Interventional nephrology has become a growing and distinct discipline within nephrology. The first two articles in this special section deal with everyday issues that practicing nephrologists, dialysis nurses, and technicians encounter.

In “The PICC Conundrum: Vein Preservation and Venous Access,” Dr. Pflederer provides background on the increasing use of PICC lines and how their use impacts CKD patients who will require vascular access. Indeed, Dr. Pflederer's article may serve as a resource for developing a PICC line use policy.

Dr. Besarab outlines the enormous impact that the all too frequent use of central venous dialysis catheters has on the morbidity and mortality of patients. He describes the three scourges of dialysis central venous catheters: maintaining patency, catheter-related infection, and central vein stenosis. The frequent use of central venous dialysis catheters has led to what many describe as an epidemic of central venous stenosis. Unfortunately, there are no durable endovascular or surgical strategies once central vein stenosis develops, often leading to permanent vascular access loss.

Dr. Agarwal describes multiple factors favoring peritoneal dialysis. The alignment of benefits to patients (for example, better initial survival, which may be related to not using a central venous dialysis catheter) and now financial benefits derived from the changes in reimbursement may lead to an increase in peritoneal dialysis in the United States. Perhaps these changes will lead to a “PD First” approach as a corollary to “Fistula First.”

Next, Drs. Rabahi-Oskoui and O’Neill outline the utility of ultrasoundography when used by nephrologists. Several medical specialties have incorporated ultrasoundography as part of their practice. Rabahi-Oskoui and O’Neill successfully argue that nephrologists can improve patient care by doing so. In many ways, ultrasound is supplanting the stethoscope.

In the final two articles in this issue, Dr. Dwyer discusses the development of interventional nephrology and Dr. Roy-Chaudhury discusses research opportunities in interventional nephrology.

Interventional nephrology, born in the private practice sector, has now evolved and matured with the development of formal training programs in academic medical centers. ASN has recognized the importance of these developments by establishing the Interventional Nephrology Advisory Group (INAG), which informs the ASN Council and Board of Advisors about issues of importance to the society.

Most recently, INAG has developed a comprehensive curriculum for academic-based nephrology training programs. As described by Dr. Roy-Chaudhury, INAG has also worked with other societies to recommend to the National Institute of Diabetes and Digestive and Kidney Diseases research initiatives germane to improving the care of kidney patients. This focus on research in dialysis vascular access should lead to improved patient care.

I hope that this special edition of Kidney News stimulates you, the reader, to learn more about interventional nephrology.

—Jack Work, MD, chair of the ASN Interventional Nephrology Advisory Group, edited this special section for ASN Kidney News, along with KNS editorial board member Edgar Lerman.

### The PICC Conundrum: Vein Preservation and Venous Access

By Timothy A. Pflederer

Peripheral inserted central venous catheters (PICC lines) are being used with increasing frequency in the hospital and outpatient settings for patients who require venous access. Originally intended as a less invasive way to obtain long-term central venous access, PICC lines are now being used for a growing number of indications. Patients who require an extended course of antibiotics or other medications were often chosen to have a PICC line placed after treatment was begun with a peripheral intravenous (IV) catheter. However, PICC lines are now often chosen as the first-line access option in patients with difficult venous access regardless of the duration of therapy required.

Hospitalized patients are older and more chronically ill than in the past. Many of these patients have poor peripheral veins caused by underlying disease, repeated phlebotomy, and IV catheters. Maintaining peripheral IV access can be challenging and time consuming for hospital staff. PICC lines obviate these frustrations and have therefore become staff's preferred venous access device, often placed even when venous access may not truly be required for very much longer. Because of an increasing body of evidence that PICC lines interfere with future arteriovenous fistulae and nontunneled internal jugular central venous catheter use for dialysis access, the rapid rise in the use of PICC lines has become of great concern.

PICC lines are single-lumen or dual-lumen catheters designed to be placed in a peripheral vein with the tip advanced into a central vein—typically the subclavian vein, brachiocephalic vein, or superior vena cava. They can be placed in the cephalic, median cubital, or basilic veins of the upper arm.

Ultrasound is commonly used to facilitate accurate placement, especially in the more deeply located basilic vein. PICC lines provide convenient, long-term venous access with low rates of failure from thrombosis or infection. They last longer and require less maintenance than peripheral IV catheters. And because they are placed in larger veins at the elbow or above, they can usually be successfully placed even in the most challenging patient. Hospital nursing staff can be trained to place the lines, and this often allows PICC placement to be readily available day or night. These advantages of PICC lines have led to a dramatic rise in their use, especially in the hospital setting.

Unfortunately, this increasing use of PICC lines has come with a cost for patients with chronic kidney disease who go on to require dialysis. PICC lines are associated with a 23-57 percent incidence of thrombosis of the vein in which they are inserted (1). Additionally, 7.5 percent of patients experience central venous abnormalities after the use of PICC lines (2). Loss of peripheral and central venous patency may preclude the successful placement of arteriovenous fistula access when that is necessary. This is a grave concern for these patients, in whom arteriovenous access options have a profound impact on morbidity and mortality during dialysis.

But the problem with prior venous access devices limiting future dialysis access options is not unique to PICC lines. Repeated venipuncture, peripheral IV catheters, and central venous catheters are associated with phlebitis, venous sclerosis, stenosis, and thrombosis. Central venous catheters cause endothelial denudation, smooth muscle proliferation, and pericatheter thrombus even with relatively short-term use (3,4). Not all central venous access sites are the same. Various studies have shown that central venous catheters placed in the subclavian vein are associated with a 13-42 percent incidence of venous stenosis or occlusion, whereas internal jugular catheters are associated with only a 0.3-3 percent incidence (5-7). Tunneled small-diameter catheters placed in the internal or external jugular veins may be associated with an even lower risk of catheter-related central venous complications and do not cause direct damage to peripheral veins (8).

So what are we to do to preserve the veins of patients with chronic kidney disease who may progress to a need for dialysis? PICC lines certainly have a high risk of interfering with future arteriovenous fistula placement by causing stenosis and thrombosis of both peripheral and central veins. But peripheral IV catheters and central venous catheters also carry significant risk. Several organizations have established guidelines and position statements that can be helpful in considering this issue. The Fistula First Coalition (9), the National Kidney Foundation (10), and the American Society of Diagnostic and Interventional Nephrology (11) all have provided useful direction. The Renal Network Inc. (NW 4, 5, 10) has developed a tool kit to aid in implementing a vein preservation strategy (12).

Based on these sources, several recommendations can be made. First, the actual need for venous access should be assessed carefully in all patients. Reducing the frequency of venipuncture and choosing oral medication therapy when possible can significantly reduce venous injury. When venous access is required, patients who are at risk for requiring dialysis in the future should be identified. This requires a review of their history and prior laboratory values. Patients with stage 3-5 chronic kidney disease, patients currently receiving dialysis, and patients with functioning kidney transplants should be identified before venous access is obtained. Venous access in these patients should occur with the following priority:

1. The dorsal veins of the hand are the preferred location for phlebotomy and peripheral venous access.
2. The internal jugular veins are the preferred location for central venous access.
3. The external jugular veins are an acceptable alternative for venous access.
4. The subclavian veins should not be used for central venous access.
5. Placement of a PICC should be avoided.
6. Tunneled small-bore catheters in the internal or external jugular location should be used as an alternative to PICC lines and nontunneled internal jugular central venous catheters.

For these recommendations to be implemented, processes will have to be established within the hospital to ensure that estimated GFR is determined and medical history is obtained in every patient being considered for central venous access, including a PICC line. In most instances, when the patient is at risk for future kidney failure, PICC lines should not be used. Protocols should be in place to guide decisions regarding the appropriate venous access when the patient fits one of the above categories at risk for requiring future dialysis. Finally, physicians must be available with expertise to guide these decisions and place the tunneled small-bore...