Vasculearn NETWORK

Circulating knowledge. Saving lives.

THE Beat

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A heartfelt thank you to our outgoing members:

Aaron Aday, MD, MS
Allen Taylor, MD
Alex Spyropoulos, MD
Brenda Shisslak
Jerrold Levy, MD
Margaret Fang, MD, MPH
Umberto Campia, MD, MSc

Goodbyes and Hellos:

Meet the 2025 Medical Advisory Board

The Medical Advisory Board (MAB) was founded in 2020 to support the North American Thrombosis Forum (NATF – now Vasculearn Network, VLN) in delivering timely, relevant educational resources to both clinicians and patients. Over the past four years, the MAB has not only guided us through a global pandemic but also played a pivotal role in shaping our mission, vision, and strategic goals.

We wouldn't be the organization we are today without the dedication, expertise, and passion of this incredible group of advisors. To our emeriti members: thank you for your invaluable contributions. We deeply appreciate your time, knowledge, and commitment.

Though these departures are bittersweet, we're thrilled to welcome new perspectives and leadership in 2025. Members of the VLN Medical Advisory Board (MAB) will serve as both advisors to—and advocates for—the organization and will focus on:

- Offering insights, scientific guidance, and expertise to advance VLN's mission
- Enhancing our visibility
- Supporting our strategic growth and development

The 2025 VLN Medical Advisory Board:

Behnood Bikdeli, MD, MS
Vascular Medicine Advisor

Heather Johnson, MD, MS
Preventive Cardiology Advisor

JoMarie Monzon, FNP-BC, MSN
Vascular Surgery/Advanced Practice Provider (APP) Advisor

LaVon Woodard
Patient Advisor

Margo Minissian, PhD, ACNP
Technology & Innovation Advisor

Scott Woller, MD
Thrombosis Medicine Advisor

Taylor Anzidei, DNP-EL, RN, CCRN
Clinical Nursing Advisor

Learn more about our newest members!

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Introducing our newest Medical Advisory Board members



Jomarie Monzon, FNP-BC, MSN

Vascular Surgery APP Advisor

JoMarie is the Lead Nurse Practitioner for the Division of Vascular Surgery at Cedars-Sinai Medical Center and oversees advanced practice initiatives and protocol development. A nurse practitioner since 2009 with board certification, she has led projects like an APP-led aortic clinic and expanding vascular surgery services. JoMarie was named Cedars-Sinai APP of the Year (2023) and is developing a sclero-therapy clinic for venous disease.



LaVon Woodard

Patient Advisor

LaVon, a licensed barber and barbershop owner in Brunswick, Georgia, experienced symptoms of a blood clot in 2017 but was sent home without treatment. In 2022, he was diagnosed with deep vein thrombosis (DVT). He is grateful to be a part of the VLN Medical Advisory Board, where he can share his story and learn from others.



Heather Johnson, MD, MS

Preventive Cardiology Advisor

Dr. Johnson is the Director of Preventive Cardiology for Women's Services at Florida Atlantic University. She earned her medical and population health degrees from the University of Wisconsin-Madison and a Master of Medical Management from USC. Her NIH-funded research focuses on cardiovascular risk management, and she is a Fellow of multiple cardiology organizations.



Scott Woller, MD

Thrombosis Medicine Advisor

Dr. Woller, a specialist in thrombosis medicine and anticoagulation, focuses on venous thromboembolic disease prevention. A Professor of Medicine at the University of Utah and Chair of Medicine at Intermountain Medical Center, he has led NIH-funded studies and co-chaired ACCP antithrombotic therapy guidelines. Board certified in Internal Medicine, Dr. Woller is a Fellow of major medical societies and a renowned educator.



Lieutenant Commander Taylor Anzidei

Clinical Nursing Advisor

LCDR Anzidei is a critical care nurse and leader in the U.S. Navy Nurse Corps. She specializes in trauma and cardiovascular care, advanced cardiac devices, and military medical readiness. Taylor is a decorated officer, educator, and speaker, committed to advancing military healthcare and mentoring the next generation of nurses.

We are also pleased to announce that **Tara Lech** and **Aviva Schwartz** will continue to co-chair the Board for the 2025 term, and **Behnood Bikdeli** and **Margo Minissian** will stay on for their second term. We look forward to exciting collaborations ahead as we remain committed to advancing cardiovascular and thrombosis education and improving patient care.

Heart Failure's Quiet Companion: The Risk of Blood Clots

Heart failure (HF) is a serious condition that affects millions of people worldwide and is becoming more common as the population ages. Most people know that it causes fatigue, swelling, and shortness of breath. Few realize that the condition also increases the risk of blood clots.

Raising awareness about this connection is one step forward in improving outcomes for those living with heart failure.

What Is Heart Failure?

HF occurs when the heart has trouble pumping properly. The walls of the heart might be stiff or damaged, or the heart muscle might not pump as strongly as it should. These problems can raise pressure in the heart or reduce its ability to circulate enough blood to support the body, whether at rest or during activity.

HF can affect different parts of the heart, resulting in...

Left-Sided HF: The left side of the heart pumps oxygen-rich blood to the body. When it doesn't work properly, fluid may build up in the lungs, and make breathing difficult. This can be described as systolic HF (trouble pumping blood out) or diastolic HF (the pumping chamber becomes stiff, doesn't relax between beats, making it harder for the heart to fill with blood).

Right-Sided HF: The right side of the heart sends blood to the lungs to pick up oxygen. When this side fails, blood backs up in the veins, causing swelling in the legs, ankles, or belly.

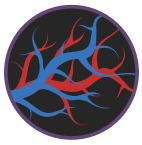
Understanding Blood Clots

As part of the body's natural healing process, blood clots form when a blood vessel has become damaged. Platelets and proteins in the blood work together to create a clot that stops bleeding and protects the injured area. Sometimes, clots can form inside blood vessels even when there's no clear injury, or they may not break down as they should, leading to serious health risks.

Why Does Heart Failure Increase Blood Clot Risk?

HF raises the risk of blood clots in several ways, including slowing blood flow and damaging blood vessels. These changes create conditions where dangerous clots, like deep vein thrombosis (DVT) or pulmonary embolism (PE), are more likely to form.

Damage to blood vessel walls



Heart failure can damage the walls of blood vessels, leading to endothelial dysfunction, a condition where the vessel lining loses its ability to work properly. Increased pressure in the vessels, abnormal blood flow, and oxidative stress—an imbalance of harmful molecules that damages the vessel lining—are key contributors. Over time, this damage weakens the vessels' ability to relax and regulate blood flow.

Changes in the blood



Inflammation in HF raises levels of clot-promoting molecules like fibrinogen. It also activates platelets, making them stickier and more likely to form clots. Oxidative stress disrupts the blood's natural balance between clotting and anti-clotting factors. Medications used to reduce fluid buildup in HF can increase blood concentration and further promote clot formation.

Altered blood flow



When HF reduces the heart's pumping ability, it can lead to low cardiac output, where less blood is pumped out than normal. Over time, the heart's chambers may stretch and enlarge, further weakening its function. This slower blood flow increases the risk of blood clots.

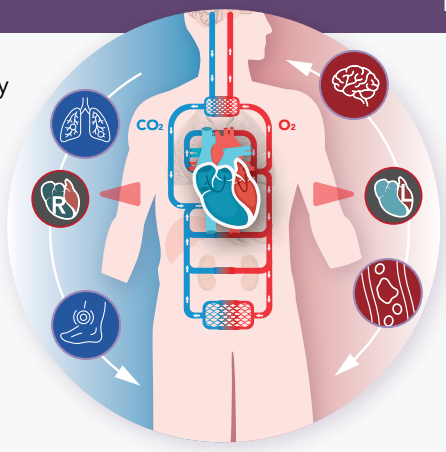
Atrial fibrillation (Afib), a common condition in people with HF, can further disrupt blood flow. In Afib, the heart's irregular rhythm causes blood to pool in the atria, the two chambers of the heart that receive blood and pump it into the ventricles. This pooling creates an environment where clots are more likely to form. These clots can travel to the brain, leading to a stroke.

Clot Risks in Right- vs. Left-Sided Heart Failure

HF can increase the risk of blood clots, but the type of clot often depends on whether it's left-sided or right-sided HF.

Right-Sided HF:

- Blood flow slows in the veins, especially in the legs.
- Slowed blood flow can cause blood to pool, increasing the risk of DVT.
- A DVT can break loose and travel to the lungs, causing a PE.



Left-Sided HF:

- When the left side of the heart doesn't work well, blood can pool in the left ventricle.
- This pooling increases the risk of clots forming inside the heart.
- Left-sided HF can cause clots to form in the heart and travel through arteries to the brain (causing a stroke), or to other organs as well.

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Living Well with Heart Failure and Blood Clot Risks

Take your medications as prescribed and follow your clinician's advice for managing other conditions that can make HF worse. **Follow these tips to help manage HF and reduce your risk of blood clots:**

Stay physically active:
Regular movement improves heart health and prevents blood from pooling.

Stop smoking:
Smoking increases your heart rate and blood pressure and reduces your ability to stay physically active.

Get enough rest:
Take breaks to reduce strain on your heart. Simple things like napping, putting your feet up, or sitting during tasks can prevent overexertion. For better sleep, avoid caffeine, alcohol, and heavy meals before bed.

Manage stress:
Use healthy coping methods like deep breathing, yoga, or joining a support group.

Eat heart-healthy foods:
Focus on fruits, vegetables, whole grains, lean proteins, and healthy fats. Limit processed foods, sugar, salt, and red meat.

Vasculearn Network is a proud supporter of:

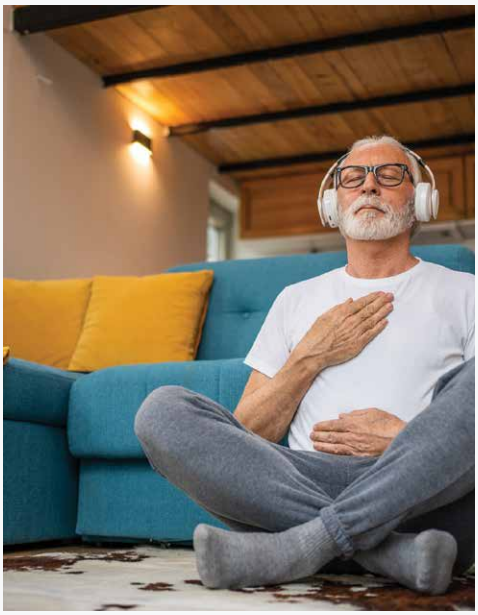
AMERICAN **HEART MONTH** February











HF can lead to blood clots, but understanding the connection can help you take control. Small, consistent steps—like following your care plan and addressing risk factors—can make a big difference in protecting your health.

Scan the QR code to access important website links

Upcoming Patient Events

All groups are virtual and start at 7:00 PM EST



Blood Clot Education Group

Join our Blood Clot Education Group to connect with others and learn about all things related to blood clots. Get accurate information, hear from experts on the latest research and treatments, and share your experiences. Each session includes participant introductions and a Q&A with a clinician, where you can submit questions in advance.

February 13, 2025

March 11, 2025

April 8, 2025

Long-PE and CTEPH Support Group (Quarterly)

Have you or someone you care for experienced a pulmonary embolism (PE)? VLN offers a dedicated support group for patients with post-PE syndrome and CTEPH (Chronic Thromboembolic Pulmonary Hypertension). This group provides a safe space to connect with others, receive support, and learn more about managing life after PE.

Each session includes introductions and a Q&A with a clinician, where you can submit questions in advance.

March 4, 2025

April 24, 2025

Blood Clot Support Group

Hosted by Joelle Hochman, RRT, Chair of Patient Engagement & Education

After experiencing a blood clot, it's normal to have a lot of questions. Many people are left feeling confused about why this happened to them and are anxious about it happening again.

We're pleased to offer a support group experience where patients can share their stories, connect with others who've had blood clots, and receive emotional support.

February 20, 2025

March 20, 2025

April 17, 2025

Bilingual Virtual Patient Education Series

Join Vasculearn Network's free Bilingual Virtual Patient Education Series on Preventing and Treating Heart Disease! This series features expert physicians sharing the latest heart health insights, interactive Q&A sessions, and bilingual support in English and Spanish to ensure everyone can participate and benefit.

March 19, 2025

In all online groups, a clinician will be available to answer general questions about blood clots. Please note that they cannot provide personalized medical advice to any patients.

Women's Support Group

As we close out American Heart Month, join us for a special support group just for women. This month, we'll focus on understanding cardiovascular health and what it means for your overall well-being. This is a friendly and supportive space to learn more about atherosclerotic cardiovascular disease, coronary artery disease, peripheral artery disease, and other vascular diseases. Understanding these conditions can help you take charge of your health, whether it's through prevention, recognizing symptoms, or asking the right questions at your doctor's office.

February 25, 2025

To register for these programs, please visit Patient Events on our website at https://thrombosis.org/events/patients/

Do you like what you see in *The Beat* and find this information helpful?

Please consider making a donation to VLN to further support blood clot education.

Please help us spread the word about these support groups! More information can be found on our website.

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