

Tiny corkscrew retrieves blood clots from the brain preventing strokes

By Daniel Q. Haney
THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

Surgical corkscrew plucks out blood clots

Physicians can thread a miniature corkscrew into the brain that can pluck out a deadly blood clot during an ischemic stroke and quickly restore the flow to blocked blood vessels. Ischemic strokes are the third leading cause of death in the United States.



SOURCES: Concentric Medical, Inc.

SAN DIEGO — A tiny experimental corkscrew threaded deep into the brain can pluck out deadly blood clots and stop a stroke in its tracks, potentially giving doctors an entirely new tool against this major killer.

Nearly 90 percent of all strokes result from clots that lodge in the brain's arteries, cutting off circulation and starving brain cells of oxygen and nutrition. The goal of the new device is to extract these clots before they do permanent harm.

"It's like pulling the cork out of a wine bottle," said Dr. Sidney Starkman, co-director of the UCLA Stroke Center. "What you want is to get the blood flowing back to the brain."

The device is the most advanced of several new stroke treatment tools discussed Thursday at a meeting in San Diego of the American Stroke Association.

The only treatment now available for the emergency care of strokes is TPA, the clot-dissolving medicine also used to stop heart attacks. Only about 5 percent of stroke victims receive it, and among those, it helps only about one in eight.

TPA can be used only within the first three hours after a stroke. Most victims arrive at the hospital too late, or they have other conditions that could cause the TPA to trigger disastrous bleeding in the brain.

Starkman directed testing of the corkscrew — called the Merci Retrieval System — on 109 patients. All had suffered severe strokes within the previous eight hours, and none could be given TPA.

The corkscrew successfully retrieved the clot in half of them. Three-quarters of these patients survived, and 40 percent had few or no lasting disability. Among those in whom the clot could not be removed, half survived and just 6 percent had a good recovery.

Starkman said many of the patients were paralyzed on one side or could not talk when the procedure began.

"What's really remarkable is we can see the problem and pull it out," he said. "In some patients, the moment the clot came out, they could move again or talk normally. It was instantaneous."

Starkman's study was financed by the

corkscrew's maker, Concentric Medical of Mountain View, Calif. Based on this study, the company has asked the Food and Drug Administration for approval to sell the device. An FDA advisory committee will review it later this month.

The National Institutes of Health will sponsor a larger study of the device. Patients will be randomly assigned to get either the corkscrew or routine care.

Dr. Larry Goldstein, head of the cardiovascular center at Duke University, said patients who got the corkscrew appeared to do better than expected. However, he cautioned that the many patients, whose clots not show up on brain scans would not be eligible for the treatment.

"It won't be a panacea," he said. Another drawback is that it can be done only by specially trained neuroradiologists. A UCLA survey found that 82 percent of the population lives within a three-hour drive of a hospital that could do the procedure.

Dr. Morgan S. Campbell of the Alabama Neurological Institute in Birmingham presented preliminary results of another approach intended to improve circulation to the brain after a stroke. The treatment involves inflating balloons in the abdominal aorta, forcing more blood to the head.

The initial safety testing showed improved cerebral blood flow in 12 of 16 patients. The device, called NeuroFlo, was developed by CoAxia of Maple Grove, Minn.

NEWS IN BRIEF

Body found identified as missing professor

FORT WORTH, Texas (AP) — One of two people accused of abducting and killing a retired Texas Christian University professor told police he wrapped duct tape around her face after leaving a grocery store parking lot, according to an arrest warrant affidavit.

Edward Busby, 31, and Kathleen Latimer, 39, both of Fort Worth, were charged with capital murder Wednesday in the death of Laura Lee Crane. They were jailed on \$1 million bond in Oklahoma City, where they were arrested Sunday after being stopped driving Crane's car.

Crane's body was found Tuesday afternoon off Interstate 35 near Davis, Okla. An autopsy showed she was asphyxiated. She was abducted Friday. Busby said that he drove Crane away from the lot before putting duct tape

around her face so that Crane was unable to breath, according to capital murder warrants obtained Wednesday by the Fort Worth Star-Telegram.

Busby said that he and Latimer drove to Ardmore, where they spent the night, and that Crane was dead when he checked on her the next morning, according to the affidavits.

Authorities were led to the body after Busby confessed, said Fort Worth police Lt. Roger Dixon, a detective who went to Oklahoma City to question the suspects.

Crane's body was found at the bottom of an embankment with duct tape across her face, Dixon said. Her death was ruled homicide by asphyxiation, and she also had suffered blunt force trauma, he said.

Dixon would not say when or in which state Crane was killed. Dixon said robbery was a motive and that she appeared to be a random target.

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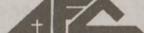
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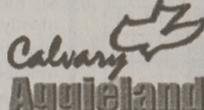
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