

Final Thoughts on the Buffalo CCSVI Research Effort

Ashton Embry, May 16th, 2011

Introduction

I was told if I watched the videos of the recent presentations of the University of Buffalo researchers on their CCSVI work (http://www.bnac.net/?page_id=667), I would change my opinion about their work. Accordingly, I watched the videos to see if they addressed any of my serious criticisms in my original essay on the overt, anti-CCSVI bias of their recent publication (<http://www.facebook.com/DIRECTMS?ref=mf#!/notes/direct-ms/buffaloed-the-anti-ccsvi-bias-of-the-university-of-buffalo-researchers-and-their/210099172352923>) and in my reply to their less-than-adequate response to my criticisms (<http://www.facebook.com/DIRECTMS?ref=mf#!/notes/direct-ms/my-reply-to-a-letter-from-bianca-weinstock-guttman-and-robert-zivadinov/210575515638622>).

Statistical Trick

In their article and accompanying press release, the Buffalo researchers played a statistical trick by how they dealt with 52 “borderline” patients whom did not receive a complete Doppler assessment. They did CCSVI prevalence statistics by excluding the borderlines from the analysis (the obvious and proper procedure) but then also did the statistics putting the borderlines in the negative CCSVI category. This latter calculation has absolutely no justification and took the prevalence of CCSVI in those with MS from 63% to 56%.

In the video, Dr Zivadinov claims that putting the borderlines in the negative category is a conservative approach which is nonsense. It is a completely invalid and unacceptable approach. Because such a calculation is completely unreasonable, such a move was clearly a statistical “dirty trick” to lower the prevalence.

Notably, Zivadinov says in the video, with a smirk on his face, that such a minor lowering means little. However, it really means a lot. With a 63% finding, most people reasonably round it off to about two thirds of persons with MS having CCSVI, an impressive finding that the Buffalo researchers clearly did not want publicized. By using their dirty trick, they brought the CCSVI prevalence down to 56% and they stress this phony number in their published discussion and their press release. As expected, many reporters rounded off the bogus 56% number to 50% or about half of persons with MS having CCSVI. Thus, by the use of a statistical “dirty trick”, they changed the public’s perception of CCSVI prevalence in MS from a scientifically determined 2/3 of persons with MS having CCSVI to a bogus and much less impressive prevalence of about 1/2.

CCSVI is not a cause of MS

The second major complaint in my original critique was that data presented by the Buffalo researchers did not support their widely publicized claim that CCSVI is not a primary cause of MS. Dr Weinstock-Guttman in the video spent a lot of time going over how to prove a factor is a causal one but such an effort is entirely inappropriate and irrelevant. What was needed was a discussion of how one would demonstrate CCSVI is NOT a cause of MS as the Buffalo researchers trumpeted in their press release. Notably Weinstock-Guttman did not address this critical point whatsoever. Just because it cannot be proven CCSVI is a cause of MS does not mean that CCSVI is not a possible cause of MS

The bottom line is the Buffalo data do not negate the hypothesis that CCSVI is a cause of MS and they have offered no cogent arguments in either their paper or the current video presentations to support such a biased and misleading claim. The Buffalo data tell us that CCSVI can still be considered a possible cause of MS and that further data are needed to decide the issue. The Buffalo researchers could not bring themselves to make such an obvious statement.

CCSVI is an effect of MS

My third substantial criticism of the Buffalo research was their biased claim in their paper and press release that their data demonstrate that CCSVI is an effect of MS rather than a cause. In their paper they offered the evidence of CCSVI being more common in more progressive cases as proof of this interpretation. Of course, such a relationship can just as easily be explained by CCSVI as an important cause of MS and thus their analysis holds no water. In their video they seem to agree that either explanation is possible. The fact they used only the anti-CCSVI interpretation in their paper and press release demonstrates their undeniable and unscientific, anti-CCSVI bias.

Summary

The bogus statistics and the completely unsupported speculations regarding CCSVI as an effect rather than a cause of MS clearly show that the Buffalo researchers are not to be trusted and have no credibility when it comes to scientific analysis in general and the analysis of CCSVI and MS in specific. In the video Zivadinov claims they will be honest in how they do their research and make interpretations from it. This is most likely a very hollow promise given their recent, highly biased actions which are anything but honest and objective. It is possible they are doing reasonable research but their major anti-CCSVI bias means such work may well be tainted. Furthermore, any interpretations that they spin from such research will assuredly be so prejudicial and contorted so as to be worthless. This was demonstrated in spades by their recent interpretations.

Absolutely nothing in the recent videos indicates that the Buffalo researchers are not highly biased against CCSVI and can be trusted. Notably, a number of the authors of the Buffalo paper report getting money from the drug company Serono which recently settled a 44 million dollar law suit regarding the alleged bribing of neurologists to prescribe the drug Rebif for MS. When you realize that almost everyone connected with the Buffalo CCSVI research is, or has recently been, “on the take” from the drug companies, it is not surprising they are trying hard to discredit CCSVI with phony statistical analysis and unsupported and highly prejudicial speculations regarding the critical relationship between CCSVI and MS.

The Buffalo researchers have revealed themselves as the ugliest face of the greed-driven, neurological opposition to CCSVI. At least people like Mark “it’s a hoax” Freedman and Steven Novella, who last week claimed Dr Zamboni is a crank, that venous angioplasty for MS is like drinking poison, and that any doctor doing angioplasty for MS is unethical, leave no doubt as to their anti-CCSVI prejudices with their ridiculous hyperbole. Obviously, such ill-informed, venom-spewing neurologists should be ignored when it comes to CCSVI and MS.

The Buffalo researchers are much more insidious, anti-CCSVI warriors. They pretend to be objective, unbiased researchers while at the same time doing great harm to the science of CCSVI and MS by publishing and promoting a bogus prevalence number and making a baseless, irresponsible, reckless and completely unsupported claim that CCSVI is simply an effect of MS. When the history of MS is written, the Buffalo researchers may well be characterized as the Benedict Arnolds of the Liberation War.