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Intersections and innovations in neurosurgery and vascular surgery: Advances, challenges, and future directions.

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Introduction

Neurosurgery and vascular surgery represent two of the most intricate and high-stakes disciplines in modern medicine. Neurosurgery focuses on the diagnosis, treatment, and rehabilitation of disorders affecting the brain, spinal cord, and peripheral nervous system, often requiring precision at the micrometer level. Vascular surgery, in contrast, is concerned with the treatment of diseases affecting the arteries, veins, and lymphatic vessels, encompassing both open surgical techniques and minimally invasive endovascular interventions. While these specialties have traditionally been regarded as distinct, their clinical intersections are increasingly apparent, particularly in the management of cerebrovascular diseases such as aneurysms, arteriovenous malformations, carotid artery disease, and stroke. The integration of advanced imaging, robotics, intraoperative navigation, and hybrid surgical techniques is blurring the lines between the two fields, offering patients improved outcomes while posing new technical and ethical challenges. This article explores the historical development, procedural overlaps, technological advancements, challenges, and future trends in the collaborative landscape of neurosurgery and vascular surgery [1].

Neurosurgery traces its roots back to ancient civilizations, with evidence of trepanation in prehistoric skulls. However, it emerged as a defined specialty in the late 19th and early 20th centuries with pioneers such as Harvey Cushing, who revolutionized brain tumor surgery, and Walter Dandy, who developed techniques for aneurysm clipping. Initially, neurosurgical procedures carried extremely high mortality rates due to the lack of advanced imaging, anesthesia, and sterile techniques. The advent of computed tomography (CT) in the 1970s, magnetic resonance imaging (MRI) in the 1980s, and the development of microsurgical instruments dramatically improved precision and patient survival.

Vascular surgery evolved in parallel, shaped by breakthroughs in understanding vascular anatomy and physiology. Alexis Carrel's development of vascular suturing techniques in the early 20th century earned him a Nobel Prize and set the stage for complex arterial repairs. The rise of endovascular techniques in the late 20th century, spearheaded by innovators like Charles Dotter and Andreas Grüntzig, transformed vascular surgery into a hybrid discipline blending catheter-based interventions with open procedures. Today, vascular surgery encompasses a wide range of interventions, from bypass grafting and endarterectomy to aneurysm repair and thrombectomy [2].

The most direct overlap between neurosurgery and vascular surgery lies in cerebrovascular disease management. Conditions such as intracranial aneurysms, arteriovenous malformations (AVMs), carotid artery stenosis, and ischemic stroke require expertise from both fields. Aneurysms can be treated via microsurgical clipping (a neurosurgical domain) or endovascular coiling (traditionally performed by neurointerventional radiologists, but increasingly by vascular surgeons trained in endovascular techniques). Advances in flow diversion stents and intrasaccular devices demand multidisciplinary collaboration. Carotid endarterectomy (CEA) has long been a vascular surgical procedure, but neurosurgeons also perform carotid artery stenting (CAS) in specialized centers. The choice between CEA and CAS depends on patient anatomy, comorbidities, and the surgeon's expertise.

Treatment may involve microsurgical resection (neurosurgery), embolization (endovascular), or stereotactic radiosurgery. Often, these are staged multimodal therapies coordinated between both specialties. Mechanical thrombectomy—now a standard of care in large vessel occlusion stroke—relies on catheter-based vascular access and navigation through cerebral vessels. This procedure has united the skill sets of endovascular neurosurgeons, interventional neuroradiologists, and vascular surgeons [3].

Modern neurosurgery relies heavily on high-magnification operating microscopes, enabling delicate dissection of neural and vascular structures with minimal collateral damage: Neuronavigation systems, intraoperative MRI, and indocyanine green (ICG) video angiography allow real-time visualization of vascular structures during surgery, reducing complications. Advancements in microcatheters, guidewires, balloon-assisted coiling, and stent retrievers have revolutionized the treatment of intracranial vascular pathologies. Robotic systems, though still in early adoption, promise to improve the precision of both neurosurgical and vascular interventions by filtering out human tremor and enabling minimally invasive access [4].

Hybrid ORs integrate advanced imaging (such as biplane angiography) with surgical facilities, enabling combined open and endovascular procedures in a single setting—critical for complex aneurysm repairs and AVM management. Neurosurgery and vascular surgery have different residency and fellowship pathways, making cross-training rare. The rise of endovascular neurosurgery has partially bridged this gap, but multidisciplinary competency remains challenging. Determining whether to pursue open surgery, endovascular intervention, or a hybrid approach can be complex, with decisions influenced by evolving evidence, patient preference, and institutional expertise.

Advanced hybrid ORs and robotic systems are expensive, and not all hospitals can afford them, leading to disparities in patient access to cutting-edge treatments. A 54-year-old patient presented with a giant MCA aneurysm. Initial endovascular attempts failed due to vessel tortuosity. A combined neurosurgical and vascular team performed a bypass graft followed by aneurysm trapping, resulting in complete occlusion without neurological deficit. A patient with symptomatic high-grade carotid stenosis and tandem intracranial stenosis underwent staged CEA followed by intracranial stenting by a neuroendovascular-trained vascular surgeon, highlighting the benefit of shared expertise.

AI is expected to play a major role in preoperative planning, intraoperative navigation, and postoperative monitoring, helping surgeons anticipate complications and optimize outcomes. Advances in genomics and molecular imaging may allow surgeons to predict vascular fragility and tailor interventions accordingly. Tissue-engineered grafts could reduce complications related to synthetic materials, benefiting both vascular and neurosurgical reconstructions. Telemedicine and remote surgical guidance may allow experienced surgeons to assist less specialized centers worldwide, expanding access to high-quality neurosurgical and vascular care. [5].

Conclusion

Neurosurgery and vascular surgery, once largely distinct specialties, are converging in the management of complex cerebrovascular and systemic vascular disorders. Technological advancements, particularly in imaging, robotics, and endovascular devices, are enabling unprecedented collaboration between these disciplines. While challenges remain in training, resource allocation, and procedural decision-making, the shared goal of improving patient outcomes is driving innovation. The future of these fields lies in continued integration, multidisciplinary teamwork, and the adoption of emerging technologies, ultimately ensuring that patients benefit from the most advanced, precise, and personalized surgical care possible.

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