Diagnosis & Management of Heparin-Induced Thrombocytopenia

An Educational Slide Set
American Society of Hematology 2018 Guidelines for Management of Venous Thromboembolism

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American Society of Hematology 2018 guidelines for management of venous thromboembolism: heparin-induced thrombocytopenia

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ASH Clinical Practice Guidelines on VTE

1. Prevention of VTE in Surgical Hospitalized Patients
2. Prevention of VTE in Medical Hospitalized Patients
3. Treatment of Acute VTE (DVT and PE)
4. Optimal Management of Anticoagulation Therapy
5. Prevention and Treatment of VTE in Patients with Cancer
6. Heparin-Induced Thrombocytopenia (HIT)
7. Thrombophilia
8. Pediatric VTE
9. VTE in the Context of Pregnancy
10. Diagnosis of VTE
How were these ASH guidelines developed?

**PANEL FORMATION**
Each guideline panel was formed following these key criteria:
- Balance of expertise (including disciplines beyond hematology, and patients)
- Close attention to minimization and management of conflicts of interest

**CLINICAL QUESTIONS**
10 to 20 clinically-relevant questions generated in PICO format (population, intervention, comparison, outcome)

**EVIDENCE SYNTHESIS**
Evidence summary generated for each PICO question via systematic review of health effects plus:
- Resource use
- Feasibility
- Acceptability
- Equity
- Patient values and preferences

Example: PICO question
“In patients with suspected HIT and an intermediate probability 4Ts score, should non-heparin anticoagulants be provided at therapeutic or prophylactic intensity?”

**MAKING RECOMMENDATIONS**
Recommendations made by guideline panel members based on evidence for all factors.
How patients and clinicians should use these recommendations

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>STRONG Recommendation (“The panel recommends...”)</th>
<th>CONDITIONAL Recommendation (“The panel suggests...”)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>For patients</strong></td>
<td>Most individuals would want the intervention.</td>
<td>A majority would want the intervention, but many would not.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>For clinicians</strong></td>
<td>Most individuals should receive the intervention.</td>
<td>Different choices will be appropriate for different patients, depending on their values and preferences. Use shared decision making.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Objectives

By the end of this module, you should be able to

1. Describe a diagnostic algorithm for patients with suspected heparin-induced thrombocytopenia (HIT)

2. Compare non-heparin anticoagulants for the treatment of acute HIT

3. Describe recommendations for managing anticoagulation for cardiac surgery in patients with a previous history of HIT
HIT is a profoundly hypercoagulable state

HIT is an iatrogenic disorder usually mediated by IgG antibodies that bind PF4-heparin complexes.

These antibodies cause a hypercoagulable state by activating platelets and procoagulant microparticles.

One-third to one-half of patients with HIT develop venous, arterial, or microvascular thrombosis.

Unfractionated heparin (UFH) associated with 10-fold increase in risk of HIT compared with LMWH.
Case 1: Medical Inpatient Admission

82 year old male

**Past Medical History:** Diabetes, hypertension, congestive heart failure

**Medications:** Metformin, ramipril, aspirin, furosemide

**Admitted to:** Internal Medicine ward with exacerbation of congestive heart failure, secondary to poor compliance with diet and diuretics

**Treated with:**
- Intravenous furosemide, nitroglycerin patch
- *Subcutaneous unfractionated heparin (UFH)* 5,000 IU Q12H started on admission date for DVT prophylaxis
Case 1: Medical Inpatient Admission

• **Bloodwork:** Day 0 is admission date
  • No fever, no other new medications. Normal blood pressure and heart rate. No signs or symptoms of venous thromboembolism.
  • No bleeding or bruising
  • No exposure to heparin in the 3 months prior to this admission

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Platelets (x $10^9$)</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Day 0</td>
<td>200</td>
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<tr>
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<td>+5</td>
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<tr>
<td>+6</td>
<td>150</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>+7</td>
<td>67</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
Considering your patient’s progressive thrombocytopenia and heparin exposure, you are concerned about the possibility of HIT. Which of the following most accurately describes his clinical probability of HIT?

A. Probably low probability, given overall clinical context
B. Probably high probability, given overall clinical context
C. Low probability, based on 4Ts score
D. Intermediate probability, based on 4Ts score
E. High probability, based on 4Ts score
Recommendation

In patients with suspected HIT, the panel recommends using the 4Ts score to estimate the probability of HIT rather than a gestalt approach (strong recommendation, moderate certainty)

Remarks:

• Missing or inaccurate information may lead to a faulty 4Ts score and inappropriate management
• Every effort should be made to obtain accurate and complete information necessary to calculate the 4Ts score. If key information is missing it may be prudent to err on the side of a higher 4Ts score.
• Reassess frequently. If there is a change in clinical picture, the 4Ts score should be recalculated.
The 4Ts Score: Clinical Probability Model

**Our patient:**
Platelets 67, > 50% drop.
Onset of drop on day +6.
No thrombosis.
No other cause for thrombocytopenia.

**HIGH probability:** 6-8 points

**INTERMEDIATE probability:** 4-5 points

**LOW probability:** ≤ 3 points

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Lo J Thromb Haemost 2006
ASH 2009 Clinical Guide
Your patient’s 4Ts score indicates a high clinical probability for HIT.

What diagnostic tests would you recommend at this point to confirm or exclude a diagnosis of HIT?

A. None; patient is high probability and diagnosis is confirmed
B. Immunoassay only (ex. HIT PF4/heparin ELISA)
C. Functional test only (ex. serotonin release assay)
D. Immunoassay, and if positive then perform functional test
Laboratory Diagnostic Testing for HIT

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>HIT Immunoassay Tests</th>
<th>Functional HIT Assays</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Detect the presence of anti-PF4/heparin antibodies</td>
<td>Assays that detect antibodies capable of binding and activating platelets</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• ELISA (detect IgG)</td>
<td>• Serotonin release assay (SRA)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• ELISA (detect polyspecific antibodies)</td>
<td>• Heparin-induced platelet activation test (HIPA)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• IgG-specific chemiluminescent assay</td>
<td>• Platelet aggregation test (PAT)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Particle gel immunoassay (PaGIA)</td>
<td>• Flow cytometry-based assays</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Latex agglutination assay</td>
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</table>
Recommendation

• If there is an intermediate- or high-probability 4Ts score, the panel recommends an immunoassay (strong recommendation, moderate certainty)

• If the immunoassay is positive and a functional assay is available (locally or as a send-out test to a reference laboratory), the panel suggests a functional assay (conditional recommendation, moderate certainty)

Remark:
• Likelihood of HIT increases with a higher 4Ts score and a higher ELISA OD (Optical Density)
A diagnostic algorithm of intermediate/high 4Ts score, followed by immunoassay, followed by functional testing results in:

- Few false negatives (missed HIT diagnoses), and
- Few or no false positives (incorrect diagnoses of HIT)

A functional assay may not be necessary for patients with high probability 4Ts score and very strongly positive immunoassay (ELISA value of > 2.0 OD units)
Your patient’s 4Ts score indicates high probability for HIT, and you have sent off the HIT ELISA (result is pending). Currently, your patient is receiving subcutaneous UFH 5,000 units twice daily.

What management strategy would you recommend while awaiting the HIT ELISA test results?

A. Continue heparin as the diagnosis of HIT is not confirmed
B. Stop heparin, wait for ELISA result
C. Stop heparin, start non-heparin anticoagulant at prophylactic intensity
D. Stop heparin, start non-heparin anticoagulant at therapeutic intensity
E. Stop heparin, transfuse platelets
Recommendation

In patients with suspected HIT and HIGH PROBABILITY 4Ts score:

- The panel recommends discontinuation of heparin and initiation of a non-heparin anticoagulant at therapeutic intensity (strong recommendation, moderate certainty)

In patients with suspected HIT and INTERMEDIATE PROBABILITY 4Ts score:

- The panel recommends discontinuation of heparin (strong recommendation, moderate certainty)
- The panel suggests initiation of non-heparin anticoagulant at prophylactic intensity if patient is at high bleeding risk, therapeutic intensity if patient not at high bleeding risk

In patients with INTERMEDIATE-risk 4Ts score who have high bleeding risk, there could be greater harm with therapeutic-intensity treatment (bleeding) with less potential benefit, because fewer such patients will have HIT
Therapeutic versus Prophylactic Intensity

• Non-heparin anticoagulant at therapeutic intensity is recommended over prophylactic intensity based on very low certainty of evidence
  • 3 small studies comparing therapeutic versus prophylactic anticoagulation with Danaparoid, Lepirudin, or Fondaparinux
  • Danaparoid showed 50% reduction in thrombosis with therapeutic dosing
  • No difference in outcomes with Lepirudin and Fondaparinux

• However, strong recommendation based on likely large magnitude of benefit (prevention of thrombosis)
Recommendation

In patients with HIT who are at average bleeding risk, the panel suggests against routine platelet transfusion (conditional recommendation, low certainty)

Remark:
• Platelet transfusion may be an option for patients with active bleeding or at high bleeding risk

Low certainty for beneficial or adverse effects of platelet transfusions in HIT
Mixed results from observational studies
→ One large database study (n = 6,332) suggested increase in arterial thrombotic events (adjusted odds ratio 3.4, 95% CI 1.2 to 9.5); other small cohort studies suggest no difference
Case 1: HIT Laboratory Test Results

• Your HIT immunoassay (ELISA) results are reported back that afternoon as optical density (OD) = 1.8 (NORMAL OD is < 0.4 at your lab).

• You ask your lab to send a sample to your local reference lab for a confirmatory functional assay (serotonin release assay).

• Your patient continues to be clinically stable with no symptoms or signs of pulmonary embolism, deep vein thrombosis, or arterial thrombosis.
Your patient has acute isolated HIT (without thrombosis), and platelet count is currently 67.

Which of the following non-heparin anticoagulants would NOT be appropriate at this point?

A. Argatroban

B. Warfarin (vitamin K antagonist)

C. Rivaroxaban

D. Fondaparinux

E. Danaparoid
Recommendation

In patients with **acute HIT or acute isolated HIT**, the panel recommends **against initiation of a VKA prior to platelet count recovery** (platelets ≥ 150 x 10⁹/L) (*strong recommendation, moderate certainty*)

Remarks:
- Also applies to those taking VKA at onset of acute HIT or acute isolated HIT
- In these patients, VKA would be discontinued and intravenous Vitamin K administered concomitant with initiation of a non-heparin anticoagulant

| In case series, early initiation of VKA associated: | Warfarin-induced skin necrosis | Venous limb gangrene | Recurrent thrombosis | Limb amputation |
Recommendation

• In patients with acute HIT complicated by thrombosis (HITT) or acute HIT without thrombosis (isolated HIT), the panel recommends discontinuation of heparin and initiation of a non-heparin anticoagulant (strong recommendation, moderate certainty)

• The panel suggests argatroban, bivalirudin, danaparoid, fondaparinux or a direct oral anticoagulant (DOAC)
Rationale for Anticoagulant Selection

- **Using a non-heparin anticoagulant** *(compared with stopping heparin +/- starting VKA)* associated with:
  - Fewer thrombotic events
  - BUT probably increase in risk of major bleeding

- **No direct comparisons of DOACs** vs. parenteral anticoagulants in HIT

- **Small numbers of patients treated with DOACs in case series**
  - Few thrombotic events *(rivaroxaban 1/46, apixaban 0/12, dabigatran 1/11)*
  - Benefits and harms of DOACs compare favorably to parenteral agents
## Rationale for Anticoagulant Selection

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Clinical Context</th>
<th>Implications for Anticoagulant Selection</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Critical illness</td>
<td>Argatroban or Bivalirudin (shorter duration of effect)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Increased bleeding risk</td>
<td>• If <em>moderate or severe hepatic dysfunction</em> (Childs-Pugh B or C), may be advisable to avoid argatroban or use a reduced dose</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Possible urgent procedures</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Life- or limb-threatening VTE (massive PE or venous limb gangrene)</td>
<td>Parenteral non-heparin anticoagulant preferred <em>(Argatroban, Bivalirudin, Danaparoid, Fondaparinux)</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• <em>Few such patients treated with DOACs</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clinically stable patients at average bleeding risk</td>
<td>Fondaparinux or <em>DOACs</em> reasonable</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Most published DOAC experience with Rivaroxaban</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anticoagulant</td>
<td>Dosing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-----------------------</td>
<td>------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
| **Argatroban** (direct thrombin inhibitor) IV | **Bolus:** None  
**Infusion:** STANDARD (2 mcg/kg/min), REDUCED DOSE for liver dysfunction, CHF, post-cardiac surgery (0.5-1.2 mcg/kg/min) | • Hepatobiliary clearance  
• Adjusted to aPTT 1.5-3.0 times baseline |
| **Bivalirudin** (direct thrombin inhibitor) IV | **Bolus:** None  
**Infusion:** STANDARD (0.15 mg/kg/hr); consider REDUCED DOSE for renal or liver dysfunction | • Enzymatic clearance  
• Adjusted to aPTT 1.5-2.5 times baseline |
| **Danaparoid** (indirect Xa inhibitor) IV | **Bolus:** Weight-based (1500-3750 units)  
**Infusion:** INITIAL ACCELERATED (400 units/hr x 4 hr, then 300 units/hr x 4 hr), then MAINTENANCE (150-200 units/hr) | • Renal clearance  
• Adjusted to anti-Xa activity 0.5-0.8 units/mL |
| **Fondaparinux** (indirect Xa inhibitor) SC | < 50 kg → 5 kg daily  
50-100 kg → 7.5 mg daily  
> 100 kg → 10 mg daily | • Renal clearance  
• No monitoring |
| **Rivaroxaban** (direct Xa inhibitor) PO | **HITT:** 15 mg twice daily x 3 weeks, then 20 mg daily  
**Isolated HIT:** 15 mg twice daily until platelet count recovery (≥ 150) | • Renal clearance  
• No monitoring |
Case 1: Treatment

• You decide to start your patient on rivaroxaban 15 mg PO BID and discontinue subcutaneous UFH.

• Over the next 8 days, your patient’s platelet count gradually rises from 67 to 165, and there is no evidence of bleeding.
Your patient has no symptoms of deep vein thrombosis or pulmonary embolism.

Which of the following tests would you suggest to screen for asymptomatic VTE?

A. There are no symptoms, so imaging is not indicated
B. Bilateral upper extremity compression ultrasound (US)
C. Bilateral lower extremity compression ultrasound (US)
D. CT pulmonary angiogram
E. Choices C & D
Recommendation

In patients with acute isolated HIT, the panel suggests:

- **Bilateral lower extremity compression US** to screen for asymptomatic proximal DVT (*conditional recommendation, very low certainty*)

- **Upper-extremity US** in patients with an upper extremity central venous catheter, in the limb with the catheter, to screen for asymptomatic DVT (*conditional recommendation, very low certainty*)
Case 1: HITT

• He is found to have an **occlusive left popliteal vein DVT**. He continues rivaroxaban 15 mg BID for 3 weeks, then takes rivaroxaban 20 mg daily for a total of 3 months.

• At 3 months, his platelet count is normal (205 x 10⁹/L) and he is at his baseline health status. You ask him to stop rivaroxaban.

• 15 months later, he returns to hospital with CHF again and is found to have severe aortic stenosis, with an aortic valve area of 0.6 cm². He requires a valve replacement.
Your patient with a history of HITT requires open heart surgery, with intraoperative anticoagulation while on pump. His platelet count is normal. You repeat his HIT ELISA and OD is 0.2 (NORMAL < 0.4).

What would you suggest that your patient receive for intraoperative anticoagulation?

A. Preoperative plasma exchange and intraoperative heparin
B. Intraoperative heparin only
C. Intraoperative heparin with an antiplatelet agent
D. Intraoperative bivalirudin only
E. Intraoperative bivalirudin with an antiplatelet agent
Five Phases of HIT

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Phase</th>
<th>Platelet count</th>
<th>Immunoassay</th>
<th>Functional assay</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Suspected HIT</td>
<td>Decreased</td>
<td>?</td>
<td>?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Acute HIT</td>
<td>Decreased</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>+</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Subacute HIT A</td>
<td>Normal</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>+</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Subacute HIT B</td>
<td>Normal</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>–</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Remote HIT</td>
<td>Normal</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>–</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
Recommendation

In patients with subacute HIT B or remote HIT who require cardiovascular surgery, the panel suggests intraoperative anticoagulation with heparin rather than treatment with a non-heparin anticoagulant, plasma exchange and heparin, or heparin combined with antiplatelet agent (conditional recommendation, very low certainty).

Remarks:

• Treatment with heparin would be limited to the intraoperative setting, and avoided before and after surgery.

• Postoperative platelet count monitoring for HIT may be necessary, even when postoperative heparin is not given, because “delayed-onset (autoimmune) HIT” beginning 5 to 10 days after intraoperative heparin exposure has been reported.
Case 2: Medical Inpatient Admission

82 year old male

**Past Medical History:** Diabetes, hypertension, congestive heart failure

**Medications:** Metformin, ramipril, aspirin, furosemide

**Admitted to:** Internal Medicine ward with exacerbation of congestive heart failure, secondary to poor compliance with diet and diuretics

**Treated with:**

- Intravenous furosemide, nitroglycerin patch
- *Subcutaneous unfractionated heparin (UFH)* 5,000 IU Q12H started on admission date for DVT prophylaxis
Case 2: Medical Inpatient Admission

- **Bloodwork:** Day 0 is admission date
- No fever, no other new medications. Normal blood pressure and heart rate. No signs or symptoms of venous thromboembolism
- No bruising or bleeding
- No exposures to heparin in the 3 months prior to this admission

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<td>+6</td>
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<td>+7</td>
<td>125</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
Considering your patient’s progressive thrombocytopenia and heparin exposure, you are concerned about the possibility of HIT.

Which of the following most accurately describes his clinical probability of HIT?

A. Probably low probability, given overall clinical context
B. Probably high probability, given overall clinical context
C. Low probability, based on 4Ts score
D. Intermediate probability, based on 4Ts score
E. High probability, based on 4Ts score
The 4Ts Score: Clinical Probability Model

**Our patient:**  
Platelets 125, 30-50% drop  
Drop at Day +2  
No thrombosis  
No other cause for thrombocytopenia

- **HIGH probability**: 6-8 points
- **INTERMEDIATE probability**: 4-5 points
- **LOW probability**: ≤ 3 points

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>4Ts</th>
<th>2 Points</th>
<th>1 Point</th>
<th>0 Points</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Thrombocytopenia</td>
<td>Platelet count fall &gt; 50% <strong>and</strong> platelet nadir ≥20 x 10⁹/L</td>
<td>Platelet count fall 30-50% <strong>or</strong> platelet nadir 10-19 x 10⁹/L</td>
<td>Platelet count fall &lt; 30% <strong>or</strong> platelet nadir &lt; 10 x 10⁹/L</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Timing of platelet count fall</td>
<td>Clear onset between days 5-14 <strong>or</strong> platelet fall ≤ 1 day (prior heparin exposure within 30 days)</td>
<td>Consistent with days 5-14 fall, but not clear (e.g., missing platelet counts) <strong>or</strong> onset after day 14 <strong>or</strong> fall ≤ 1 day (prior heparin exposure 30-100 days ago)</td>
<td>Platelet count fall ≤ 4 days without recent exposure</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thrombosis or other sequelae</td>
<td>New thrombosis (confirmed); skin necrosis at heparin injection sites; anaphylactoid reaction after IV heparin bolus; adrenal hemorrhage</td>
<td>Progressive or recurrent thrombosis; Non-necrotizing (erythematous) skin lesions; Suspected thrombosis (not confirmed)</td>
<td>None</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other causes of thrombocytopenia</td>
<td>None apparent</td>
<td>Possible</td>
<td>Definite</td>
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Lo J Thromb Haemost 2006  
ASH 2009 Clinical Guide
Your patient’s 4Ts score (3) indicates a **low clinical probability** for HIT.

What diagnostic tests would you recommend at this point to confirm or exclude a diagnosis of HIT?

A. None; patient is low probability and HIT is highly unlikely
B. Immunoassay only (ex. HIT PF4/heparin ELISA)
C. Functional test only (ex. serotonin release assay)
D. Immunoassay, and if positive then perform functional test
Recommendation

In patients with suspected HIT and low probability 4Ts score, the panel recommends **against HIT laboratory testing** (strong recommendation, moderate certainty)

Remark:
- HIT laboratory testing may be appropriate for patients with a low probability 4Ts score if there is uncertainty about the 4Ts score (for example, due to missing data)
Case 2: Resolution

• Given his low clinical probability, you elect not to send his HIT ELISA assay or functional assay. He continues to receive SC heparin.

• With treatment for CHF, his thrombocytopenia improves. He is discharged with a follow-up outpatient CBC to ensure resolution of thrombocytopenia.

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Additional Topics in these Guidelines

- Platelet count monitoring in patients receiving heparin
- Prophylactic IVC filter insertion in the setting of acute HIT
- Duration of non-heparin anticoagulant therapy in acute isolated HIT
- Anticoagulant management for percutaneous coronary intervention in patients with acute HIT or previous history of HIT
- Anticoagulant therapy for HIT in renal replacement therapy
Areas of Future Investigation

• Development of novel HIT immunoassays and functional assays
• Outcomes from treatment of acute HIT with DOACs
• Comparisons of DOACs and parenteral non-heparin anticoagulants
• Role of concomitant antiplatelet and anticoagulant therapy in HIT
• Impact of screening for asymptomatic DVT in acute isolated HIT
• Optimal duration of anticoagulation in acute isolated HIT
• Intraoperative anticoagulant management for cardiovascular surgery
In Summary: Back to our Objectives

1. Describe a diagnostic algorithm for patients with suspected heparin-induced thrombocytopenia (HIT)
   • 4Ts score, immunoassay, functional assay

2. Compare non-heparin anticoagulants for treatment of acute HIT
   • DOACs or parenteral options (Argatroban, Fondaparinux, Danaparoid, Bivalirudin)

3. Describe recommendations for managing anticoagulation for cardiac surgery in patients with a previous history of HIT
   • Determination of HIT clinical status with ELISA and/or functional assay helps to determine intraoperative anticoagulation plan
Acknowledgements

• ASH Guideline Panel team members
• Knowledge Synthesis team members
• McMaster University GRADE Centre
• Author of ASH VTE Slide Sets: Eric Tseng MD MScCH, University of Toronto and Paul Monagle MD MBBS MSc, University of Melbourne, Royal Children’s Hospital

See more about the ASH VTE guidelines at www.hematology.org/vte
Don’t miss our updated HIT Pocket Guide!