

Prognostic Validation of the NINDS Common Data Elements for the Radiologic Reporting of Acute Traumatic Brain Injuries: A CENTER-TBI Study

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Abstract

The aim of this study is to investigate the prognostic value of using the National Institute of Neurological Disorders and Stroke (NINDS) standardized imaging-based pathoanatomic descriptors for the evaluation and reporting of acute traumatic brain injury (TBI) lesions. For a total of 3392 patients (2244 males and 1148 females, median age = 51 years) enrolled in the Collaborative European NeuroTrauma Effectiveness Research in Traumatic Brain Injury (CENTER-TBI) study, we extracted 96 Common Data Elements (CDEs) from the structured reports, spanning all three levels of pathoanatomic information (i.e., 20 “basic,” 60 “descriptive,” and 16 “advanced” CDE variables per patient). Six-month clinical outcome scores were dichotomized into favorable (Glasgow Outcome Scale Extended [GOS-E] = 5–8) versus unfavorable (GOS-E = 1–4). Regularized logistic regression models were constructed and compared using the optimism-corrected area under the curve (AUC). An abnormality was reported for the majority of patients (64.51%). In 79.11% of those patients, there was at least one coexisting pathoanatomic lesion or associated finding. An increase in lesion severity, laterality, and volume was associated with more unfavorable outcomes. Compared with the full set of pathoanatomic descriptors (i.e., all three categories of information), reporting “basic” CDE information provides at least equal discrimination between patients with favorable versus unfavorable outcome (AUC = 0.8121 vs. 0.8155, respectively). Addition of a selected subset of “descriptive” detail to the basic CDEs could improve outcome prediction (AUC = 0.8248). Addition of “advanced” or “emerging/exploratory” information had minimal prognostic value. Our results show that the NINDS standardized-imaging based pathoanatomic descriptors can be used in large-scale studies and provide important insights into acute TBI lesion patterns. When used in clinical predictive models, they can provide excellent discrimination between patients with favorable and unfavorable 6-month outcomes. If further validated, our findings could support the development of structured and itemized templates in routine clinical radiology.

Keywords: Common Data Elements; computed tomography; structured reporting; traumatic brain injury

Introduction

TRAUMATIC BRAIN INJURY (TBI) encompasses a vast spectrum of acute pathoanatomic lesions.^{1,2} Evaluation of these lesions on non-contrast computed tomography (NCCT) scans is often complex and challenging, and has been associated with significant observer error and variability.^{3,4} Moreover, substantial differences

exist in how lesions are reported and classified, even between expert neuroradiologists.³ Terminology also may differ between various medical disciplines, which makes it difficult to compare data from clinical trials or studies.²

In order to minimize these observer differences, to facilitate clinical effectiveness research, data sharing, data aggregation for registries, data interoperability, and the development and testing of

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computerized models, multiple instances have advocated a more standardized way to evaluate and report TBI lesions.^{2,5} One way to achieve this is by using consistent language in the form of Common Data Elements (CDEs). CDEs are logical units of data that are clearly conceptualized by definitions and can be used across different studies.

In 2010, a consortium of TBI experts from the National Institutes of Health and National Institute for Neurological Disorders and Stroke (NINDS) created a set of radiologic CDEs, which includes controlled terms and standardized definitions to characterize the different types of pathoanatomic lesions encountered on imaging of TBI patients.^{2,6} Information pertaining to these lesions can be classified into three levels of successive detail: 1) “basic” or “supplemental–highly recommended” information (presence vs. absence); 2) “descriptive” or “supplemental” information (location, size, extent, etc.); and 3) “advanced” or “emerging/exploratory” information (subtype, quantitative volumetry, etc.).^{2,6}

Several large-scale multi-center TBI studies have implemented this kind of standardized and structured CDE characterization.^{7,8} Research shows that good interobserver and intraobserver agreement can be achieved for the reporting of “basic” data elements.^{9,10} However, the value and prognostic importance of reporting these different pathoanatomic descriptors has not been extensively investigated. For example, the majority of “descriptive” and “advanced” data elements have not been fully validated or correlated with clinical outcome.⁶ A thorough prognostic validation is therefore urgently needed.

The main purpose of this study is to investigate the value of using the recommended NINDS standardized pathoanatomic terms and definitions for reporting acute TBI lesions. More specifically, we aim to explore acute NCCT lesion patterns and to investigate the prognostic value of the different pathoanatomic descriptors by building regularized logistic regression models that cover all successive levels of lesion information.

Methods

Study design, setting, and ethics statement

The Collaborative European NeuroTrauma Effectiveness Research in Traumatic Brain Injury (CENTER-TBI) project included a multi-center longitudinal and observational study (registered at ClinicalTrials.gov: NCT02210221).⁸ Patients with a clinical diagnosis of TBI and an indication for CT scanning were enrolled in three strata, differentiated by care path (i.e., emergency room [ER], admission, or intensive care unit [ICU] stratum). The study protocol was approved by the national and local ethics committees for each participating center. Informed consent, including use of data for other research purposes, was obtained in each subject according to local regulations. Patient data was de-identified and coded by means of a Global Unique Patient Identifier.

NCCT evaluation

A total of 4037 initial NCCT scans, from 55 different European centers, were forwarded to a centralized imaging repository and evaluated by a central review panel between January 2015 and December 2018. The review panel consisted of three protocol-trained reviewers (i.e., one expert neuroradiologist with over 25 years of experience and two trained neuroscientists with expertise in radiologic neuroanatomy). All readers were blinded to clinical patient information, except for gender, age, and care path stratum. Pathoanatomic data elements were evaluated and entered directly into digital custom-made multi-tiered structured templates (Fig. 1 for an example). Each synoptic report was generated as a draft by

one of the two neuroscientists, followed by a double-reading and validation by the expert neuroradiologist.

NINDS TBI CDEs

A total of 96 CDEs (20 “basic,” 60 “descriptive,” and 16 “advanced”) were extracted from the synoptic reports for this study. Three variables, that were not clearly defined in the NINDS CDEs, were evaluated extra and incorporated in the study as “descriptive” or “supplemental” pathoanatomic descriptors (i.e., total lesion volume, herniation, and pre-existing lesions). Three-dimensional skull reconstructions were made to evaluate fractures for each patient. Midline shift was measured using the A/2–B method,¹¹ and reported when higher than 5 mm. Volume estimations for hematomas and contusions were performed using the $A \times B \times C/2$ method, where A is the width, B is the depth, and C is the length of the lesion.¹² Pericontusional edema was included in the lesion measurements. For this study, where possible, location variables were simplified by collapsing them into unilateral or bilateral (Supplementary Tables S1–S3).

Outcome and final dataset

For 3392 of the 4037 reviewed patients (84%), the 6-month outcome (GOS-E) score was retrieved from the CENTER-TBI core dataset via the Neurobot[®] platform (International Neuroinformatics Coordinating Facility [INCF], version 1.2). Outcome scores were dichotomized (i.e., favorable outcome: GOS-E=5–8, unfavorable outcome: GOS-E=1–4), in accordance with previous studies.^{13,14} Venous sinus injury was rarely reported. Unfortunately, when reported, no outcome data was available. This resulted in 19 “basic” CDEs and a total of 95 predictor variables for regression analysis.

Statistical analysis

Descriptive statistics. Descriptive statistics were used to analyze patient demographics and lesion frequencies. Age between patients with favorable versus unfavorable outcome was compared using the Student’s t-test. Gender distribution was examined using the chi-squared test. Non-parametric Mann-Whitney U tests were performed to investigate differences in the median volume of lesions.

Regularized logistic regression. To reduce the complexity of our large set of variables and to have an optimal performing model with low variance, regularized logistic regression was used. Before building the models, continuous and categorical variables were scaled by dividing by two times the standard deviation.¹⁵ Two base ridge regression models were built: 1) one with the full set of CDEs (CDE_{full}) and 2) one with only “basic” or “supplemental–highly recommended” CDEs (CDE_{basic}). Ridge regression is a form of regularized regression where a penalty is imposed to the model for having too many variables. Regression coefficients of the variables that are less contributive are typically shrunk toward, but not equal to, zero. They are penalized but stay in the model. Least Absolute Shrinkage and Selection Operator (LASSO) regression is another regularized regression technique that shrinks coefficients of less contributing variables exactly to zero.¹⁶ In contrast to ridge regression, this technique reduces a large set of variables to only the important ones by performing variable or feature selection. The penalty that is given to the variables in regularized regression models is controlled by two hyperparameters: 1) lambda (λ), which accounts for the amount of regularization used in the model and 2) alpha (α), which accounts for the relative importance of the L1 (LASSO) and L2 (ridge) regularizations (i.e., ridge regression $\alpha=0$; LASSO regression $\alpha=1$). Addressing the expected multicollinearity in our data, we constructed four models with elastic net penalties, which uses both ridge and LASSO (i.e., $0 < \alpha < 1$) regularization.¹⁷ This shrinks some regression coefficients and others

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Select Lesion Type
 Skull Fracture

Skull Fracture

Basic Observation
 Absent

Descriptive

Frontal	Parietal	Temporal	Occipital
<input type="checkbox"/> Right	<input type="checkbox"/> Right	<input type="checkbox"/> Right	<input type="checkbox"/> Right
<input type="checkbox"/> Left	<input type="checkbox"/> Left	<input type="checkbox"/> Left	<input type="checkbox"/> Left

Skull Base

Right

Left

Anterior Fossa

Middle Fossa

Posterior Fossa

Advanced

Morphology

Linear

Depressed

Comminuted

Diastatic

Compound

Penetrating

Probable Fracture

Other

Pneumocephalus

Save Lesion

CENTER-TBI CENTER-TBI is a large European project that aims to improve the care for patients with Traumatic Brain Injury (TBI).

FIG. 1. Example of a structured and itemized template (i.e., for skull fracture), used for standardized evaluation and reporting in the Collaborative European NeuroTrauma Effectiveness Research in Traumatic Brain Injury (CENTER-TBI) study. The “basic” or “supplemental–highly recommended” tier refers to the presence or absence of an abnormality. The “descriptive” or “supplemental” tier gives more details about the location or volume. The “advanced” or “emerging/exploratory” tier gives extra information about the nature of the lesion or involves an emerging technique.

are set exactly to zero. Elastic net regression typically performs better than LASSO regression in the presence of highly correlated predictors¹⁷ (see Table 1 for model characteristics). For all models, hyperparameters were chosen using 10 × 10 cross-validation. The stability of the variable selection procedure and the optimism-corrected performance of the models was assessed in a 100-repetition bootstrap resampling procedure.¹⁸

Results

Descriptive statistics

Our dataset consisted of 2244 males (66.20%) and 1148 females (33.80%), with a median age of 51 (0–96 years). A total of 818 patients had unfavorable outcome (24%), for which no gender

TABLE 1. MODEL CHARACTERISTICS

#	Model	Input CDEs N(%)	Regression	Selection characteristics
1	CDE _{full}	95 (100%)	Ridge	Base model: Shrinkage of regression coefficients, no variable selection
2	CDE _{basic}	19 (20%)	Ridge	Base model: Shrinkage of regression coefficients, no variable selection
3	CDE _{basic'}	19 (20%)	Elastic Net	Subset selection on basic variables
4	CDE _{basic+descriptive}	79 (83%)	Elastic Net	Subset selection on descriptive variables, basic CDEs not penalized
5	CDE _{basic+advanced}	35 (37%)	Elastic Net	Subset selection on advanced variables, basic CDEs not penalized
6	CDE _{basic+descriptive+advanced}	95 (100%)	Elastic net	Subset selection on descriptive and advanced variables, basic CDEs not penalized

CDE, Common Data Element.

differences were found ($\chi^2=0.025$, $p=0.8755$). However, patients with unfavorable outcome were older (mean=58.1 vs. 46.4; $p<0.0001$). Of all patients, 691 were in the ER (20.4%), 1133 were admitted to the ward (33.4%) and 1568 were in the ICU (46%).

Pathoanatomic lesion frequency and co-occurrence

An abnormality was reported for the majority of patients (64.51%). If a skull fracture was present, patients had an intracranial abnormality in 92% of cases. The most common acute finding was traumatic subarachnoid hemorrhage (tSAH; 46.55%), followed by skull fracture (38.33%), contusion (33.31%), and acute subdural hematoma (SDH; 29.83%; Fig. 2). When an abnormality was found on the initial NCCT scan, in 79.11% of the cases there was at least one co-existing pathoanatomic lesion or associated finding. In many patients, the most common co-existing pathoanatomic lesion types were skull fractures with tSAH (28.50% of patients), contusions with tSAH (27.30% of patients), skull fractures and contusion (24.20% of patients), and acute SDH with tSAH (23.20% of patients; Fig. 3).

Pathoanatomic lesion laterality

Compared with unilateral lesions, bilateral lesions were associated more with unfavorable outcome (e.g., bilateral vs. unilateral acute subdural hematoma, 67.60% vs. 38%; bilateral vs. unilateral frontal contusion, 51.20% vs. 33.90%; bilateral vs. unilateral parietal contusion, 80.0% vs. 52.60%; bilateral vs. unilateral con-

tusion of the basal ganglia, 80.0% vs. 66.70%; and bilateral vs. unilateral axonal injury in the genu of the corpus callosum, 100.0% vs. 46.20%).

Pathoanatomic lesion severity

An increase in the amount of tSAH was associated with more unfavorable outcome (basal cistern trace: 51.50% vs. moderate: 61.90% vs. full: 83.70%; bilateral cortical trace: 43.30% vs. moderate 66.20% vs. full 81.60%). A higher degree of compression of the cisterns also was more associated with unfavorable outcome (compressed vs. obliterated suprasellar cistern: 60.60% vs. 85.40%, quadrigeminal cistern: 63.60% vs. 82.60%, ambient cistern: 57.20% vs. 83.10%, cerebellomedullary cistern: 71.80% vs. 87%).

Pathoanatomic lesion volumes

For specific lesion types, the median volumes were significantly higher in patients with unfavorable outcome than in patients with favorable outcome (i.e., total lesion volume: 43.14 vs. 8.59 mL, $p<0.0001$; acute subdural hematoma volume: 31.48 vs. 10.92 mL, $p<0.0001$; and contusion volume: median=11.420 vs. 3.005 mL, $p<0.0001$). The differences between other extra-axial bleedings were not significant (i.e., median epidural hematoma volume: 5.98 vs. 4.38 mL, $p=0.2417$; mixed subdural hematoma: 41.84 vs. 27.51 mL, $p=0.43$ extra-axial hematoma: 3.62 vs.

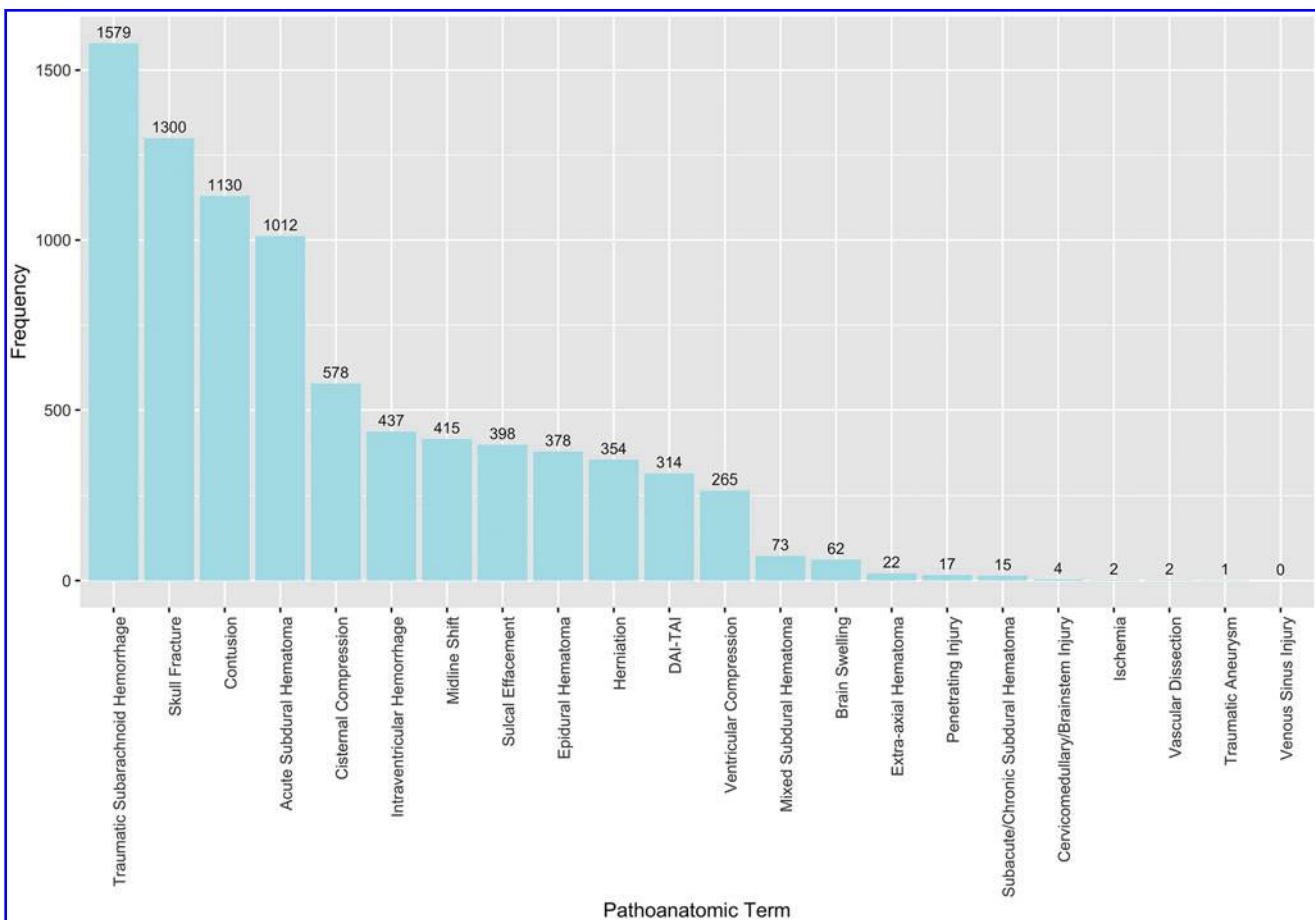


FIG. 2. Frequencies of different “basic” pathoanatomic lesion types encountered on the initial non-contrast computed tomography of a subset of 3392 patients, enrolled in the Collaborative European NeuroTrauma Effectiveness Research in Traumatic Brain Injury (CENTER-TBI) study.

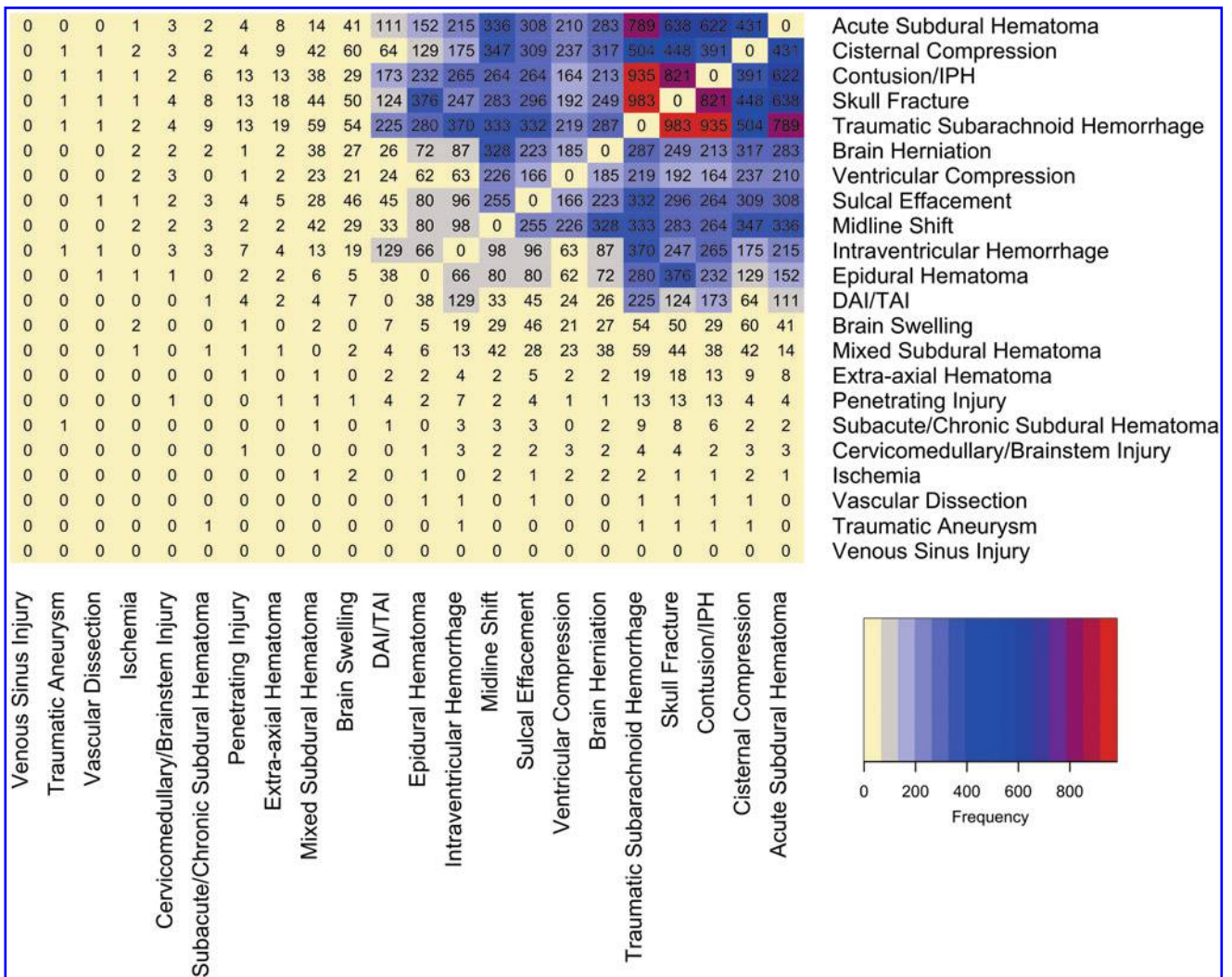


FIG. 3. Co-occurrence matrix of different “basic” pathoanatomic lesion types encountered on the initial non-contrast computed tomography of a subset of 3392 patients, enrolled in the Collaborative European NeuroTrauma Effectiveness Research in Traumatic Brain Injury (CENTER-TBI) study.

0.90 mL, $p=0.11$; and chronic/subacute subdural hematoma: 12.10 vs. 19.64 mL, $p=0.46$).

Regularized logistic regression

Base models. Table 2 shows the optimism-corrected area under the receiver operating characteristic curve and corresponding

confidence intervals for the different logistic regression models. Applying ridge regression to the full set of CDEs (CDE_{full}) yielded good discrimination between patients with favorable versus unfavorable outcome (area under the curve [AUC]=0.8121). Applying ridge regression to the “basic” CDEs only (CDE_{basic}), yielded a slightly higher discrimination (AUC=0.8155). Mean regression coefficients of the bootstrapped samples for the “basic” CDEs are shown in

TABLE 2. MODEL PERFORMANCE AND FREQUENCY OF SELECTED VARIABLES

#	Model	Regression	Input CDEs (N, Overall %)	Selected CDEs (N, Overall %)*	Optimism corrected AUROC (95% CI)
1	CDE_{full}	Ridge	95 (100%)	95 (100%)	0.8121 (0.8031–0.8179)
2	CDE_{basic}	Ridge	19 (20%)	19 (20%)	0.8155 (0.8086–0.8203)
3	CDE_{basic}^*	Elastic Net	19 (20%)	15 (16%)	0.8169 (0.8057–0.8182)
4	$CDE_{basic+descriptive}$	Elastic Net	79 (83%)	48 (51%)	0.8248 (0.8177–0.8361)
5	$CDE_{basic+advanced}$	Elastic Net	35 (37%)	28 (30%)	0.8179 (0.8107–0.8232)
6	$CDE_{basic+descriptive+advanced}$	Elastic net	95 (100%)	61 (64%)	0.8010 (0.7827–0.8161)

*Median selected CDEs during bootstrapping. For $CDE_{basic+descriptive}$, $CDE_{basic+advanced}$ and $CDE_{basic+descriptive+advanced}$, 19 basic CDEs were kept fixed in the models.

CDE, Common Data Element; AUROC, area under the receiver operating characteristic curve; CI, confidence interval.

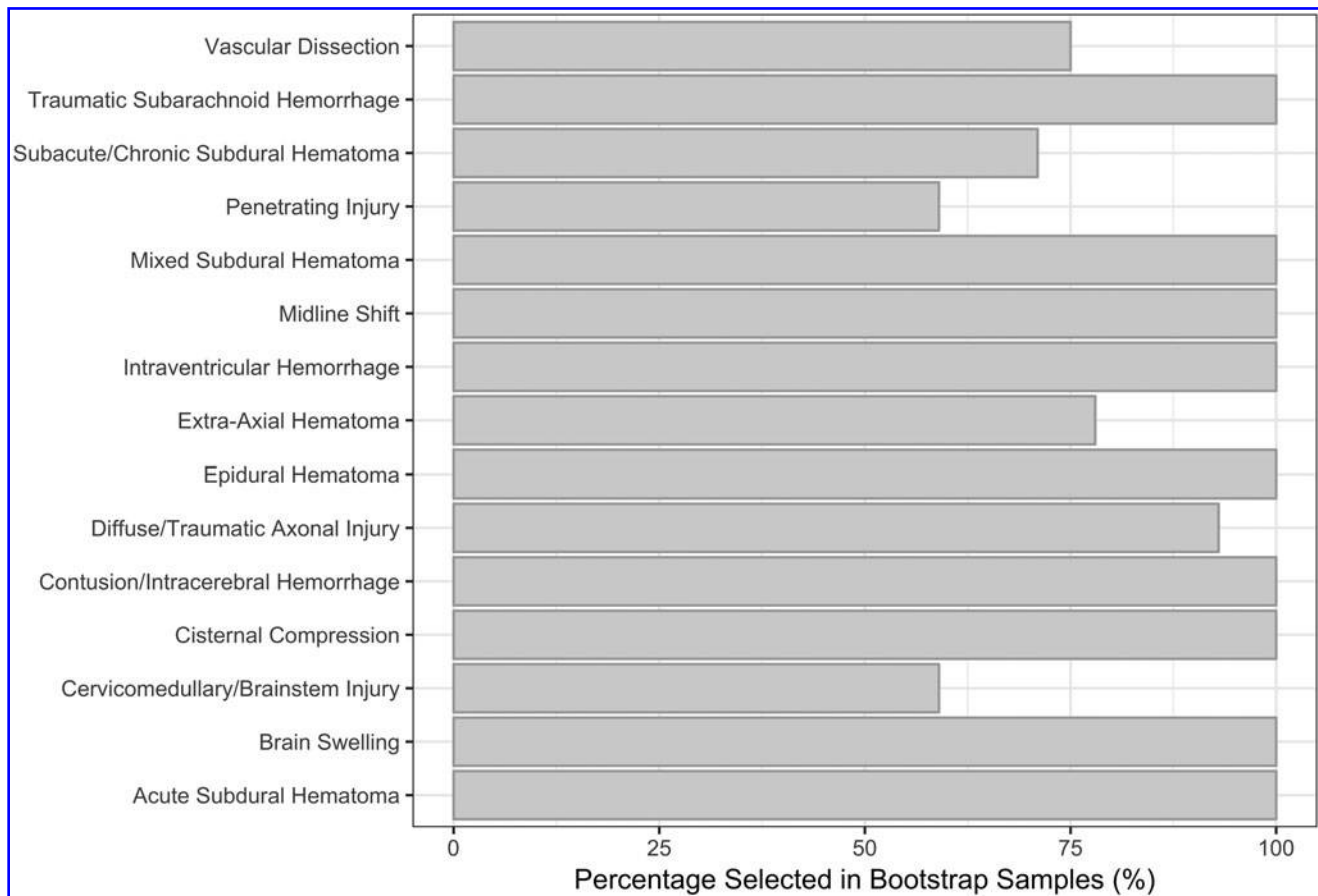


FIG. 4. Percentage of “basic” Common Data Elements (CDEs) selected during the optimism-corrected bootstrapping procedure for the CDE_{basic} model. Note: only variables are shown that were selected in at least 50% of the bootstrap samples.

Supplementary Table S4, indicating substantial prognostic importance of vascular injury, ischemia, brain swelling, subdural hematoma, intraventricular hemorrhage, cisternal compression and tSAH.

Variable selection and selection stability of elastic net models. Table 2 shows the total frequency of retained pathoanatomic variables in the different elastic net models. During bootstrapping of the CDE_{basic} model, a median of 15 out of 19 variables were selected in at least 50% of the bootstrap samples (Fig. 4). Traumatic aneurysm, ischemia, skull fracture, and ventricular compression were not commonly selected (i.e., <50%). Compared with the base models, the CDE_{basic} model slightly increased discrimination (Table 2).

The “basic” pathoanatomic data elements were further kept fixed in the elastic net models by not penalizing them and variable selection was performed only on the “descriptive” and “advanced” information. During bootstrapping of the CDE_{basic+descriptive} model, a median of 29 out of 61 “descriptive” variables were selected in at least 50% of the bootstrap samples (Table 2). For the CDE_{basic+descriptive+advanced} model, a median of 34 out of 61 “descriptive” variables were selected in at least 50% of the bootstrap samples (Table 2), of which 28 variables were co-selected in both models (Fig. 5A).

During bootstrapping of the CDE_{advanced} model, a median of nine of 16 variables were selected in at least 50% of the bootstrap samples. For the CDE_{basic+descriptive+advanced} model, a median of eight of 16 “advanced” variables were selected, of which all 8 were co-selected in both models (Fig. 5B). The CDE_{advanced} model slightly

increased the AUC, but adding “advanced” descriptors to the “basic” and “descriptive” information performed worse than the base models (Table 2). The best classification performance was achieved by the CDE_{basic+descriptive} model (Table 2). Table 3 shows the CDEs, with successive levels of detail, that were selected by the original models.

Discussion

Our study is the first large-scale effort to investigate the value of using NINDS standardized pathoanatomic terms and definitions for the evaluation and reporting of acute TBI lesions. Our findings show that this kind of structured CDE characterization, with multiple levels of lesion detail, can be used in large-scale studies and can provide important insights into common and uncommon lesion patterns. For instance, we confirm the expectation that most TBI patients with a lesion on the initial NCCT scan, have co-existing pathology,⁶ and that certain pathoanatomic entities tend to co-occur.

Our study also indicates that standardized imaging-based pathoanatomic descriptors can be used to build strong clinical predictive models. In particular, we illustrated that regularized logistic regression models, using acute NCCT-based pathoanatomic data elements as predictors, can provide excellent discrimination between patients with favorable and unfavorable outcomes after TBI. Interestingly, however, the greatest amount of prognostic information was provided by “supplemental–highly recommended” or “basic” data elements (i.e., presence or absence of lesions), which corroborates this set of pathoanatomic terms as essential imaging elements for clinical studies.

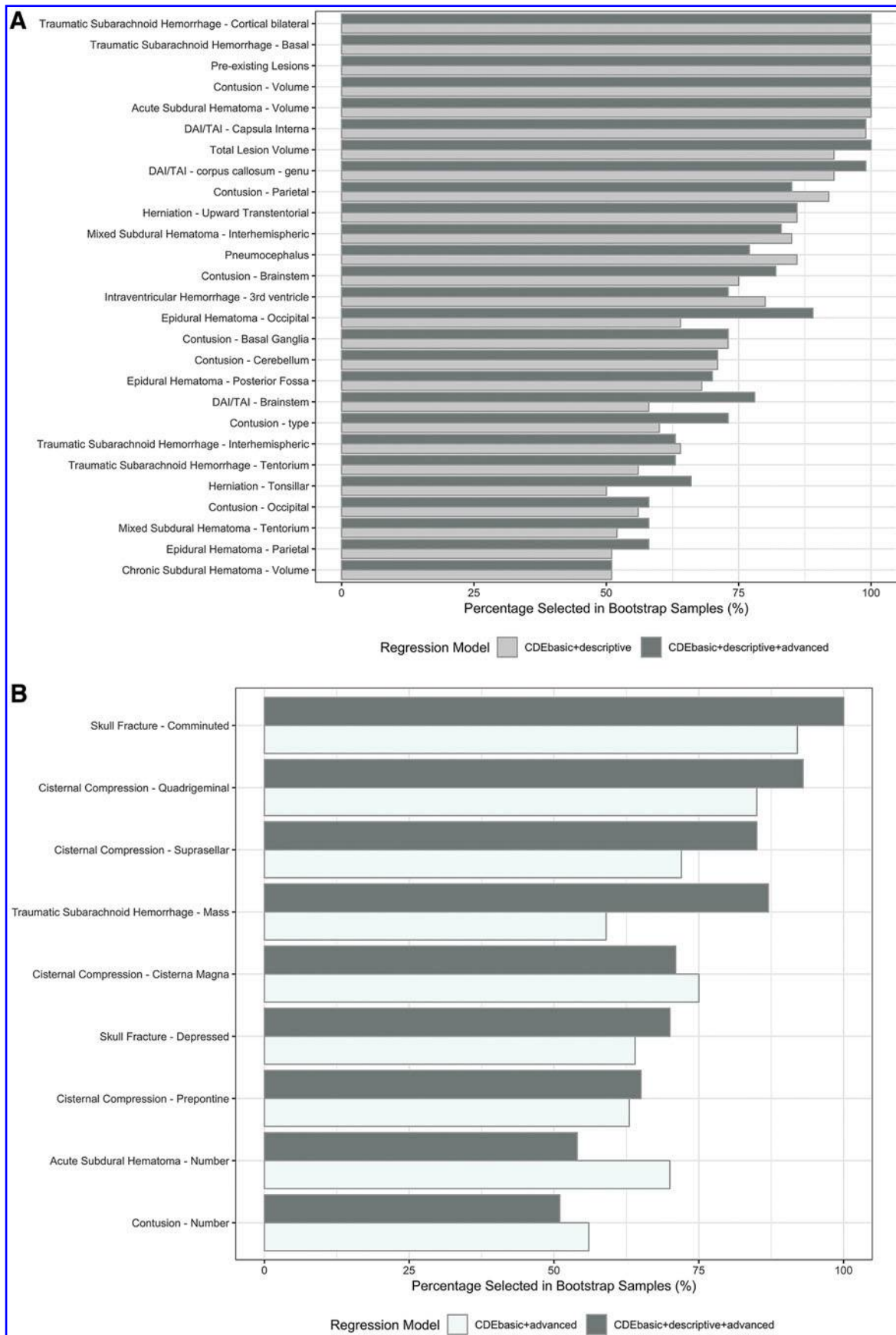


FIG. 5. (A) Percentage of “descriptive” variables selected during the optimism-corrected bootstrapping procedure for the Common Data Elements (CDE)_{basic+descriptive} and CDE_{basic+descriptive+advanced} models. (B) Percentage of “advanced” variables selected during the optimism-corrected bootstrapping procedure for the CDE_{basic+advanced} and the CDE_{basic+descriptive+advanced} models. Note: Only variables are shown that were selected in at least 50% of the bootstrap samples and were co-selected by both models.

TABLE 3. SELECTED CDE VARIABLES BY THE ORIGINAL ELASTIC NET REGRESSION MODELS

#	<i>Basic CDEs</i>		<i>Descriptive information</i>		<i>Advanced information</i>	
	CDE _{basic}	CDE _{basic} '	CDE _{basic+descriptive}	CDE _{basic+descriptive+advanced}	CDE _{basic+advanced}	CDE _{basic+descriptive+advanced}
1	Skull fracture	-	Pneumocephalus	-	Comminuted, depressed	Comminuted
2	Extra-axial hematoma	+	-	-	-	-
3	Epidural hematoma	+	Parietal, Occipital	-	-	-
4	Subdural hematoma, acute	+	Volume	Volume	Number	-
5	Subdural hematoma, subacute/chronic.	+	-	-	-	-
6	Subdural hematoma, mixed	+	Tentorium, Interhemispheric	Tentorium, Interhemispheric	-	-
7	Traumatic subarachnoid hemorrhage	+	Basal, cortical bilateral, Tentorium, Interhemispheric	Basal, cortical bilateral, Interhemispheric	Mass, size	Mass
8	Vascular dissection	+	-	-	-	-
9	Traumatic aneurysm	-	-	-	-	-
10	Venous sinus injury	-	-	-	-	-
11	MLS	+	-	-	-	-
12	Cisternal compression	+	-	-	Suprasellar, prepontine, quadrigeminal, cerebellomedullary	Suprasellar, prepontine, quadrigeminal
13	Ventricular Compression	-	-	-	-	-
14	Contusion	+	Type, parietal, occipital, basal ganglia, brainstem, volume	Type, parietal, basal ganglia, volume	Number	-
15	Intraventricular Hemorrhage	+	3rd ventricle	-	-	-
16	TAI/DAI	+	Corpus callosum (genu), Capsula interna, brainstem	Corpus callosum (genu), capsula interna	-	-
17	Penetrating Injuries	+	-	-	-	-
18	Cervicomedullary junction/Brainstem Injury	+	-	-	-	-
19	Ischemia	+	-	-	-	-
20	Brain Swelling	+	-	-	-	-
Extra	Herniation		Upward transtentorial	Upward transtentorial		
Extra	Incidental findings		Pre-existing lesions Total lesion volume	Pre-existing lesions Total lesion volume		

CDE, Common Data Element; MLS, midline shift.

Nevertheless, the best prognostic model in our study contained a subset of selected “descriptive” or “supplemental” data elements added to the “basic” information. More specifically, distinct locations, laterality, and volumes of certain pathoanatomic entities improved discrimination performance. For example, tSAH location, laterality and degree was consistently selected, together with the volume of acute subdural hematomas, contusions, and the presence of pre-existing lesions. Traumatic axonal injuries (i.e., capsula interna, genu of the corpus callosum and brainstem) location and, among others, the sum of all estimated lesion sizes (i.e., total lesion volume) also provided important prognostic information. These findings are very much in line with previous studies.^{19–24}

Interestingly, however, the majority of “descriptive” and “advanced” data elements were extraneous to predict good or bad outcome in our study. One possible explanation for this finding is that certain details are redundant for dichotomized GOS-E outcomes. For example, in many cases when cisternal compression is reported, multiple cisterns are compressed simultaneously, which may render this extra information redundant. However, these details might be relevant for other outcomes of interest.

The call for using standardized language in clinical radiology routine is also growing.²⁵ Unfortunately, radiologists still report TBI lesions using unstructured narrative free-text and are known to underreport volumes in clinical routine.²⁶ In addition, more than a

third of neurosurgeons solely rely on visual intuition for their surgical decision-making, despite volume-based surgical and patient management recommendations and guidelines.^{27,24}

Radiologists often argue that that structured reporting systems, using a standardized lexicon, might diminish efficiency, reduce the speed of reporting and cause too much distraction in a field with broad pathology. However, our study indicates that “basic” or “supplemental—highly recommended” pathoanatomic terms, as recommended by the NINDS working group, offer an essential framework of strong outcome predictors that can be incorporated in itemized structured reporting templates. Important details (i.e., volume and location) can be added, based on the clinical or prognostic question of the treatment team. Moreover, automatic quantification of lesion volume is already within reach.²⁸ Not only has this shown to improve prognostic models,²⁹ it could offer a more complete, objective and consistent evaluation of TBI lesions in radiology routine. More “advanced” or “emerging/exploratory” techniques are currently under validation. When incorporated into CDE-based reporting, they could help improve the standardization of clinical decision-making and treatment of acute TBI patients.

We acknowledge several limitations to our study. For example, proportional odds regression might offer some efficiency gains compared with conventional binary logistic regression with GOS-E.³⁰ However, regularized logistic regression with elastic net penalties is a statistically robust method for variable selection and was optimally suited for our study. Another limitation is that some variables (i.e., vascular injuries and venous sinus injury) were seldomly reported. These injuries are rare and their diagnosis is difficult to make based on NCCT imaging alone, without CT angiography or venography to confirm. In our study, CT angiograms were rarely uploaded. Unfortunately, of those reported, outcome data was not always present. In the future, an increased sample size of these data elements and the incorporation of other imaging modalities (magnetic resonance imaging [MRI], CT-angiography or venography, etc.) could reveal other important descriptors. Finally, our work focusses only on the initial NCCT. Certain secondary injuries (e.g., ischemia, swelling, etc.) are often only detected on a follow-up NCCT scan. We did not include or investigate CDEs that are related to follow-up (e.g., brain atrophy, lesion volume change) or more “advanced” and “emerging/exploratory” neuroimaging techniques (diffusion tensor imaging, etc.). Future studies might address these questions, in addition to investigating the value of using standardized imaging-based pathoanatomic data elements in predicting neuro-worsening, or changes in patient status, that might need specific interventions to improve clinical outcome.

Conclusion

Our study represents the first large-scale effort to scientifically vet the NINDS pathoanatomic terms and definitions for the reporting of acute TBI lesions. We show that these standardized-imaging based pathoanatomic descriptors can be used in large-scale studies and provide important insights into common and uncommon acute lesion patterns. When incorporated in clinical prediction models, specific standardized NCCT-based data elements can offer excellent discrimination between patients with favorable and unfavorable 6-month outcomes after TBI. Further validation of our findings can also support the development of consensus-based itemized templates for structured reporting of TBI lesions in clinical radiology routine.

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Supplementary Material

Supplementary Table S1
Supplementary Table S2
Supplementary Table S3
Supplementary Table S4

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