and cardiac arrest can both result in global ischemic injury that is not limited to a single vascular area. At the tissue and cellular levels, the pathophysiology of ischemia is similar, involving metabolic inefficiency and cell death owing to hypoxia. Because approximately half of cerebrovascular resistance is dependent on the major arteries at the circle of Willis, as well as both intra- and extracranial vasculature, the regulation of tissue perfusion in the brain is adjusted differently than in any other organ in the body [10]. Through their regulation of cerebral blood flow, these arteries and their end arterioles play a critical role in oxygen supply to the brain parenchyma (CBF). Many animal and human investigations have been conducted to determine the threshold below which a decrease in CBF causes neurological symptoms and those that

correlate with pathologically irreversible neuronal damage [11,12]. Depending on the study design, neurological symptoms and ischemia have been reported to range from less than 20ml/100ml/minute to 8-12ml/100ml/min, indicating that tissue oxygenation was no longer sufficient to maintain the cellular machinery [12,13]. While cerebral ischemia was previously assumed to be caused by a decrease in CBF, Ostergaard and colleagues have highlighted the concept of capillary transit time heterogeneity and its contribution to the brain's efficacy in extracting oxygen at a given CBF [14]. Regional changes in CBF can be visualized using computed tomography (CT) and magnetic resonance imaging (MRI) (Figure 1). The last aftermath of tissue oxygen deprivation causes a multitude of deadly effects, including cell body shrinkage, chromatin condensation, nuclear disintegration, and alterations in membrane phospholipid structure [15]. Phosphatidylethanolamine, a member of the phospholipid structure, has been hypothesized to have a regulatory function in the blebbing and creation of apoptotic bodies, as well as in the mediation of cellular necrosis, as its externalization may contribute to cytoskeletal organization [16].

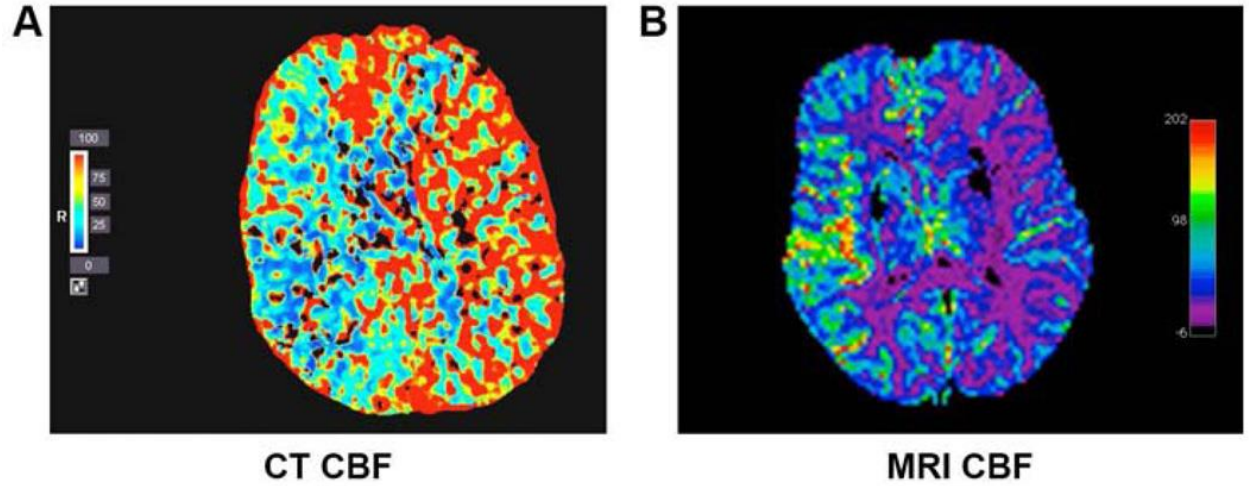

Figure 3: (A) CT of patient presenting with acute right MCA stroke with blue color demonstrating most severely decreased CBF in ischemic hemisphere. (B) MRI of patient presenting with acute left MCA stroke with purple color demonstrating most severely decreased CBF in ischemic hemisphere.

The fundamental step in guiding further therapy is defining the extent and location of the ischemic parenchyma irreparably damaged by severe hypoperfusion, known as the 'infarct core.' With ischemia (defined as cerebral blood flow [CBF] less than 10-12 ml/100 g/min) [17] and subsequent energy failure, water molecules become trapped in the damaged cells, a process known as 'compartmentalization,' resulting in cytotoxic edema. Each 1% increase in tissue water content results in a 2.6 Hounsfield Unit drop in tissue density [18]. Early ischemia indicators include blurring of the internal capsule's clarity, loss of distinctness of the insular ribbon cortex, and loss of cortico-medullary differentiation. Within the first 3 hours after symptom onset, the CT indications show a sensitivity of 40-60% and specificity, positive and negative predictive values of 85, 96, and 27%, respectively. The earliest time for diagnosing hypodensity caused by ischemia is 45 minutes [19,20]. The method used to define IC with MRI is diffusion-weighted imaging (DWI). Due to the restricted motion of the water molecules trapped in the cell, DWI detects cytotoxic edema [21]. This restricted diffusion can be seen as a bright signal on b1000 DWI images or as a low signal on the following, automatically produced apparent diffusion coefficient (ADC) maps. DWI can detect ischemia as early as 11 minutes after the onset of a stroke and is far more sensitive than CT in identifying acute ischemia [22]. However, some areas with restricted diffusion may experience reversal of these changes and are thus considered to be in the penumbra [23].

CT becomes the preferable imaging modality in patients who are unable to receive MRI, such as those with pacemakers or implanted metallic items, or in patients who are too unstable to remain in a supine posture for a lengthy amount of time. However, for individuals who are able to undergo MRI testing, this imaging technology, albeit slightly more time

consuming, has the distinct advantage of showing precise detail of brain parenchyma with early sensitivity that significantly outperforms CT procedures. MRI will show new ischemia lesions as hyperintensities on DWI and associated ADC hypointensities minutes after the beginning of neurologic symptoms and, probably, ischemic insult. These lesions, which reflect parenchymal cytotoxic edema, are thought to approximate the ischemic core in the short term. It is important to highlight that with the clearance of ischemia, DWI lesions may become reversible [24,25]. The pattern of distribution of DWI lesions may provide invaluable insight into illness mechanisms, whether thromboembolic in nature, due to blockage of a specific vascular area, or due to hypoperfusion and borderzone ischemia [26]. Misalignment of DWI and FLAIR positive may disclose temporal aspects or the length of ischemia [27]. CT has limitations in detecting extremely early ischemia injury in the acute environment and in accurately seeing posterior fossa disease [28]. However, because to the widespread availability of CT equipment in the community and in some institutions, CT scanning remains the first-line imaging modality. When paired with CT, CTA and CTP provide additional information about early ischemia. Non-contrast CT may be useful in ruling out cerebral bleeding or an existing, non-vascular explanation for presentation such as a mass associated to infection, cancer, or other etiology in conjunction with a patient presentation and clinical exam that is consistent with a vascular event. Repeat, serial imaging with the evolution of the patient's symptoms is also crucial in cases of suspected cerebral ischemia where non-contrast CT did not detect abnormality [28].

The concept of "fogging" best illustrates the need of repeated imaging and approaching cerebral ischemia as a dynamic situation. This phrase has long been used in CT to refer to the transitory decrease of visibility of an ischemic lesion roughly 2 weeks following the beginning of stroke [29,30]. The area of infarction develops a signal intensity similar to the surrounding normal tissue, most likely as a result of inflammatory cell infiltration of the lesion. In 2004, O'Brien and colleagues used T2 weighted MRI to do an independent, blinded examination of serial MRI images from patients presenting with symptoms of cortical ischemic stroke for up to 7 weeks [31]. While fogging on CT imaging translated into non-visibility of the lesion at the 2-week interval, the scientists discovered "fogging" on MRI in 50% of patients (15 patients) spanning in time from 6 to 36 days after the ischemic episode, with a median of 10 days. In these individuals with moderate to large infarcts, a reduction in infarct severity was believed to contribute to an underestimating of the eventual result of stroke, and based on this, it was suggested that final imaging be obtained 7 weeks following the ischemic event [31].

CONCLUSION:

All emergency physicians, neurologists, neurosurgeons, and neuroradiologists must be familiar with imaging in the acute context of suspected stroke. A thorough understanding of imaging modalities is required for the treatment of acute stroke patients. Unenhanced CT scan remains the initial study of choice for evaluating an acute stroke patient due to its widespread availability and speed - it is used for inclusion criteria and to rule out hemorrhage. Following bedside point-of-care testing to establish the baseline creatinine level, CT angiography can be obtained to provide additional information on stenotic and occluded blood vessels. Because of its superior soft tissue contrast, traditional MRI remains an important technique in the evaluation of subacute stroke patients. Specialized MRI techniques are also required to rule out hemorrhage in patients suspected of having stroke.

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