Mechanical Thrombectomy Eligibility Requirements Reinstated

The October 2018 issue of Perspectives announced the suspension of individual physician procedural volume and training eligibility requirements for mechanical thrombectomy applicable to the Thrombectomy-Capable Stroke Center (TSC) and Comprehensive Stroke Center (CSC) certification programs. This suspension allowed The Joint Commission to review relevant data and discuss the appropriateness of the eligibility requirements with stakeholders and its expert panel.

The Joint Commission held a call with stakeholder organizations on October 31, 2018, and convened a meeting with stakeholder organizations and The Joint Commission’s Stroke Technical Advisory Panel on December 18, 2018, to discuss the requirements.

Stakeholder and Expert Analysis
The Joint Commission reviewed data on the number of mechanical thrombectomies performed per year by individual physicians. There was agreement that studies of mechanical thrombectomy procedural volume from the last few years underestimated actual use during the periods analyzed. Moreover, the number of mechanical thrombectomies increased dramatically in 2017 and likely increased further in 2018. These data addressed concerns that the original individual physician volume requirement of 15 mechanical thrombectomies per year was too high and supported reinstating the original requirement.

Discussions with the Technical Advisory Panel also addressed whether the individual physician mechanical thrombectomy volume requirement should apply to all physicians performing mechanical thrombectomy at a stroke center or be restricted to the primary neuro-interventionists. The majority supported a proposed requirement to extend applicability to any physician performing mechanical thrombectomy. However, several panel members emphasized the need to give stroke centers time to adjust staffing levels and call schedules to ensure that all physicians performing mechanical thrombectomy meet the volume requirement.

Arriving at a Decision
Based on these discussions, The Joint Commission decided to reinstate the original individual mechanical thrombectomy volume eligibility requirement immediately, and then implement a revised requirement (expanding which physicians the requirement applies to) in six months.

Strong support to reestablish training requirements also was heard during the call and meeting. However, additional discussion is needed with stakeholders and Technical Advisory Panel members to finalize revised requirements. The Joint Commission will announce changes after further review and discussion.
TSCs and CSCs affected by the reinstatement of these requirements must meet the following eligibility criteria:

**Effective February 1, 2019,** the original volume criteria for all primary neuro-interventionists (that is, those who routinely take call to perform emergency mechanical thrombectomy) at an organization applying for TSC or CSC certification or recertification must have performed 15 mechanical thrombectomies over the past 12 months or 30 over the past 24 months. In evaluating the number of mechanical thrombectomies performed, procedures performed at hospitals other than the one applying for certification can be included in the primary neuro-interventionist’s total.

**Effective August 1, 2019,** revised volume criteria will be effective for all physicians who perform mechanical thrombectomy at an organization applying for TSC or CSC certification. Rather than allowing organizations to determine who is considered a primary neuro-interventionist, as stated in the original eligibility criteria, all physicians who perform mechanical thrombectomies must have performed 15 mechanical thrombectomies over the past 12 months or 30 over the past 24 months. In evaluating the number of mechanical thrombectomies performed, procedures performed at hospitals other than the one applying for certification can be included in the physician’s total.

Questions related to this announcement can be directed to Tabitha Vieweg, BSN, MBA, RN, associate director, Department of Standards and Survey Methods.