

Heterogeneity in clinical practices for post-cardiotomy extracorporeal life support: A pilot survey from the PELS-1 multicenter study

Silvia Mariani¹  | Gabor Bari^{1,2}  | Justine M. Ravaux^{1,3}  | Bas C. T. van Bussel^{1,4}  |
 Maria Elena De Piero¹  | Ann-Kristin Schaefer⁵ | Khalil Jawad⁶ | Matteo Pozzi⁷  |
 Antonio Loforte^{8,9}  | Nikolaos Kalampokas¹⁰ | Agne Jankuviene¹¹ |
 Erwan Flecher¹² | Xiaotong Hou¹³ | Jeroen J. H. Bunge^{14,15}  | Kogulan Sriranjani¹⁶ |
 Leonardo Salazar¹⁷ | Bart Meyns^{3,18}  | Michael A. Mazzeffi¹⁹ | Sacha Matteucci²⁰  |
 Sandro Sponga²¹  | Kollengode Ramanathan²² | Alessandro Costetti²³ |
 Francesco Formica^{24,25,26}  | Pranya Sakiyalak²⁷ | Antonio Fiore²⁸  |
 Chistof Schmid²⁹ | Giuseppe Maria Raffa³⁰  | Roberto Castillo³¹ | I-wen Wang³²  |
 Jae-Seung Jung³³  | Tomas Grus³⁴  | Vin Pellegrino³⁵  | Giacomo Bianchi³⁶  |
 Matteo Pettinari³⁷  | Alessandro Barbone³⁸  | José P. Garcia³⁹ |
 Mariusz Kowalewski⁴⁰  | Kiran Shekar⁴¹  | Glenn Whitman⁴² | Roberto Lorusso¹  |
 on behalf of the PELS-1 Investigators

Correspondence

Silvia Mariani, Cardio-Thoracic Surgery
 Department, Maastricht University
 Medical Centre, P. Debyealaan, 25, 6202
 AZ Maastricht, The Netherlands.
 Email: s.mariani1985@gmail.com

Abstract

Background: High-quality evidence for post-cardiotomy extracorporeal life support (PC-ECLS) management is lacking. This study investigated real-world PC-ECLS clinical practices.

Methods: This cross-sectional, multi-institutional, international pilot survey explored center organization, anticoagulation management, left ventricular unloading, distal limb perfusion, PC-ECLS monitoring, and transfusion practices. Twenty-nine questions were distributed among 34 hospitals participating in the Post-cardiotomy Extra-Corporeal Life Support Study.

Results: Of the 32 centers [16 low-volume (50%); 16 high-volume (50%)] that responded, 16 (50%) had dedicated ECLS specialists. Twenty-six centers (81.3%) reported using additional mechanical circulatory supports. Anticoagulation practices were highly heterogeneous: 24 hospitals (75%) reported using patients bleeding status as a guide, without a specific threshold in 54.2% of cases. Transfusion targets ranged from 7 to 10 g/dL. Most centers used cardiac venting

List of PELS-1 Investigators are available in [Supplemental Materials](#).

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on a case-by-case basis (78.1%) and regular distal limb perfusion (84.4%). Nineteen (54.9%) centers reported dedicated monitoring protocols, including daily echocardiography (87.5%), Swan-Ganz catheterization (40.6%), cerebral near-infrared spectroscopy (53.1%), and multimodal assessment of limb ischemia. Inspection of the circuit (71.9%), oxygenator pressure drop (68.8%), plasma free hemoglobin (75%), d-dimer (59.4%), lactate dehydrogenase (56.3%), and fibrinogen (46.9%) are used to diagnose hemolysis and thrombosis.

Conclusions: This study shows remarkable heterogeneity in clinical practices for PC-ECLS management. More standardized protocols and better implementation of the available evidence are recommended.

KEYWORDS

cardiac surgery, clinical practices, extracorporeal life support, heart failure, post-cardiotomy shock, survey

1 | INTRODUCTION

The application of veno-arterial extracorporeal life support (V-A ECLS) in post-cardiotomy shock has been reported in 0.4% to 3.6% of cases¹ and has significantly increased in the past decades.^{2,3} Nevertheless, data obtained from the Extracorporeal Life Support Organization (ELSO) registry indicate that, even with improved successful weaning, survival to hospital discharge remains low.^{2,4} Despite the growing number of patients and the data provided by observational studies, we still lack high-quality evidence to standardize post-cardiotomy ECLS (PC-ECLS) care. A first attempt has been made with the 2020 EACTS/ELSO/STS/AATS expert consensus paper on PC-ECLS in adults⁵ and the ELSO interim guidelines for V-A ECLS in adult cardiac patients.⁶ However, it is unclear how well these guidelines have been applied, and their release is very recent.⁷ There is evidence that a standardized team-based approach for PC-ECLS can produce promising results,⁸ but little is known about the extent of heterogeneity in PC-ECLS practices. The primary step to understanding this knowledge gap is to investigate current real-life clinical practices. The Post-cardiotomy Extra-Corporeal Life Support Study (PELS-1) collected data on adults suffering from post-cardiotomy cardiogenic shock and requiring ECLS support in cardiac surgery units worldwide.⁹ The present article reports the results of a survey conducted among PELS-1 participating centers to highlight similarities and differences in terms of five key issues: (1) Characteristics of PC-ECLS hospitals; (2) Anticoagulation management and transfusion; (3) Left ventricular (LV) unloading; (4) Distal limb perfusion; (5) General ECLS monitoring practices.

2 | MATERIALS AND METHODS

2.1 | Development of the survey

The PELS-1 Working Group designed and conducted a multi-institutional, multi-national pilot survey with input from the specialists from adult ECLS units. The list of invited cardiac surgery units was populated from the PELS-1 participating centers. As this was a quality improvement survey, specific ethical approval was waived. However, the PELS-1 study was conducted in accordance with the Declaration of Helsinki, and Institutional Review Board approval was obtained (number: METC-2018-0788, date: December 19th, 2018). This pilot survey was conducted and reported according to the consolidated criteria for reporting qualitative studies (COREQ).¹⁰

2.2 | Design of the survey

The survey was designed based on 29 questions ([Supplemental methods](#)) including five essential themes: (1) characteristics of ECLS center and institution; (2) anticoagulation management and transfusions; (3) left ventricular unloading; (4) distal limb perfusion; (5) ECLS monitoring practices. The survey included multiple-choice and open-ended (free text) questions. The survey, once designed, was sent to an independent reviewer (MEDP) for critical review. Following feedback, the survey underwent revision and further testing by the PELS-1 Working Group representatives and was then accepted for distribution.



2.3 | Distribution of the survey

PELS-1 is an international, multi-center, retrospective study enrolling consecutive patients supported with ECLS in the postoperative phase ([ClinicalTrials.gov](https://clinicaltrials.gov/ct2/show/study/NCT03857217): NCT03857217) in 34 centers from 16 countries. In September 2021, a researcher (SM) from the coordinating center distributed the above-mentioned questionnaire to the PELS-1 principal investigator of each center through email. In the event of no response, a reminder was sent after 4 weeks and after 8 weeks. No face-to-face interviews, repeated interviews, or audio/visual recordings were performed. In cases of missing data or unclear answers, questionnaires were returned to participants for comment and/or correction. If after 2 reminders, no answer was available, missing data were considered “not reported.”

2.4 | Data analysis

The data were exported in a dedicated file format into Microsoft Excel (Washington, USA, Version 16.35) and reviewed by three researchers (SM, GB, and JMR). Variables are expressed as numbers (valid percent based on available data, excluding missing values) for categorical variables. All descriptive statistics were performed on the original data, and no imputations were performed. Categorical data were compared between groups with Pearson's Chi-Square, Fisher's exact test, or the Fisher-Freeman-Halton Exact Test, as appropriate. The descriptive analysis addressed differences between low-volume (≤ 30 V-A ECLS cases per year) and high-volume (> 30 V-A ECLS cases per year) centers.¹¹⁻¹³ We considered a 2-sided p -value < 0.05 statistically significant. All data were merged from de-identified files into SPSS 26.0 (IBM, New York, USA) and R 4.1.2 (R Foundation for Statistical Computing, Vienna, Austria) for data management and statistical analysis. The final report was shared with all participants before publication.

3 | RESULTS

3.1 | Characteristics of the participating centers

Thirty-two centers (94.1%) responded to the PELS-1 Survey. Two centers did not submit their questionnaires despite 2 reminders. Most centers were in Europe ($n = 22$, 68.8%; [Table 1](#)), academic hospitals ($n = 24$, 75%), and referral centers for transplants and ventricular assist devices (VAD, $n = 23$, 71.9%). High-volume centers were academic hospitals ($n = 16$, 100%, $p = 0.002$). The annual surgical volume, intensive care unit bed capacity, and V-A ECLS volume ranged widely ([Figure 1](#)). Sixteen centers (50%)

treated more than 30 V-A ECLS cases per year, and two centers (6.3%) declared a V-A ECLS volume > 100 cases per year. Most centers ($n = 26$, 81.3%) reported the availability of other types of mechanical circulatory support. ECLS specialists were present in 16 (50%) hospitals, equally distributed between high- and low-volume centers ([Table 1](#)).

3.2 | Anticoagulation management and transfusion

Most hospitals declared to administer a full dose of protamine ($n = 16$, 52%) at the end of the cardiac operation when an intra-operative ECLS is required, especially high-volume hospitals ($n = 11$, 69%, [Figure 2A](#)). Anticoagulation is mostly started at a variable time based on the patient's bleeding ($n = 24$, 75%, [Figure 2B](#)). Thirteen centers (54.2%) did not report a specific bleeding monitoring protocol, but they disclosed that they start anticoagulation based on a subjective judgment of reduced post-operative bleeding ([Table S1](#)). Centers that reported a specific bleeding threshold showed a high heterogeneity ([Table S1](#)). The main first choice of anticoagulation drug was continuous infusion of unfractionated heparin ($n = 31$, 96.9%, [Table 2](#)), while the most popular second choices were bivalirudin ($n = 15$, 43%) and argatroban ($n = 8$, 23%). Most hospitals ($n = 25$, 43.9%) declared to use activated partial thromboplastin time (aPTT) for anticoagulation monitoring. However, frequency and target values ([Table 2](#) and [Table S2](#)) differed widely. Heterogeneity was observed regarding other anticoagulation monitoring methods, such as activated clotting time (ACT, $n = 9$, 15.8%), anti-Xa activity ($n = 8$, 14%), TEG/ROTEM ($n = 8$, 14%) or prothrombin time ($n = 4$, 7%). The hemoglobin threshold to transfuse patients ranged from 7 to 10 g/dL ([Table 3](#)).

3.3 | LV unloading and distal limb perfusion

Only 4 (12.5%) centers routinely use LV unloading strategies in all PC-ECLS cases ([Table 3](#)). Most centers ($n = 25$, 78.1%) reported considering LV unloading on a case-by-case basis. Intra-aortic balloon pump remains the most common unloading strategy ($n = 18$, 56.3%). Most centers ($n = 27$, 84.4%) declared to regularly use distal limb perfusion with femoral cannulation.

3.4 | ECLS monitoring

Nineteen centers (59.4%) reported specific PC-ECLS monitoring protocols ([Table 4](#)). Limb perfusion is frequently



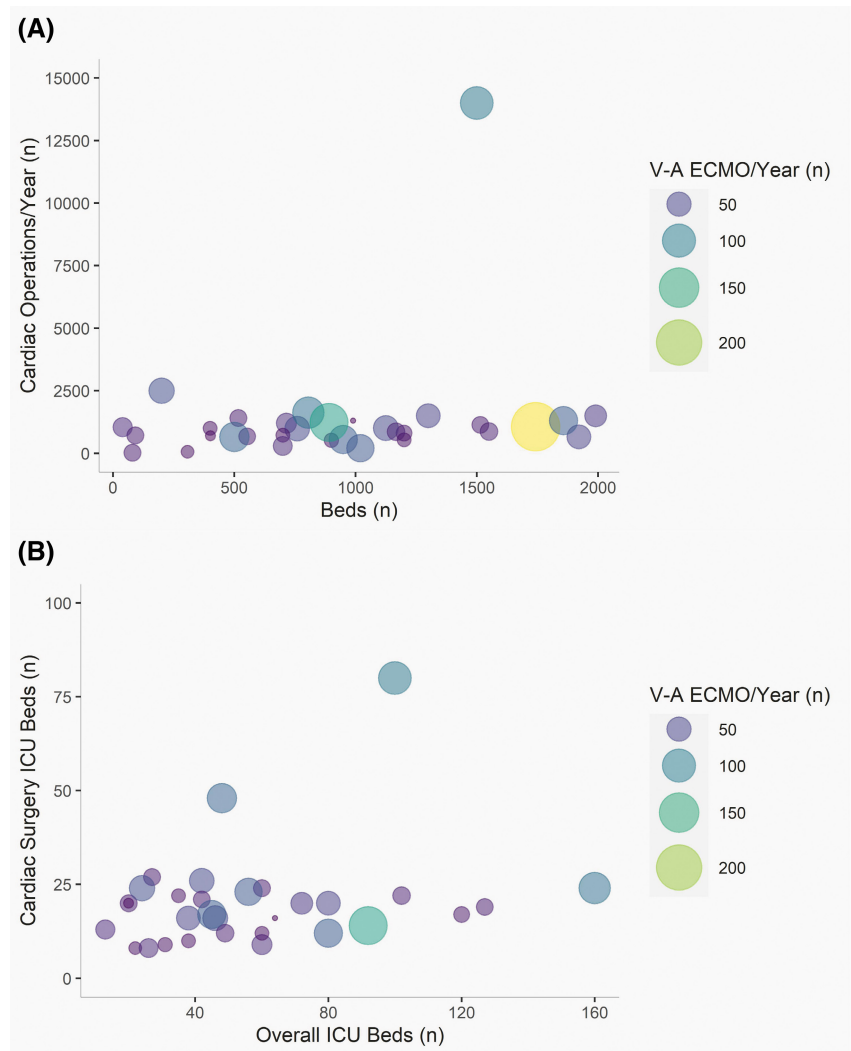
TABLE 1 Centers characteristics.

	Overall (n = 32)	Low volume (n = 16)	High volume (n = 16)	p-value
Continent				0.754
Asia	3 (9.4%)	1 (6.3%)	2 (12.5%)	
Australia	3 (9.4%)	2 (12.5%)	1 (6.3%)	
Europe	22 (68.8%)	10 (62.5%)	12 (75%)	
North America	2 (6.3%)	1 (6.3%)	1 (6.3%)	
South America	2 (6.3%)	2 (12.5%)	0 (0%)	
Center type				0.550
VAD center	5 (15.6%)	3 (18.8%)	2 (12.5%)	
Transplant and VAD center	23 (71.9%)	10 (62.5%)	13 (81.3%)	
Non-transplant non-VAD center	4 (12.5%)	3 (18.8%)	1 (6.3%)	
Hospital type				0.002
Academic	24 (75%)	8 (50%)	16 (100%)	
Non-academic	3 (9.4%)	3 (18.8%)	0 (0%)	
Private hospital	4 (12.5%)	4 (25%)	0 (0%)	
Other	1 (3.1%)	1 (6.3%)	0 (0%)	
Overall beds				0.352
0–499	8 (25%)	6 (37.5%)	2 (12.5%)	
501–1000	11 (34.4%)	5 (31.3%)	6 (37.5%)	
>1000	13 (40.6%)	5 (31.3%)	8 (50%)	
ICU beds				0.395
0–30	7 (21.9%)	5 (31.3%)	2 (12.5%)	
31–60	16 (50%)	8 (50%)	8 (50%)	
61–90	2 (6.3%)	0 (0%)	2 (12.5%)	
>90	7 (21.9%)	3 (18.8%)	4 (25%)	
ICU type				0.719
Only cardiac	19 (59.4%)	9 (56.3%)	10 (62.5%)	
Mixed	13 (40.6%)	7 (43.8%)	6 (37.5%)	
Operations/year				0.180
0–500	4 (12.5%)	2 (12.5%)	2 (12.5%)	
501–1000	13 (40.6%)	9 (56.3%)	4 (25%)	
>1000	15 (46.9%)	5 (31.3%)	10 (62.5%)	
Other ECLSs/year				0.220
0–30	24 (75%)	14 (87.5%)	10 (62.5%)	
>30	8 (25%)	2 (12.5%)	6 (37.5%)	
Other MCS available	26 (81.3%)	13 (81.3%)	13 (81.3%)	1.000
Other MCS type				0.643
Nothing	6 (14%)	3 (14%)	3 (13%)	
Impella	23 (52%)	10 (48%)	13 (57%)	
Levitronix	5 (11%)	4 (19%)	1 (4%)	
TandemHeart-ProtekDuo	4 (9%)	2 (10%)	2 (9%)	
VAD	6 (14%)	2 (10%)	4 (17%)	
Other	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	
ECLS specialists	16 (50%)	7 (43.8%)	9 (56.3%)	0.480

Note: Data are reported as n (% as percentage excluding missing values). p values by chi squared indicate statistically significant differences between low-volume and high-volume centers.

Abbreviations: ECLS, extracorporeal life support; ICU, intensive care unit; MCS, mechanical circulatory support; VAD, ventricular assist device.

FIGURE 1 Bubble chart representing (A) overall bed capacity, annual cardiac operations and veno-arterial extracorporeal life support (V-A ECLS) annual use. (B) overall intensive care units (ICU) beds, cardiac surgery ICU beds and V-A ECLS annual use.



monitored with a multi-modality approach including clinical observation ($n=25$, 78.1%), ultrasound ($n=22$, 68.8%) and skin temperature evaluation ($n=18$, 56.3%). Neuromonitoring is mainly based on near-infrared spectroscopy (NIRS; $n=17$, 53.1%), especially in low-volume centers ($p=0.013$). Echocardiography is performed daily in most centers ($n=28$, 87.5%), while Swan-Ganz catheterization is used in 40.6% of centers ($n=13$). Other organs are rarely monitored routinely (Table 4) and lung ultrasound is used only in low-volume centers ($p=0.043$). Most centers evaluate hemolysis through concentrations of free hemoglobin ($n=24$, 75.0%) and thrombosis by direct inspection of the circuit ($n=23$, 71.9%), oxygenator pressure drop ($n=22$, 68.8%), D-dimer (59.4%), lactate dehydrogenase (56.3%), and fibrinogen (46.9%).

4 | DISCUSSION

This pilot PELS-1 survey is the first cross-sectional, multi-institutional, international survey on clinical

practices for PC-ECLS management. This descriptive work reports responses from 32 ECLS centers from 16 countries, with 68.8% being European centers. Half of the participants represented high volume (>30 V-A ECLS cases/year) units, and about three quarters were academic hospitals and referral centers for heart transplantation and VAD. The inclusion of different types of ECLS units from different countries makes this pilot survey representative of PC-ECLS practices. Extreme heterogeneity in all five major PC-ECLS themes was observed.

Post-cardiotomy cardiogenic shock represents one of the most common ECLS indications in adults.^{2,3,4,5,14} The current clinical scenario pushes every cardiac surgery unit to provide an ECLS service besides the normal cardiac surgery activity, regardless of the center's ECLS case load. Nevertheless, to optimize outcomes, it is recommended that centers performing ECLS for cardiac failure achieve a minimum ECLS volume of 30 cases per year, with a substantial proportion being for cardiac failure.^{11,12,13,15} This survey revealed that several hospitals

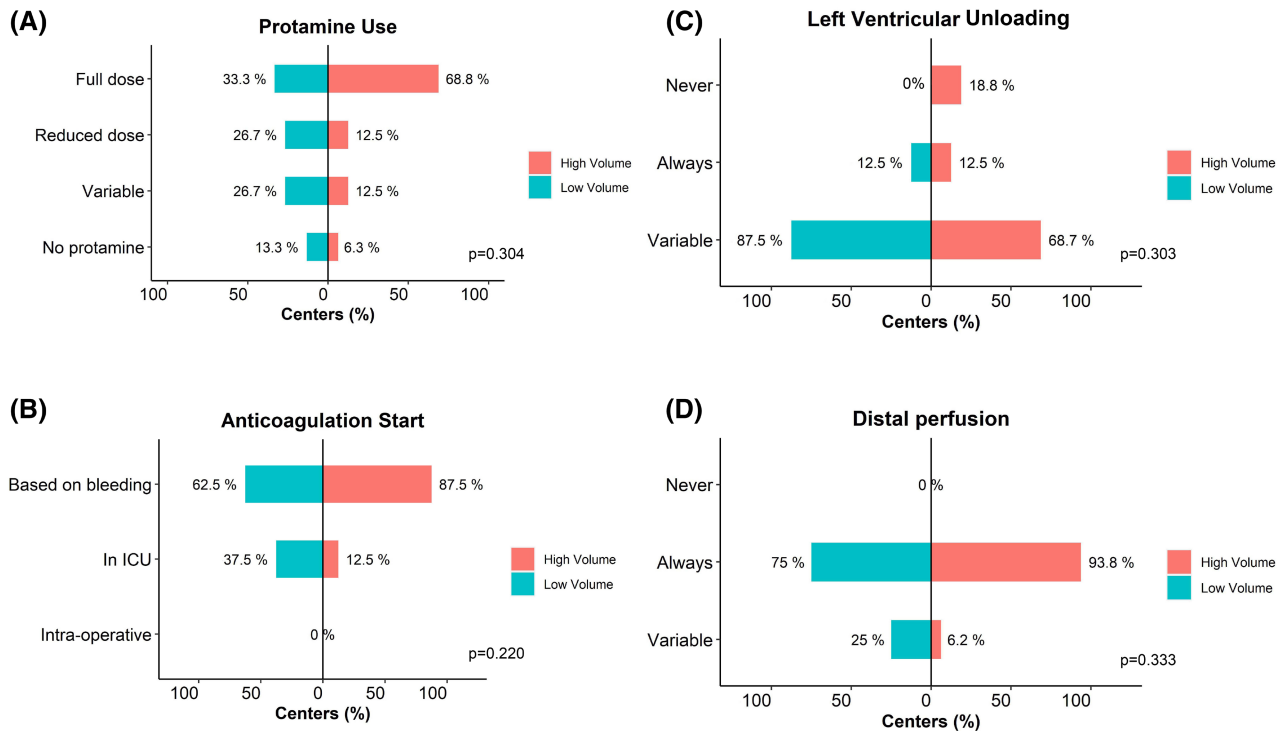


FIGURE 2 Bar charts representing the reported practices regarding protamine administration (A), left ventricular vent (B), anticoagulation initiation (C), and placement of a distal perfusion cannula (D).

providing V-A ECLS for post-cardiotomy shock perform ≤ 30 V-A ECLS cases per year, and these low-volume centers are mainly non-academic. Both low-volume and high-volume centers seem to be aligned on several clinical practices, including access to other mechanical circulatory support devices or the presence of ECLS specialists. Overall, it is advised, when possible and depending on the center-specific caregiver model, to have fully trained ECLS specialists as part of the team.¹¹ However, this practice was reported only in 50% of the included centers. Interestingly, low-volume centers tend to use more or different monitoring strategies, such as NIRS or lung ultrasound, compared to high-volume centers. Given the current reality, differences in terms of ECLS case load and team organization among centers are still relevant.^{11,12}

The highest degree of heterogeneity was observed regarding anticoagulation policies, including timing of initiation, monitoring, and intensity of anticoagulation. According to the 2020 EACTS/ELSO/STS/AATS expert consensus paper on PC-ECLS,⁵ reversing intraoperative heparin with protamine after cardiopulmonary bypass termination may be considered (Class of recommendation: IIb, level of evidence: C).⁵ However, no evidence is available regarding the optimal amount of protamine to be administered. About half of the surveyed centers use a full dose of protamine, while 38% use a reduced or variable dose based on the patient's bleeding.¹⁶ Similarly, available

guidelines support the initiation of ECLS without anticoagulation until bleeding has diminished to acceptable levels (Class of recommendation: I, level of evidence: C), indicating a threshold of <100 mL/h within 24–48 h after cardiopulmonary bypass.⁵ Despite these recommendations, most participating centers did not report a specific protocol regarding bleeding thresholds or start the anticoagulation based on their clinical judgment on patient's bleeding. Furthermore, reported protocols were extremely heterogeneous indicating an urgent need of scientific evidence on this topic. While awaiting new evidence in this field, it is advisable to establish institutional protocols and standardize the clinical practice according to the available 2020 EACTS/ELSO/STS/AATS expert consensus paper.⁵

Similarly, anticoagulation monitoring is still debated, and the effects of this uncertainty are reflected by the variability in monitoring methods, timing, and target values reported by the PEELS-1 centers. The general ELSO guidelines are currently noncommittal about appropriate monitoring, advocating a tailored strategy for each patient.¹⁷ This statement can support the different approaches established by each institution based on local experience and resource availability. Nevertheless, the 2020 EACTS/ELSO/STS/AATS expert consensus paper on PC-ECLS clearly recommends monitoring anticoagulation with a target ACT of 160–220s and a target aPTT of 50–80s (Class of recommendation: I, level of evidence: C).¹⁸ The 2021 ELSO anticoagulation guidelines suggest an anticoagulation

TABLE 2 Anticoagulation management.

	Overall (n = 32)	Low volume (n = 16)	High volume (n = 16)	p-value
Protamine use				0.304
No protamine	3 (10%)	2 (13%)	1 (6%)	
Full dose	16 (52%)	5 (33%)	11 (69%)	
Reduced dose	6 (19%)	4 (27%)	2 (13%)	
Variable	6 (19%)	4 (27%)	2 (13%)	
Anticoagulation start				0.220
Intraoperative	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	
ICU	8 (25%)	6 (37.5%)	2 (12.5%)	
Based on bleeding	24 (75%)	10 (62.5%)	14 (87.5%)	
Anticoagulation first line drug				1.000
Continuous unfractionated heparin IU/h	31 (96.9%)	15 (93.8%)	16 (100%)	
Subcutaneous heparin	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	
Argatroban	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	
Bivalirudin	1 (3.1%)	1 (6.3%)	0 (0%)	
Other	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	
Anticoagulation second line drug				0.278
None	7 (20%)	5 (29%)	2 (11%)	
Continuous unfractionated heparin IU/h	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	
Subcutaneous heparin	4 (11%)	3 (18%)	1 (6%)	
Argatroban	8 (23%)	2 (12%)	6 (33%)	
Bivalirudin	15 (43%)	7 (41%)	8 (44%)	
Other	1 (3%)	0 (0%)	1 (6%)	
Anticoagulation monitoring ^a				0.582
ACT	9 (15.8%)	3 (9.4%)	6 (24%)	
aPTT	25 (43.9%)	14 (43.8%)	11 (44%)	
PT	4 (7%)	4 (12.5%)	0 (0%)	
INR	3 (5.3%)	2 (6.3%)	1 (4%)	
TEG/ROTEM	8 (14%)	5 (15.6%)	3 (12%)	
Anti-Xa activity	8 (14%)	4 (12.5%)	4 (16%)	
ACT frequency				0.500
4–6 h	7 (77.8%)	3 (100%)	4 (66.7%)	
12–24 h	2 (22.2%)	0 (0%)	2 (33.3%)	
aPTT frequency				0.341
4–8 h	20 (80%)	10 (71.4%)	10 (90.9%)	
12–24 h	5 (20%)	4 (28.6%)	1 (9.1%)	
PT frequency				n.a.
4–8 h	2 (50%)	2 (50%)	0 (0%)	
12–24 h	2 (50%)	2 (50%)	0 (0%)	
INR frequency				n.a.
4–8 h	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	
12–24 h	3 (100%)	2 (100%)	1 (100%)	
TEG/ROTEM frequency				1.000
12–24 h	3 (37.5%)	2 (40%)	1 (33.3%)	
When needed/other	5 (62.5%)	3 (60%)	2 (66.7%)	

(Continues)



TABLE 2 (Continued)

	Overall (n = 32)	Low volume (n = 16)	High volume (n = 16)	p-value
Anti-Xa activity frequency				0.229
4–6 h	3 (37.5%)	0 (0%)	3 (75%)	
12–24 h	3 (37.5%)	2 (50%)	1 (25%)	
When needed/other	2 (25%)	2 (50%)	0 (0%)	

Note: Data are reported as *n* (% as a percentage excluding missing values). *p* values by chi squared indicate statistically significant differences between low-volume and high-volume centers.

Abbreviations: ACT, accelerated clotting time; aPTT, activated partial thromboplastin time; ICU, intensive care unit; INR, international normalized ratio; PT, prothrombin time; ROTEM, rotational thromboelastometry; TEG, thromboelastography.

^aPercentages indicate the frequency of use for each monitoring strategy with respect to the pool of all reported monitoring strategies.

monitoring laboratory schedule.^{17,19} As demonstrated by this pilot survey, these guidelines are still far from being widely applied.

There is a lack of studies to guide blood product transfusion practices in PC-ECLS patients, but general guidelines suggest a hemoglobin goal of >7–9 g/dL¹⁷ to maintain a good oxygen delivery. A survey on anticoagulation and transfusion practices in adult ECLS demonstrated that 33.3% of centers use a hemoglobin transfusion trigger of 7.1–8 g/dL and 28.9% of them use a threshold of 8.1–10 g/dL.²⁰ The current survey on PC-ECLS showed that 53.1% of included hospitals use a hemoglobin trigger of 8 g/dL, in line with previous literature,²¹ but pragmatic real-life studies are required to investigate whether this empirical threshold also has real benefits.

Regarding the LV unloading strategy, a minority of centers declared to avoid the use of any LV vent, while most hospitals apply a dynamic strategy based on the patient's needs and degree of LV distension, as also advised by the 2020 EACTS/ELSO/STS/AATS expert consensus paper on PC-ECLS.⁵ Similarly, the current guidelines supporting a routine implant of a distal perfusion cannula with a femoral peripheral ECLS,⁶ are implemented in most centers.

About 60% of surveyed centers declared to have specific monitoring protocols for PC-ECLS patients. While monitoring is endorsed by the literature,^{5,6} specific indications on method choice and frequency are lacking. Overall, daily echocardiography (87.5%) and pulmonary artery catheter measurements (40.6%) are the most common methods for cardiovascular monitoring²² while NIRS (53.1%) and brain computed tomography (28.1%) are the preferred methods for neurological monitoring.²³ Close monitoring of lower limb ischemia is widely applied by most centers, following guidelines.^{5,6} Other organs are usually monitored upon patient's needs, while special attention is given to hemolysis and thrombosis, reflecting the international guidelines.^{5,6,17} Notwithstanding, a certain degree of variability can still be observed among centers.

The findings of this pilot survey reflect the opinions of a cohort of physicians from 16 countries on 5 continents. However, a potential bias may be introduced based on the pilot nature of this survey, which was shared only among the PELS-1 participating centers. Despite that, the survey involved low- and high-volume programs, making this pilot survey representative of real-life PC-ECLS practices. We attempted to avoid nonresponse bias by sending the survey to institutions already involved in PELS-1. Given that a response of 20%–30% is generally considered acceptable for a survey,²⁴ we also attempted to increase the response rate by sending email reminders. Despite this, 2 centers did not reply, and the final response rate was 94.1%. Incomplete responses may have also been a limitation, although calculations were made as described above to accurately present the data. Even if the number of respondents is still considered to be small, data suggest an apparent variability of PC-ECLS practice that may, in and of itself, minimize nonresponse bias.²⁵ Finally, there might be variations in ECLS management modalities due to nonclinical factors, including financial, historical, cultural, and ethical factors.²⁶ However, exploring these was beyond the scope of this survey.

4.1 | Conclusions

As there is limited evidence regarding PC-ECLS management, each institution tends to develop different strategies, as shown by this pilot survey summarizing the approaches taken by 32 facilities worldwide. The survey demonstrates wide variability in ECLS service organization, practices regarding anticoagulation and transfusions, LV unloading, and monitoring. Moreover, this survey showed how several choices are still based on clinicians' personal judgment and not on institutional protocols or guidelines. The use of distal limb perfusion seems to be an exception in this scenario, as it is regularly applied in most centers.



TABLE 3 Transfusions, left ventricular venting, and distal perfusion.

	Overall (n = 32)	Low volume (n = 16)	High volume (n = 16)	p-value
Hb trigger for transfusions				0.417
7 g/dL	4 (12.5%)	1 (6.3%)	3 (18.8%)	
7.5 g/dL	4 (12.5%)	3 (18.8%)	1 (6.3%)	
8 g/dL	17 (53.1%)	8 (50%)	9 (56.3%)	
8.5 g/dL	1 (3.1%)	0 (0%)	1 (6.3%)	
9 g/dL	4 (12.5%)	3 (18.8%)	1 (6.3%)	
10 g/dL	1 (3.1%)	1 (6.3%)	0 (0%)	
Not reported	1 (3.1%)	0 (0%)	1 (6.3%)	
LV unloading				0.303
No LV unloading	3 (9.4%)	0 (0%)	3 (18.8%)	
Always LV unloading	4 (12.5%)	2 (12.5%)	2 (12.5%)	
Variable	25 (78.1%)	14 (87.5%)	11 (68.8%)	
LV unloading strategy (first line)				0.357
Trans-aortic device	3 (9.4%)	0 (0%)	3 (18.8%)	
Left ventricular (vent or cannula)	5 (15.6%)	3 (18.8%)	2 (12.5%)	
Left atrium (direct or transseptal)	5 (15.6%)	2 (12.5%)	3 (18.8%)	
Septostomy	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	
IABP	18 (56.3%)	10 (62.5%)	8 (50%)	
Pulmonary artery cannula	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	
Other	1 (3.1%)	1 (6.3%)	0 (0%)	
LV unloading strategy (second line)				0.478
None				
Trans-aortic device	2 (6%)	1 (6%)	1 (6%)	
Left ventricular (vent or cannula)	10 (28%)	7 (39%)	3 (17%)	
Left atrium (direct or transseptal)	8 (22%)	4 (22%)	4 (22%)	
Septostomy	7 (19%)	4 (22%)	3 (17%)	
IABP	5 (14%)	1 (6%)	4 (22%)	
Pulmonary artery cannula	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	
Other	4 (11%)	1 (6%)	3 (17%)	
Distal perfusion				0.333
Never	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	
Always	27 (84.4%)	12 (75%)	15 (93.8%)	
Variable	5 (15.6%)	4 (25%)	1 (6.3%)	

Note: Data are reported as *n* (%) as percentage excluding missing values). *p* values by chi squared indicate statistically significant differences between low-volume and high-volume centers.

Abbreviations: IABP, intra-aortic balloon pump; LV, left ventricle.

This pilot survey encourages the development of larger qualitative research studies and clinical trials on specific patient management issues in PC-ECLS and a more widespread implementation of the available guidelines for PC-ECLS management. Finally, this survey highlights the importance of considering the variable “center” and its heterogeneity as an important factor in studies on PC-ECLS.

AUTHOR CONTRIBUTIONS

Silvia Mariani: Concept/design, Data analysis /interpretation, Drafting the article, Critical revision of the article, Approval of the article, Statistics, and Data collection. **Gabor Bari:** Data analysis/interpretation, Drafting the article, Critical revision of the article, Approval of the article, and Statistics. **Justine M. Ravoux:** Concept/design, Data interpretation, Drafting the article, Critical revision of the article,



TABLE 4 General monitoring.

	Overall (n = 32)	Low volume (n = 16)	High volume (n = 16)	p-value
Limb perfusion				
NIRS	16 (50%)	10 (62.5%)	6 (37.5%)	0.157
Skin temperature	18 (56.3%)	10 (62.5%)	8 (50%)	0.476
Capillary refilling	17 (53.1%)	6 (37.5%)	11 (68.8%)	0.077
Ultrasound	22 (68.8%)	11 (68.8%)	11 (68.8%)	1.000
Clinical observation	25 (78.1%)	13 (81.3%)	12 (75%)	1.000
Nothing	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	n/a
Neuromonitoring				
NIRS	17 (53.1%)	12 (75%)	5 (31.3%)	0.013
EEG	4 (12.5%)	1 (6.3%)	3 (18.8%)	0.600
Brain CT scan	9 (28.1%)	3 (18.8%)	6 (37.5%)	0.433
Trans-cranial Doppler	1 (3.1%)	1 (6.3%)	0 (0%)	1.000
Biomarkers	3 (9.4%)	0 (0%)	3 (18.8%)	0.226
State entropy and bispectral index	3 (9.4%)	3 (18.8%)	0 (0%)	0.226
Evoked potentials	2 (6.3%)	0 (0%)	2 (12.5%)	0.484
Nothing	7 (21.9%)	1 (6.3%)	6 (37.5%)	0.083
Cardiovascular				
Swan-Ganz catheter	13 (40.6%)	8 (50%)	5 (31.3%)	0.280
PiCCO	2 (6.3%)	1 (6.3%)	1 (6.3%)	1.000
Daily echocardiography	28 (87.5%)	13 (81.3%)	15 (93.8%)	0.600
Nothing	2 (6.3%)	1 (6.3%)	1 (6.3%)	1.000
Other organs				
Thorax CT scan	10 (31.3%)	3 (18.8%)	7 (43.8%)	0.127
Lung ultrasound	5 (15.6%)	5 (31.3%)	0 (0%)	0.043
Abdomen CT scan	7 (21.9%)	2 (12.5%)	5 (31.3%)	0.394
Abdomen ultrasound	6 (18.8%)	3 (18.8%)	3 (18.8%)	1.000
Kidney NIRS	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	n/a
Kidney ultrasound	5 (15.6%)	1 (6.3%)	4 (25%)	0.333
Interleukins dosage	1 (3.1%)	0 (0%)	1 (6.3%)	1.000
Nothing	17 (53.1%)	9 (56.3%)	8 (50%)	0.723
Hemolysis				
Free hemoglobin	24 (75.0%)	11 (68.8%)	13 (81.3%)	0.658
Haptoglobin	9 (28.1%)	3 (18.8%)	6 (37.5%)	0.433
ECLS oxygenator pressure drop	17 (53.1%)	7 (43.8%)	10 (62.5%)	0.288
Other	4 (12.5%)	3 (18.8%)	1 (6.3%)	0.600
Thrombosis				
D-dimer	19 (59.4%)	10 (62.5%)	9 (56.3%)	0.719
LDH	18 (56.3%)	9 (56.3%)	9 (56.3%)	1.000
Fibrinogen	15 (46.9%)	7 (43.8%)	8 (50%)	0.723
Thrombin	5 (15.6%)	2 (12.5%)	3 (18.8%)	1.000
Lactate	9 (28.1%)	4 (25%)	5 (31.3%)	1.000
Direct inspection of circuitry	23 (71.9%)	10 (62.5%)	13 (81.3%)	0.433
ECLS oxygenator pressure drop	22 (68.8%)	11 (68.8%)	11 (68.8%)	1.000
Other	2 (6.3%)	1 (6.3%)	1 (6.3%)	1.000

Note: Data are reported as n (%) as a percentage excluding missing values). p values by chi squared indicate statistically significant differences between low-volume and high-volume centers.

Abbreviations: CT, computer tomography; ECLS, extracorporeal life support; EEG, electroencephalogram; LDH, lactate dehydrogenase; NIRS, near-infrared spectroscopy; PiCCO, pulse contour cardiac output.



Approval of the article, and Data collection. **Bas C.T. van Bussel:** Data analysis/interpretation, Drafting the article, Critical revision of the article, Approval of the article, and Statistics. **Maria Elena De Piero:** Concept/design, Data interpretation, Critical revision of the article, Approval of the article, and Data collection. **Ann-Kristin Schaefer, Khalil Jawad, Matteo Pozzi, Antonio Loforte, Nikolaos Kalampokas, Agne Jankuviene, Erwan Flecher, Xiaotong Hou, Jeroen J.H. Bunge, Kogulan Sriranjjan, Leonardo Salazar, Bart Meyns, Michael A Mazzeffi, Sacha Matteucci, Sandro Sponga, Kollengode Ramanathan, Alessandro Costetti, Francesco Formica, Pranya Sakiyalak, Antonio Fiore, Chistof Schmid, Giuseppe Maria Raffa, Roberto Castillo, I-wen Wang, Jae-Seung Jung, Tomas Grus, Vin Pellegrino, Giacomo Bianchi, Matteo Pettinari, Alessandro Barbone, José P. Garcia, Mariusz Kowalewski, Kiran Shekar, Glenn Whitman:** Data interpretation, Critical revision of the article, Approval of the article, and Data collection. **Roberto Lorusso:** Concept/design, Data interpretation, Critical revision of the article, Approval of the article, and Data collection.

AFFILIATIONS

- ¹Cardio-Thoracic Surgery Department, Cardiovascular Research Institute Maastricht, Maastricht, The Netherlands
- ²Department of Cardiac Surgery, Clinic of Internal Medicine, University of Szeged, Szeged, Hungary
- ³Department of Cardiac Surgery, University Hospitals Leuven, Leuven, Belgium
- ⁴Department of Intensive Care Medicine, Cardiovascular Research Institute, Maastricht, The Netherlands
- ⁵Division of Cardiac Surgery, Medical University of Vienna, Vienna, Austria
- ⁶Department of Cardiac Surgery, Leipzig Heart Center, Leipzig, Germany
- ⁷Department of Cardiac Surgery, Louis Pradel Cardiologic Hospital, Lyon, France
- ⁸Division of Cardiac Surgery, IRCCS Azienda Ospedaliero-Universitaria di Bologna, Bologna, Italy
- ⁹Department of Surgical Sciences, University of Turin, Turin, Italy
- ¹⁰Department of Cardiac Surgery, Medical Faculty, Heinrich Heine University, Duesseldorf, Germany
- ¹¹II Department of Anesthesiology, Centre of Anesthesia, Intensive Care and Pain management, Vilnius University Hospital Santariskiu Klinikos, Vilnius, Lithuania
- ¹²Division of Cardiothoracic and Vascular Surgery, Pontchaillou University Hospital, Rennes, France
- ¹³Center for Cardiac Intensive Care, Beijing Institute of Heart, Lung, and Blood Vessels Diseases, Beijing Anzhen Hospital, Capital Medical University, Beijing, China
- ¹⁴Department of Intensive Care Adults, Erasmus MC, Rotterdam, The Netherlands
- ¹⁵Department of Cardiology, Erasmus MC, Rotterdam, The Netherlands
- ¹⁶Department of Intensive Care Medicine, Center of Applied Medical Research, St Vincent's Hospital, Darlinghurst, New South Wales, Australia
- ¹⁷Department of Cardiology, Fundación Cardiovascular de Colombia, Bucaramanga, Colombia

- ¹⁸Department of Cardiovascular Sciences, University of Leuven, Leuven, Belgium
- ¹⁹Departments of Medicine and Surgery, University of Maryland, Baltimore, Maryland, USA
- ²⁰SOD Cardiocirurgia Ospedali Riuniti 'Umberto I - Lancisi - Salesi' Università Politecnica delle Marche, Ancona, Italy
- ²¹Division of Cardiac Surgery, Cardiothoracic Department, University Hospital of Udine, Udine, Italy
- ²²Cardiothoracic Intensive Care Unit, National University Heart Centre, National University Hospital, Singapore, Singapore
- ²³Cardiac Surgery Unit, Cardiac Thoracic and Vascular Department, Niguarda Hospital, Milan, Italy
- ²⁴Department of Medicine and Surgery, Cardiac Surgery Clinic, San Gerardo Hospital, University of Milano-Bicocca, Monza, Italy
- ²⁵Department of Medicine and Surgery, University of Parma, Parma, Italy
- ²⁶Cardiac Surgery Unit, University Hospital of Parma, Parma, Italy
- ²⁷Division of Cardiovascular and Thoracic Surgery, Department of Surgery, Faculty of Medicine Siriraj Hospital, Mahidol University, Bangkok, Thailand
- ²⁸Department of Cardio-Thoracic Surgery, University Hospital Henri-Mondor, Créteil, France
- ²⁹Department of Cardiothoracic Surgery, University Medical Center Regensburg, Regensburg, Germany
- ³⁰Department for the Treatment and Study of Cardiothoracic Diseases and Cardiothoracic Transplantation, IRCCS-ISMETT (Istituto Mediterraneo per i Trapianti e Terapie ad Alta Specializzazione), Palermo, Italy
- ³¹ECLS Unit, Departamento de Anestesia, Clínica Las Condes, Las Condes, Chile
- ³²Division of Cardiac Surgery, Memorial Healthcare System, Hollywood, Florida, USA
- ³³Department of Thoracic and Cardiovascular Surgery, Korea University College of Medicine, Seoul, South Korea
- ³⁴2nd Department of Cardiovascular Surgery, First Faculty of Medicine, Charles University and General University Hospital in Prague, Prague, Czech Republic
- ³⁵Intensive Care Unit, The Alfred Hospital, Melbourne, Victoria, Australia
- ³⁶Ospedale del Cuore Fondazione Toscana "G. Monasterio", Massa, Italy
- ³⁷Department of Cardiovascular Surgery, Ziekenhuis Oost-Limburg, Genk, Belgium
- ³⁸Cardiac Surgery Unit, IRCCS Humanitas Research Hospital, Rozzano, Italy
- ³⁹IU Health Advanced Heart & Lung Care, Indiana University Methodist Hospital, Indianapolis, Indiana, USA
- ⁴⁰Central Clinical Hospital of the Ministry of Interior, Centre of Postgraduate Medical Education, Warsaw, Poland
- ⁴¹Adult Intensive Care Services, The Prince Charles Hospital, Brisbane, Queensland, Australia
- ⁴²Cardiac Intensive Care Unit, Johns Hopkins Hospital, Baltimore, Maryland, USA

CONFLICT OF INTEREST STATEMENT

RL is consultant for Medtronic, Getinge, Abiomed, and LivaNova; Advisory Board Member of Eurosets, Hemocue, and Xenios (honoraria are paid as research funding). KR has received honorarium from Baxter and Fresenius for educational lectures not related to this topic.



DATA AVAILABILITY STATEMENT

Data will be shared on reasonable request with the corresponding author with the permission of all PELS-1 participating centers.

ORCID

Silvia Mariani <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-2238-1399>

Gabor Bari <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-4167-5736>

Justine M. Ravaux <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-8716-1290>

org/0000-0002-8716-1290

Bas C. T. van van Bussel <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-1621-7848>

org/0000-0003-1621-7848

Maria Elena De Piero <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-6696-8570>

org/0000-0002-6696-8570

Matteo Pozzi <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-6550-0872>

Antonio Loforte <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-3689-0477>

Jeroen J. H. Bunge <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-7897-4628>

org/0000-0002-7897-4628

Bart Meyns <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-8110-4009>

Sacha Matteucci <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-8854-0866>

org/0000-0002-8854-0866

Sandro Sponga <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-3417-1073>

Francesco Formica <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-3989-6134>

org/0000-0003-3989-6134

Antonio Fiore <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-7962-7276>

Giuseppe Maria Raffa <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-7141-2561>

org/0000-0001-7141-2561

I-wen Wang <https://orcid.org/0009-0006-3044-1300>

Jae-Seung Jung <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-8848-4112>

Tomas Grus <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-1355-7129>

Vin Pellegrino <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-3149-1936>

Giacomo Bianchi <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-4240-0099>

org/0000-0003-4240-0099

Matteo Pettinari <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-2611-9566>

Alessandro Barbone <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-5120-5802>

org/0000-0002-5120-5802

Mariusz Kowalewski <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-5478-3245>

org/0000-0002-5478-3245

Kiran Shekar <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-1239-7514>

Roberto Lorusso <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-1777-2045>

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SUPPORTING INFORMATION

Additional supporting information can be found online in the Supporting Information section at the end of this article.

How to cite this article: Mariani S, Bari G, Ravoux JM, van van Bussel BCT, De Piero ME, Schaefer A-K, et al. Heterogeneity in clinical practices for post-cardiotomy extracorporeal life support: A pilot survey from the PELS-1 multicenter study. *Artif. Organs.* 2023;00:1–13. <https://doi.org/10.1111/aor.14601>