**Brachial plexus segmentation on ultrasound imaging with a deep learning model for neuraxial blockade**

**RESEARCH PROTOCOL**

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**Brachial plexus segmentation on ultrasound imaging with a deep learning model for neuraxial blockade**

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| **Independent expert(s)** | Not applicable |

**PROTOCOL SIGNATURE SHEET**

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**TABLE OF CONTENTS**

1. INTRODUCTION AND RATIONALE 8

2. OBJECTIVES 9

3. STUDY DESIGN 10

3.1 Population (base) 12

3.2 Inclusion criteria 12

3.3 Exclusion criteria 12

4. TREATMENT OF SUBJECTS 13

5. METHODS 14

5.1 Study parameters/endpoints 14

5.1.1 Main study parameter/endpoint 14

5.1.2 Secondary study parameters/endpoints (if applicable) 14

5.2 Study procedures 14

5.3 Withdrawal of individual subjects 14

5.4 Replacement of individual subjects after withdrawal 14

5.5 Follow-up of subjects withdrawn from treatment 14

6. STATISTICAL ANALYSIS 15

7. SAFETY REPORTING 16

7.1 Section 10 WMO event 16

7.2 AEs, SAEs and SUSARs 16

7.2.1 Adverse events (AEs) 16

7.2.2 Serious adverse events (SAEs) 16

7.3 Follow-up of adverse events 17

8. ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS 18

8.1 Regulation statement 18

8.2 Recruitment and consent 18

8.3 Compensation for injury 18

9. ADMINISTRATIVE ASPECTS, MONITORING AND PUBLICATION 19

9.1 Handling and storage of data and documents 19

9.2 Amendments 19

9.3 Annual progress report 19

9.4 End of study report 19

9.5 Public disclosure and publication policy 19

**LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS AND RELEVANT DEFINITIONS**

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **ABR** | **ABR form, General Assessment and Registration form, is the application form that is required for submission to the accredited Ethics Committee (In Dutch, ABR = Algemene Beoordeling en Registratie)** |
| **AE** | **Adverse Event** |
| **AR** | **Adverse Reaction** |
| **CCMO** | **Central Committee on Research Involving Human Subjects; in Dutch: Centrale Commissie Mensgebonden Onderzoek** |
| **CV** | **Curriculum Vitae** |
| **DSMB** | **Data Safety Monitoring Board** |
| **EU** | **European Union** |
| **GCP** | **Good Clinical Practice** |
| **GERD** | **Gastroesophageal reflux disease** |
| **IC** | **Informed Consent** |
| **METC** | **Medical research ethics committee (MREC); in Dutch: medisch ethische toetsing commissie (METC)** |
| **PPI** | **Protonpumpinhibitor(s)** |
| **(S)AE** | **(Serious) Adverse Event** |
| **Sponsor** | **The sponsor is the party that commissions the organisation or performance of the research, for example a pharmaceutical company, academic hospital, scientific organisation or investigator. A party that provides funding for a study but does not commission it is not regarded as the sponsor, but referred to as a subsidising party.** |
| **SUSAR** | **Suspected Unexpected Serious Adverse Reaction** |
| **Wbp** | **Personal Data Protection Act (in Dutch: Wet Bescherming Persoonsgevens)** |
| **WMO** | **Medical Research Involving Human Subjects Act (in Dutch: Wet Medisch-wetenschappelijk Onderzoek met Mensen** |

**SUMMARY**

**Rationale**

A failed nerve block not only results in a bad experience for the patient, it might even lead to damage to the patients’ health and in some cases complications could even threaten life.

It’s essential to recognise ultrasound anatomy when performing nerve blocks, however this may sometimes be hampered by patients’ habitus.

A possible solution might be the recent rise in artificial intelligence, especially deep learning. Nowadays, deep learning is being used in all walks of life. Facial recognition systems are being made, Google knows what objects are on your photos and manages to classify them correctly.

**Objective**

In this study we will attempt to create a dataset of ultrasound images depicting the brachial plexus and use this dataset to train an U-net model in order to identify the region of interest in these images, which may potentially be used in clinical practise.

Primary Objective

1. Construct a dataset of ultrasound images depicting the brachial plexus with manual image segmentation

Secondary Objective(s)

1. Train an U-net deep learning model using the dataset and teach it to properly identify the brachial plexus

**Study design**

We will prospectively collect 500 ultrasound images of 250 healthy adults by contacting colleagues in both hospitals, requesting their participation in this study. Ultrasound images of both the left and right brachial plexus will be obtained with an on-screen orientation where left equals lateral.

We will then feed the ultrasound images to the U-net model and set the manually marked masks (of the brachial plexus) as the output segmentation map to train the model.

**Study population**

Healthy adults with intact brachial plexus without previous surgery or radiotherapy in the area.

**Main study parameters/endpoints:**

Dataset creation

* 500 ultrasound images of the supraclavicular region with segmentation

U-net model creation

- Intersection over union per image (see Eq 1.)

- Model accuracy (see Eq 2.)

- Ultrasound images with brachial plexus segmented by the machine learning model

**Nature and extent of the burden and risks associated with participation, benefit and group relatedness:**

This study is associated with no risk to the subjects’ wellbeing.

# INTRODUCTION AND RATIONALE

Regional nerve block is a common anaesthesia technique used for surgery on the extremities. A successful block requires excellent anaesthesia experience including the ability to identify the appropriate nerves and surrounding tissues on ultrasound and good skills with a needle.

Previous studies have primarily focussed on the usage of ultrasound which has shown that ultrasound increases the success rate of regional nerve blocks. Some studies, however, have found that even with ultrasound assistance, a relatively high failure rate persists. This failure rate has largely been attributed to operators with limited experience and insufficient ultrasound skills.

A failed nerve block not only results in a bad experience for the patient, it might even lead to damage to the patients’ health and in some cases complications could even threaten life.

It’s essential to recognise ultrasound anatomy when performing nerve blocks, however this may sometimes be hampered by patients’ habitus.

A possible solution might be the recent rise in artificial intelligence, especially deep learning. Nowadays, deep learning is being used in all walks of life. Facial recognition systems are being made, Google knows what objects are on your photos and manages to classify them correctly.

Previously several studies have tried to apply this computer vision, a part of deep learning, on medical images. In 2016 a competition was held in recognizing the brachial nerve with limited success.

Some years later, in 2019, Huang et al attempted to train a U-net model with ultrasound images of the femoral nerve region and managed to successfully create images with segmentation applied.

# OBJECTIVES

In this study we will attempt to create a dataset of ultrasound images depicting the brachial plexus and use this dataset to train an U-net model in order to identify the region of interest in these images, which may potentially be used in clinical practise.

Primary Objective

1. Construct a dataset of ultrasound images depicting the brachial plexus with manual image segmentation

Secondary Objective(s)

1. Train an U-net deep learning model using the dataset and teach it to properly identify the brachial plexus

# STUDY DESIGN

We will prospectively collect 500 ultrasound images of 250 healthy adults by contacting colleagues in both hospitals, requesting their participation in this study. Ultrasound images of both the left and right brachial plexus will be obtained with an on-screen orientation where left equals lateral.

All images are saved on, and later extracted from the ultrasound machine as RGB images (which means each image has three colour channels). All images are then verified by three researchers to ensure that the brachial plexus is clearly identifiable.

Next the peripheral part of the ultrasound images not depicting tissue are removed and the image is then converted to grayscale (1 colour channel).

Experienced physicians will then use an image segmentation tool, for example ‘Labelme’, and annotate the brachial plexus. This annotation is then verified by the two other physicians independently as quality assurance.

Furthermore, to ensure anonymity, we confirm that there will be no identifiable information on the images nor in the (DICOM) metadata.

For the model training process, we selected the U-net model to train our data. U-net is a widely used network used for biomedical image segmentation. It’s architecture is shown below (Fig 1).



**Fig 1**. Simplified architecture of U-net. The vertical line and rectangles refer to the input, convolved and output images. The convolution kernels are summarized in the right bottom. Conv, convolution; ReLU, rectified linear unit.

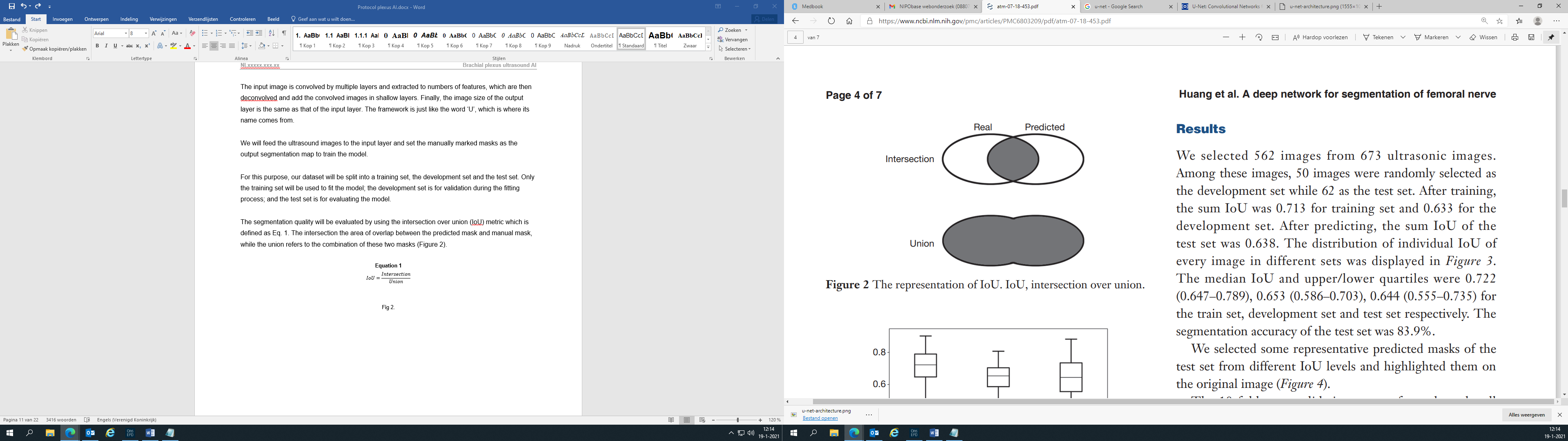
The input image is convolved by multiple layers and extracted to numbers of features, which are then deconvolved and added to the convolved images in shallow layers. Finally, the image size of the output layer is the same as that of the input layer. The framework is just like the word ‘U’, which is where its name comes from.

We will feed the ultrasound images to the input layer and set the manually marked masks as the output segmentation map to train the model.

For this purpose, our dataset will be split into a training set, the development set and the test set. Only the training set will be used to fit the model; the development set is for validation during the fitting process; and the test set is for evaluating the model.

The segmentation quality will be evaluated by using the intersection over union (IoU) metric which is defined as Eq. 1. The intersection the area of overlap between the predicted mask and manual mask, while the union refers to the combination of these two masks (Figure 2). We shall consider an IoU >0.5 to be an effective segmentation, leading to a model accuracy defined as Eq 2.

**Eq. 1 Eq. 2**



**Fig 2**. The representation of IoU. IoU, intersection over union.

STUDY POPULATION

## Population (base)

The patient population will consist of healthy adults without severe obesity and previous surgery or radiotherapy near the brachial plexus.

## Inclusion criteria

- Adult (age ≥ 18)

## Exclusion criteria

- BMI ≥ 30

- Previous surgery near the brachial plexus

- History of radiotherapy at or near the brachial plexus

- Inability to understand the Dutch language

- Inability to understand and/or fill in the informed consent

# TREATMENT OF SUBJECTS

After obtaining informed consent all test subjects will be examined using ultrasound in the supraclavicular region in order to identify the brachial plexus bilaterally.

# METHODS

## Study parameters/endpoints

### Main study parameter/endpoint

Dataset creation

* 500 ultrasound images of the supraclavicular region with segmentation

### Secondary study parameters/endpoints (if applicable)

U-net model creation

* Intersection over union per image (see Eq 1.)
* Model accuracy (see Eq 2.)
* Ultrasound images with brachial plexus segmented by the machine learning model

## Study procedures

Brachial plexus ultrasound

A Philips Sparq Ultrasound Machine with the L12-4 linear array transducer will be used to identify the brachial plexus in all patients. For this examination, the factory build-in preset “Nerve 0-4cm” preset will be used with an initial depth of 3,5cm with focus set on the second quarter from below. Extra care will be taken to ensure that the left side on the monitor corresponds with the lateral side of the patient. Depth and focus will be adjusted as needed.

Each test subject will be stored under a temporary (anonymous) ID which is randomly assigned by the ultrasound machine. For each subject, a static image of both the left and right brachial plexus will be saved.

## Withdrawal of individual subjects

Subjects can leave the study at any time for any reason if they wish to do so without any consequences. The investigator can decide to withdraw a subject from the study for urgent medical reasons.

## Replacement of individual subjects after withdrawal

Patients that have withdrawn will be replaced.

## Follow-up of subjects withdrawn from treatment

Not applicable.

# STATISTICAL ANALYSIS

Not applicable.

# SAFETY REPORTING

## Section 10 WMO event

In accordance to section 10, subsection 1, of the WMO, the investigator will inform the subjects and the reviewing accredited METC if anything occurs, on the basis of which it appears that the disadvantages of participation may be significantly greater than was foreseen in the research proposal. The study will be suspended pending further review by the accredited METC, except insofar as suspension would jeopardize the subjects’ health. The investigator will take care that all subjects are kept informed.

## AEs, SAEs and SUSARs

### Adverse events (AEs)

Adverse events are defined as any undesirable experience occurring to a subject during the study. All adverse events reported spontaneously by the subject or observed by the investiga­tor or his staff will be recorded.

### Serious adverse events (SAEs)

A serious adverse event is any untoward medical occurrence or effect that at any dose:

* results in death;
* is life threatening (at the time of the event);
* requires hospitalization or prolongation of existing inpatients’ hospitalization;
* results in persistent or significant disability or incapacity;
* is a congenital anomaly or birth defect;
* Any other important medical event that may not result in death, be life threatening, or require hospitalization, may be considered a serious adverse experience when, based upon appropriate medical judgment, the event may jeopardize the subject or may require an intervention to prevent one of the outcomes listed above.

When a serious adverse event is suspected, the local principal investigator will contact the coordinating investigator by telephone within 24 hours. The coordinating investigator will then record the SAE on the CRF, providing as much detailed information possible and relevant to the event.

The project leader or coordinating researcher will report the SAEs through the web portal *ToetsingOnline* to the accredited METC that approved the protocol, within 15 days after the sponsor has first knowledge of the serious adverse events.

SAEs that result in death or are life threatening should be reported expedited. The expedited reporting will occur not later than 7 days after the responsible investigator has first knowledge of the adverse event. This is for a preliminary report with another 8 days for completion of the report.

The following SAE’s do not require immediate reporting but will be reported once yearly in line-listings to the accredited METC that approved the protocol:

* Elective hospitalization for pre-existing conditions that have not been exacerbated by the trial treatment.
* A hospitalization, planned before the subject’s study participation.
* Social and/or convenience admission to a hospital.
* Disease recurrence during follow-up requiring hospitalization.

## Follow-up of adverse events

All AEs will be followed until they have abated, or until a stable situation has been reached. Depending on the event, follow up may require additional tests or medical procedures as indicated, and/or referral to the general physician or a medical specialist.

SAEs need to be reported till end of study within the Netherlands, as defined in the protocol

# ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

## Regulation statement

This trial will be conducted according to the principles of the Declaration of Helsinki (Fortaleza, October 2013) and in accordance with the Medical Research Involving Human Subjects Act (WMO). Study design and procedures will be carried out in accordance with the ICH Good Clinical Practise (GCP) guidelines.

## Recruitment and consent

The information offered to the patient will contain:

* A statement that the trial involves medical research.
* A full and fair explanation of the procedures to be followed.
* A full explanation of the nature, expected duration and purpose of the study.
* A description of any reasonable foreseeable risks or discomfort to the patient.
* A description of any benefits which may reasonably be expected.
* A statement that all patient data will be handled with care and confidentiality.
* A statement that participation is voluntary, that refusal to participate will involve no penalty or loss of benefits to which the patient is otherwise entitled, and that the patient may discontinue participation at any time without penalty or loss of benefits, in which case the patient will receive treatment with the same degree of care.
* Patients are given time to decide whether or not to participate in the study.

## Compensation for injury

Due to the design of the study, and neglectable risks associated with study participation, an exemption on the need for insurance is requested from the medical ethics committee.

# ADMINISTRATIVE ASPECTS, MONITORING AND PUBLICATION

## Handling and storage of data and documents

At the end of any day with subject inclusions, the local researcher is tasked with exporting the ultrasound image files to an USB stick. Upon export, these files can be considered anonymized due to the lack of identifying features in the ultrasound image and lack of identifiable metadata.

After exporting the images from the ultrasound machine, data is added to a secure network folder on the hospital network.

## Amendments

Amendments are changes made to the research after a favorable opinion by the accredited METC has been given. All amendments will be notified to the METC that gave a favorable opinion.

## Annual progress report

The sponsor/investigator will not submit a summary of the progress of the trial to the accredited METC once a year due to the nature of this study.

## End of study report

The investigator will not notify the accredited METC of the end of the study within a period of 8 weeks due to the nature of this study.

## Public disclosure and publication policy

The results of this research will be submitted for publication to peer-reviewed, preferably open-access, scientific journals.