

Our mission statement

1. Definitions

Angiology or vascular medicine deals with diseases of the vessels (arteries, veins, lymphatic vessels, microcirculation) with reference to epidemiology, diagnostics, treatment and prevention. Patients with peripheral, mesenteric, renal or cerebral circulatory disorders, venous thromboembolism, varices, malformations as well as vasculitis are evaluated and treated as outpatients or inpatients, depending on the situation. For non-invasive diagnostics, the angiologist has at his disposal various methods for measuring arterial blood flow in the extremities, as well as various methods for determining vascular stiffness and endothelial function, and capillary microscopy. Duplex sonography certainly has the greatest significance in diagnostics and also as an adjuvant instrument for various therapies. Thanks to enormous technical developments, it is also of great importance in angiological research today. The therapeutic spectrum of angiology includes, in addition to the drug treatment of vascular diseases, mainly catheter-based intervention of arterial occlusive disease of all vascular territories and of the vena cava and iliac veins in cases of acute thrombosis or post-thrombotic occlusion with chronic venous stasis sequelae, but also of malformations and aneurysms. In the field of venous diseases, minimally invasive methods (endovenous, sclerotherapy, phlebectomy) are offered for varices. Furthermore, angiology deals with the prevention and treatment of venous thromboembolism, both medicinal and interventional.

2. Requirements and coverage in Switzerland

According to a recent epidemiological study from Germany (getABI Study), the prevalence of patients with peripheral arterial disease increases significantly with age and is about 20% in men over 65 years and 17% in women. Clinically manifest, first-time venous thromboembolism occurs in approximately 0.1% of the adult population per year. The incidence of venous thromboembolism increases exponentially with age. Thus, the incidence is less than 1 per 1000 person-years in <50-year-olds and more than 6 per 1000 person-years in >80-year-olds. In the Bonn Vein Study, the prevalence of chronic venous disease was found to be very high in the general population. Thus, 59% of subjects aged 18-79 years had either isolated telangiectasias or reticular varicosities and 14% had varicose veins. A good 17% had signs of chronic venous insufficiency with edema or already advanced skin changes including leg ulcers.

Like in all western countries, the aging of the population in Switzerland will increase, so that a further increase in the incidence and prevalence of arterial and venous diseases can be expected in the coming years. A European expert committee ("European Working Group on Medical Angiology") already estimated in 1992 the need for angiologists based on epidemiological data in the European population at 1-2/100,000 inhabitants (VASA, 1992; 21: 3-5).

In Switzerland, with more than 8 million inhabitants, the need is 80-160 practicing angiologists, with the universities having a role as clinical reference centers as well as in education, training and continuing education. The peripheral training centers at cantonal hospitals but also smaller hospitals or training practices fulfill the task of teaching "practical daily angiology" and exemplifying network activities. In 2022, according to FMH statistics, there were 220 angiologists (28% female physicians / in 2013, 24%), of which approximately 130 had their own private practice, with the others working in the hospital setting. However, there are large regional differences, so there is still a need for angiologists. The proven demand as well as the fascinating breadth makes this specialty very attractive for young physicians who want to do a specialized training and gives them an optimal perspective. All possibilities of medical work are possible in this specialty: science with research and habilitation or practical patient work, part-time work, invasive arterial – invasive venous – or conservative, employed in a hospital or group practice or self-employed.

3. Assessment

The clinical spectrum includes the diagnosis and therapy of all vascular diseases including lymphedema. The core competence of angiology is the non-invasive diagnosis of vascular pathologies and their less invasive therapies. Thanks to new techniques, there is an increasing trend towards outpatient therapies.

3.1 Continuing education and postgraduate training, talent development policy

Further training takes place at university and non-university hospitals and in some medical practices. The university training centers A offer the entire spectrum including scientific work, the training centers B a partial spectrum. The former are recognized for three, the latter for two years of training. However, continuing education must be mandatory at 2 different institutions and include at least 1 A year. Continuing education is under the supervision of the SGA and the USGG (see below). The Society of Specialists in Angiology is responsible for the junior strategy to meet the country's need for vascular specialists.

3.2 Current medical society: Swiss Society of Angiology (SSA)

The SSA was founded on October 29, 1961 in Basel with the aim of enhancing research and development of diagnostic and therapeutic methods in the field of vascular diseases and to represent Swiss angiology at national and international instances. It is a member of the FMH and the Swiss Medical Association and today has more than 200 active members.

It has an official scientific organ, the VASA (Journal of Vascular Disease) and is co-organizer of the annual meeting of the Union of Swiss Vascular Disease Societies

(USGG) an annual national interdisciplinary congress. The SSA is also a founding member of the European Society of Vascular Medicine (ESDM), which was established in 2013, is represented on its Board of Directors, and participates in its joint ESDM congresses. There is a long lasting, friendly and close cooperation with the German and Austrian Society of Angiology.

4. Cooperation with other specialties

In everyday clinical practice, there are numerous interfaces between angiology and the following specialties:

- Radiology for imaging examinations besides of ultrasound and endovascular therapy.
- Vascular surgery for the operative treatment of vascular patients.
- Dermatology, also within the scope of wound consultations.
- Neurology and Neuro-Radiology, especially for the diagnosis and treatment of cerebrovascular diseases.
- Orthopedics and Diabetology for the care of diabetic complications, especially the diabetic foot.
- Rheumatology and Immunology for the care of patients with vasculitides and collagenoses.
- Nephrology for the care of patients with vascular kidney disease and dialysis shunt.
- Hematology for the care of patients with thrombophilia.
- Pneumology for the care of patients with pulmonary arterial hypertension.
- Internal medicine, Cardiology and other specialties for interdisciplinary evaluation and treatment of polymorbid patients with multiple vascular disorders.
- Various specialties (dermatology, plastic and reconstructive surgery, interventional radiology, psychiatry, orthopedics) for diagnosis and interdisciplinary treatment of angiodysplasias.
- Swiss Society for Ultrasound in Medicine (SGUM) Vascular Section in the field of ultrasound diagnostics.
- Non-medical specialists (nutritional counseling, physiotherapy, wound expert, orthopedic technology)

The most important and most frequent collaboration in everyday life is with the specialists in vascular surgery and interventional radiology. Centers that treat their patients in an optimal interdisciplinary manner by the three specialists of angiology, radiology and vascular medicine can be certified as a vascular center USGG in a standardized procedure since 2013.

6. Research

Research in angiology includes venous thromboembolism (diagnosis, therapy and prevention), vascular imaging (duplex sonography), functional diagnostics, microcirculation, interventional vascular therapies and vascular biology. The numerous resulting publications bear witness to the international impact of Swiss angiology, underlined by the international congresses organized in Switzerland by angiologists in various fields of vascular medicine.

7. Future Outlook

Swiss angiology has reached its first mid-term goal. Over the last 50 years, it has established itself as an essential partner in the care of vascular patients. This led to the attainment of the specialty status within the FMH/SIWF. She has a recognized place in the international arena of vascular research. It remains its task to confirm its remarkable achievements by strengthening the collaboration with related but distinct specialties such as internal medicine, cardiology, interventional radiology, vascular surgery, neurology and dermatology, without losing its autonomy and identity.

These goals are to be achieved, among other things, by a continuous targeted planning of young scientists, both in the clinical and in the scientific sector, a promotion of comprehensive training, especially in clinical-internistic as well as invasive angiology, in order to be able to continue to play the indispensable holistic leadership role in the care of vascular patients, and by a high level of commitment in the political and professional-political field to strengthen the angiological positions.

Since 2018, a representative of the "young angiologists" has been a voting member of the board of the Swiss Society of Angiology. Taking into account the less invasive therapy and thus the attractiveness of angiology as a specialty, we have created the Interventional Angiology Certificate of Competence (SGA) with a regulated curriculum and final examination and are active partners with a seat on the continuing education committee for the interdisciplinary Certificate of Competence in Thermal Ablation of the Truncal Veins in Varicosis (USGG). Parts of the requirement program of both certificates are implemented in the adapted angiology curriculum as of January 1, 2022, in order to facilitate the acquisition of these additional certificates for our young angiologists and to make our specialty interdisciplinary attractive.

Furthermore, since 2022 the young angiologists are actively involved in the congress design and participation in workshops and lectures (partly together with experienced keynote speakers).

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