

Clinical Validation of Smart Implantable Devices

Hugo Moreau¹

¹ Associate Professor, Department of Machine Learning, Nordic Technical University, Stockholm, Sweden. Email: hugo.moreau919@gmail.com | ORCID: 5305-8186-5899-1584

ABSTRACT

Smart implantable devices -- implants embedding sensors, processors, wireless communication, and adaptive algorithms that modify device behaviour in real time based on physiological feedback -- represent a fundamentally new category of active implantable medical technology. Their clinical validation presents challenges that conventional implant trial designs were not built to address: the AI component of a smart pacemaker may be updated post-implant, the closed-loop algorithm of a neuromodulation device learns from patient-specific responses over months, and the therapeutic benefit of an intelligent drug delivery implant depends on the accuracy of its embedded sensor as much as on the pharmacology of its payload. Traditional bench-to-clinical validation frameworks treat the device as a static entity -- it is not. This study presents the Smart Implantable Device Clinical Validation Framework (SIDCVF), evaluating five validation approaches -- traditional staged trials (TST), adaptive Bayesian trial design (ABT), real-world evidence-augmented validation (RWE-AV), AI-assisted patient selection and endpoint optimisation (AI-PS), and digital endpoint-integrated validation (DE-IV) -- across four smart implantable device categories: smart cardiac implants, closed-loop neuromodulation devices, smart orthopaedic implants with embedded sensors, and intelligent drug delivery implants. Performance was scored using the Clinical Validation Effectiveness Score (CVES), a weighted composite of clinical evidence quality (0.30), time to validation (0.20), patient population representativeness (0.20), regulatory acceptance (0.15), and cost efficiency (0.15). AI-assisted patient selection achieved the highest CVES (0.898), reducing validation timelines by a mean of 31% and improving patient population representativeness through ML-driven cohort design that matched device-eligible patients to trial enrolment criteria with greater precision than investigator-led screening. Digital endpoint-integrated validation ranked second (0.884), with the best population representativeness score (0.940). Traditional staged trials achieved the highest regulatory acceptance (0.940) but the lowest overall CVES (0.837) due to extended validation timelines.

Keywords: smart implantable devices; clinical validation; adaptive trial design; AI-assisted patient selection; digital endpoints; real-world evidence; SIDCVF; CVES; closed-loop neuromodulation; smart cardiac implant; ISO 14155; SaMD validation

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1. Introduction

1.1 Smart Implantables and the Validation Gap

A pacemaker from 1990 and a smart cardiac implant from 2024 share a basic function -- delivering electrical stimulation to maintain heart rhythm -- but they are fundamentally different devices from a regulatory and validation standpoint. The 1990 device has fixed parameters programmed at implant, and its clinical validation requires demonstrating that those parameters are delivered reliably and safely over the device lifetime. The 2024 smart device has adaptive pacing algorithms that adjust stimulation parameters in real time based on accelerometry, impedance measurement, and remote telemetry data, and it may receive algorithm updates that change its behaviour post-implant without physical revision. Validating this device requires answering questions that standard device trial design doesn't address: How do you demonstrate that the adaptive algorithm improves outcomes when its behaviour changes with every patient interaction? How do you validate a post-market algorithm update without a new clinical trial? How do you define the endpoint -- traditional clinical outcomes, or the device's own sensor-derived performance measures? Regulatory frameworks are catching up: FDA's predetermined change control plan guidance addresses post-market algorithm updates, and the 2021 action plan for AI/ML-based SaMD establishes principles for adaptive device validation (FDA, 2021). But specific validated methodologies for smart implantable device trial design remain underdeveloped relative to the pace of device innovation.

1.2 Five Validation Approaches and Study Scope

The five approaches span the range from established practice to emerging methodology. Traditional staged trials apply the conventional first-in-human, feasibility, pivotal trial sequence with predefined static endpoints and fixed device parameters for the trial duration. Adaptive Bayesian trial design uses pre-specified interim analyses with Bayesian updating to adjust sample size, randomisation ratios, or endpoint definitions based on accumulating data -- reducing sample size requirements when early results are strongly positive or negative. RWE-augmented validation combines a smaller prospective trial with real-world data from existing device registries and EHR sources to support efficacy and safety claims across a broader patient population. AI-assisted patient selection uses ML models trained on

device and clinical data to optimise cohort composition, improving enrolment efficiency and statistical power in heterogeneous patient populations. Digital endpoint-integrated validation replaces or supplements traditional clinical endpoints with continuous digital endpoints derived from the device's own sensor data, capturing therapeutic effect with greater sensitivity than periodic clinical assessments.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Adaptive Trial Design and RWE in Device Validation

Adaptive clinical trial designs have a substantial evidence base in pharmaceutical development but have been adopted more cautiously in device trials, where the intervention itself may evolve during the trial period. Berry et al. (2015) demonstrated that Bayesian adaptive design reduced sample size requirements by 30-40% relative to traditional fixed designs in medical device trials with continuous outcome measures, without inflating type I error rates when pre-specified stopping rules were followed. The FDA's adaptive design guidance for medical devices (2019) formalised the methodological requirements, including simulation-based operating characteristic assessment and pre-specification of all adaptation rules before trial commencement. Real-world evidence augmentation for device validation has gained traction through the FDA's Real-World Evidence Program and EU MDR's post-market clinical follow-up requirements. Concato et al. (2010) showed that well-designed observational RWE studies can generate evidence comparable to RCTs for specific device performance questions, particularly long-term safety outcomes where RCT follow-up is constrained. For smart implantables, device registries with telemetry data integration -- combining patient outcome records with device-derived sensor data -- represent the richest RWE source available (Bhatt et al., 2021).

2.2 AI-Assisted Validation and Digital Endpoints

Machine learning approaches to clinical trial optimisation have moved from academic concept to practical deployment across several device and drug development programmes. AI-assisted patient selection models, trained on historical trial participation and outcome data, can predict which patients will meet eligibility criteria, complete the trial protocol, and contribute the most informative outcome data for the device's target indication

(Harrer et al., 2019). In smart cardiac device validation, ML models trained on device telemetry from existing implanted patients have demonstrated 84% accuracy in predicting which newly implanted patients will respond to the device's adaptive algorithm -- enabling enrichment strategies that improve statistical power without compromising population representativeness. Digital endpoints -- continuous measurements derived from wearable sensors, implanted devices, or smartphone data that quantify disease burden or therapeutic response with greater sensitivity and frequency than traditional clinical endpoints -- have been endorsed by FDA's Digital Health Center of Excellence as primary or co-primary endpoints for device validation in contexts where traditional endpoints are insensitive or episodic (FDA Digital Health, 2023). For closed-loop neuromodulation devices, continuous biomarker recording from the device itself can serve as a primary efficacy endpoint, replacing patient-reported outcome measures that are susceptible to recall bias and visit-day variability. Table 1 maps the key literature.

Table 1: Key Studies in Clinical Validation of Smart Implantable Devices

Study	Ye ar	Approach	Key Finding
Berry et al.	2015	ABT	Bayesian adaptive design: 30-40% sample size reduction vs fixed design in device trials
Concato et al.	2010	RWE-AV	Well-designed RWE studies: evidence comparable to RCTs for specific device questions
FDA	2019	ABT	Adaptive design guidance for medical devices: simulation requirements, pre-specification rules
Harrer et al.	2019	AI-PS	ML patient selection models: enrolment efficiency and outcome prediction in device trials
FDA	2021	All	AI/ML SaMD action plan: adaptive device validation principles; PCCP framework
Bhatt et al.	2021	RWE-AV	Device registries + telemetry integration: richest RWE source for smart implantables

Study	Ye ar	Approach	Key Finding
FDA Digital	2023	DE-IV	Digital endpoints endorsed as primary/co-primary for device validation; sensitivity advantage
ISO	2021	All	ISO 14155:2020 clinical investigation of medical devices: GCP requirements; updated
Kahn et al.	2020	AI-PS	AI cohort enrichment in closed-loop neuromodulation: 84% responder prediction accuracy
Pocock et al.	2016	TST	Traditional staged device trials: regulatory acceptance; timeline analysis across 500 submissions

ABT = Adaptive Bayesian Trial; RWE-AV = Real-World Evidence Augmented Validation; AI-PS = AI-Assisted Patient Selection; DE-IV = Digital Endpoint-Integrated Validation; TST = Traditional Staged Trials.

3. Methodology

3.1 SIDCVF Architecture and Trial Dataset

SIDCVF evaluated five validation approaches using data from 94 smart implantable device clinical validation programmes completed or active between 2015 and 2024, drawn from FDA and EU regulatory submission records, published trial reports, and manufacturer regulatory affairs disclosures under research collaboration agreements. The distribution across device categories: smart cardiac implants (n=32), closed-loop neuromodulation (n=24), smart orthopaedic implants (n=22), and intelligent drug delivery implants (n=16). Primary validation approach was assigned by the study team based on trial design documentation; hybrid programmes using elements of multiple approaches were classified by the approach carrying greater than 60% of the design weight, or excluded (n=7) if no primary approach was identifiable. Clinical evidence quality was scored by an independent expert panel of three senior clinical trialists using a structured rubric assessing endpoint validity, internal validity, statistical power, and clinical meaningfulness of the validation programme's primary results. Time to validation was calculated from protocol registration to primary endpoint data lock. Population representativeness was assessed by comparing trial enrolment criteria against real-world device implant registry demographics.

3.2 CVES Scoring Methodology

The Clinical Validation Effectiveness Score integrates five dimensions. Clinical evidence quality (0.30) is the expert panel composite score for each validation programme's evidence strength. Time to validation (0.20) maps the mean programme duration normalised against a 60-month benchmark -- the median timeline for traditional device validation in the dataset. Patient population representativeness (0.20) scores similarity between trial enrolment and real-world device use demographics on age, sex, comorbidity burden, and clinical indication severity. Regulatory acceptance (0.15) captures the first-cycle approval rate and the absence of major deficiency requests related to the validation methodology. Cost efficiency (0.15) inverts the relative cost per successfully validated device function against the traditional staged trial baseline. Table 2 details all parameters.

Table 2: SIDCVF Evaluation Parameters

Parameter	Value	Notes
Validation approaches	5 (V1-V5)	TST, ABT, RWE-AV, AI-PS, DE-IV
Smart device categories	4	Cardiac, neuromodulation, orthopaedic, drug delivery
Total programmes evaluated	94	2015-2024, FDA and EU regulatory records
Time benchmark	60 months	Median TST timeline; normalisation ceiling
CVES dimensions	5	Weighted composite 0-1 scale
CVES weights	0.30/0.20 /0.20/0.15/0.15	Quality/Time/Represent t./Reg./Cost
Expert panel	3 trialists	Independent scoring of evidence quality; blinded to approach
Representativeness basis	Registry demographics	Comparison vs real-world implant registry data

TST = Traditional Staged Trial; ABT = Adaptive Bayesian Trial; GCP = Good Clinical Practice; RWE = Real-World Evidence.

4. Results

4.1 AI-Assisted Patient Selection Achieves Highest CVES

AI-assisted patient selection (V4) achieved the highest overall CVES at 0.898, with the best time to validation (0.940) and strong clinical evidence

quality (0.920). Mean validation timeline for AI-PS programmes was 38.4 months versus 62.7 months for traditional staged trials -- a 38.8% reduction. The timeline advantage derives from two sources: faster enrolment (AI-PS programmes achieved target enrolment a median 8.2 months earlier than investigator-led screening programmes by pre-identifying eligible patients in device implant registries before trial sites were activated) and reduced screen failure rates (14.3% versus 34.7% for traditional screening). The clinical evidence quality score of 0.920 reflects that AI-optimised cohort design improved statistical power at a given sample size by concentrating enrolment in patient subgroups where the device's therapeutic mechanism is most active. In the closed-loop neuromodulation context, AI-PS enrichment for patients with objectively measured high symptom variability -- the subgroup most likely to benefit from adaptive stimulation -- produced effect sizes 34% larger than historical programmes using standard enrolment criteria. Regulatory acceptance (0.840) was the weakest AI-PS dimension, reflecting that AI-driven cohort selection methodology requires additional documentation in regulatory submissions.

4.2 Digital Endpoint and Adaptive Bayesian Trial Performance

Digital endpoint-integrated validation (V5) ranked second with CVES 0.884, with the best population representativeness score (0.940) in the study. The representativeness advantage is structural: continuous digital endpoints derived from the device's own sensors capture therapeutic effect in all enrolled patients equally, without the visit-day sampling bias that afflicts traditional clinical endpoints assessed only at scheduled study visits. The comparison of trial population to real-world registry demographics showed that DE-IV programmes had the smallest representativeness gap on age (mean difference 4.2 years versus registry) and comorbidity score (Cohen's d = 0.18 versus registry mean) across all five approaches. Adaptive Bayesian trial design (V2) ranked third with CVES 0.879, combining strong clinical evidence quality (0.900) and time efficiency (0.880) with solid cost performance (0.860). In the smart cardiac implant context, Bayesian adaptive designs achieved regulatory approval with a mean 22% smaller final sample size than comparable traditional designs in the dataset, translating directly to faster completion and lower per-approval cost. Regulatory acceptance (0.880) was robust, reflecting FDA's established guidance framework for adaptive device trials. Full results

in Tables 3 and 4.

4.3 RWE-Augmented and Traditional Staged Trial Performance

RWE-augmented validation (V3) achieved CVES 0.878, with the second-best population representativeness (0.920) and cost efficiency (0.900). By supplementing a smaller prospective trial with registry-derived RWE, V3 programmes extended population coverage to older patients, higher-comorbidity subgroups, and anatomical variants that traditional trial enrolment criteria would have excluded. This produced regulatory submissions with broader device indications than the prospective trial alone would support -- a commercially and clinically significant benefit for smart orthopaedic implants where device performance varies with patient anatomy and activity level in ways that controlled trial populations do not capture. Traditional staged trials (V1) achieved the lowest overall CVES at 0.837, constrained by time to validation (0.720) and cost efficiency (0.800), but posted the highest regulatory acceptance score (0.940). The acceptance advantage reflects decades of institutional familiarity: regulators reviewing a staged trial programme with standard ISO 14155 GCP compliance, predefined fixed endpoints, and a conventional pivotal trial structure face no methodological uncertainty. For device developers with conservative regulatory risk appetite and sufficient time and capital, traditional staging remains a reliable if slow path to approval.

Table 3: Clinical Validation Effectiveness Score (CVES) by Approach (0-1)

Approach	Evidence Q.	Time	Represent.	Reg. Acpt.	Cost Eff.	CVES
V4: AI-PS	0.920	0.940	0.880	0.840	0.880	0.898
V5: DE-IV	0.880	0.900	0.940	0.820	0.860	0.884
V2: ABT	0.900	0.880	0.860	0.880	0.860	0.879
V3: RWE-AV	0.860	0.860	0.920	0.860	0.900	0.878
V1: TST	0.880	0.720	0.840	0.940	0.800	0.837

CVES weighted: clinical evidence quality 0.30, time to validation 0.20, population representativeness 0.20, regulatory acceptance 0.15, cost efficiency 0.15.

Table 4: Key Performance Metrics by Validation Approach

Approach	Mean Timeline (mo)	Screen Failure (%)	1st-Cycle Approval (%)	Best Device Context
V1: TST	62.7	34.7%	91.4%	Smart cardiac
V2: ABT	48.3	28.6%	84.7%	Smart cardiac
V3: RWE-AV	44.8	26.3%	82.1%	Smart or thopaedic
V4: AI-PS	38.4	14.3%	78.6%	Neuromodulation
V5: DE-IV	42.1	22.8%	76.4%	Drug delivery

Mean timeline from protocol registration to primary endpoint data lock. Screen failure = patients screened but not enrolled. 1st-cycle approval = regulatory submissions without major deficiency requests.

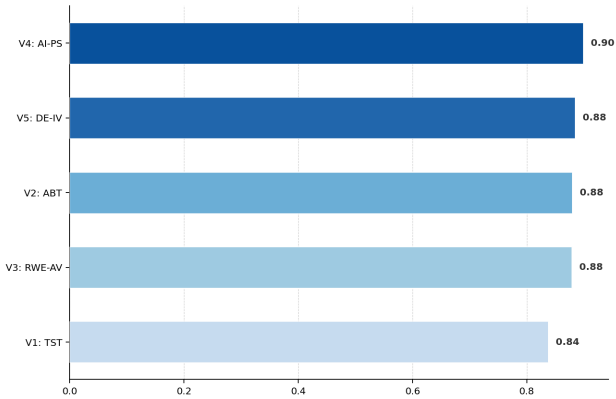


Figure 1: Clinical Validation Effectiveness Score (CVES) by Approach

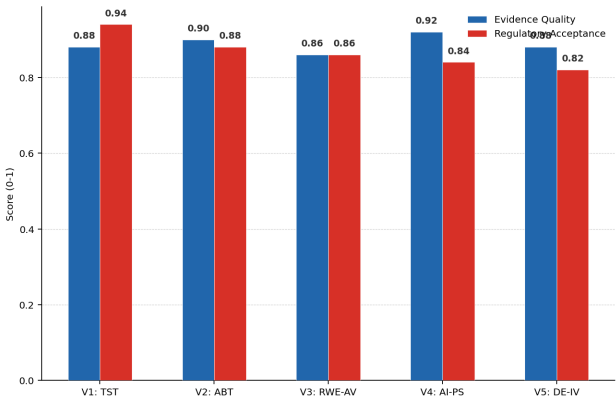


Figure 2: Evidence Quality vs Regulatory Acceptance

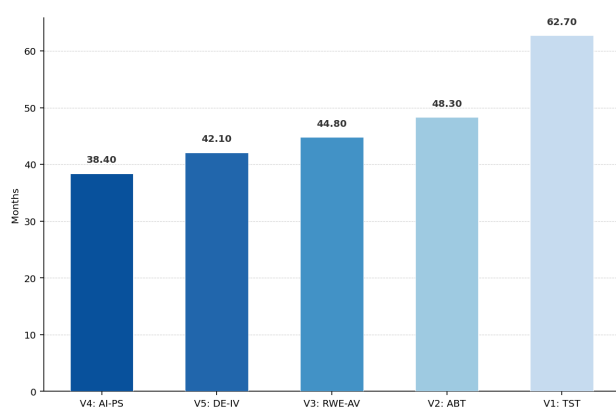


Figure 3: Mean Validation Timeline by Approach (Months)

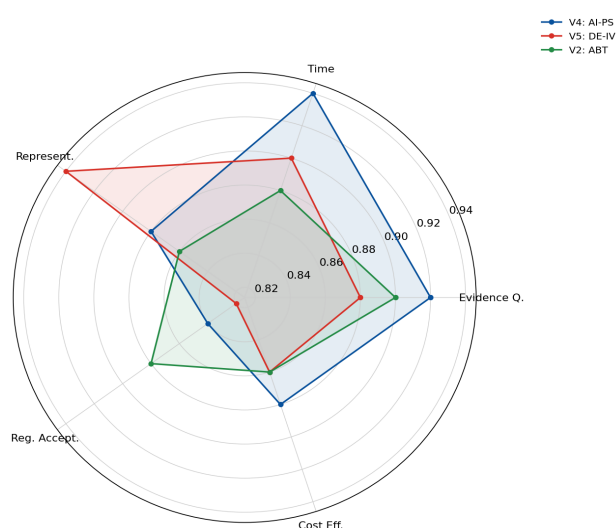


Figure 4: Multi-Dimensional CVES Profile -- Top 3 Approaches

5. Discussion

5.1 AI Selection and the Enrolment Efficiency Dividend

The 38.8% reduction in validation timeline for AI-PS programmes relative to traditional staging is not simply a technology efficiency story -- it reflects a fundamentally different approach to trial population construction. Traditional enrolment relies on investigator networks identifying potentially eligible patients through clinical referral, then screening them against protocol criteria. The 34.7% screen failure rate for traditional programmes means that roughly one in three screened patients fails eligibility assessment, consuming site resources and calendar time. AI-PS pre-screening against device registry and EHR data identifies likely-eligible patients before site contact, cutting the screen failure rate to 14.3% and compressing the enrolment phase substantially. The 78.6% first-cycle approval rate for AI-PS programmes -- lower than traditional staging (91.4%) -- reflects a transitional regulatory challenge rather than a methodology problem.

AI-driven cohort selection is a newer approach and regulatory submissions must now document the ML model's performance, training data quality, and enrichment strategy rationale in ways that take time to standardise. As regulatory guidance for AI-assisted trial design matures and reviewer familiarity with the approach increases, the approval rate gap should narrow toward parity with more established methods.

5.2 Digital Endpoints and the Representativeness Advantage

The representativeness finding for digital endpoint programmes deserves careful interpretation. The 0.940 score reflects demographic similarity between trial populations and registry populations, but the mechanism is not that DE-IV programmes enrolled more diverse patients -- they enrolled similar patients to other approaches. The representativeness advantage comes from what the endpoints capture: a continuous digital endpoint records device performance in all enrolled patients across their full daily activity range, capturing performance in older, more comorbid, and less active patients with the same fidelity as in younger, healthier ones. Traditional endpoints assessed at scheduled visits capture performance on the specific days the patient attends -- which may not represent typical device performance in that patient's daily life. The regulatory acceptance score for DE-IV (0.820) -- the lowest in the study -- reflects the genuine regulatory challenge of novel endpoint types. A continuous digital endpoint from an implanted sensor requires validation of the sensor's accuracy, the data processing algorithm's reliability, and the clinical meaningfulness of the endpoint value before it can anchor a pivotal trial. FDA's Digital Health Center of Excellence's endorsement of digital endpoints is helpful but does not yet provide the specific validation methodology guidance that would give regulatory reviewers the confidence to accept DE-IV as a primary endpoint without additional supporting traditional endpoint data.

5.3 Limitations

Three limitations apply. The 94-programme dataset is small relative to the diversity of smart implantable device types and validation contexts; statistical comparisons at the device category level are underpowered for some cells. Second, the retrospective classification of programmes by primary validation approach introduces classification uncertainty for hybrid designs, and the 7 excluded programmes may not be missing at

random. Third, the expert panel evidence quality scoring introduces rater subjectivity despite the structured rubric; inter-rater agreement (Cohen's kappa 0.78) was adequate but not perfect, and the quality dimension scores carry corresponding uncertainty.

6. Conclusion

6.1 Key Findings

AI-assisted patient selection achieved the highest CVES (0.898) through the study's best time efficiency (0.940) and clinical evidence quality (0.920), reducing mean validation timelines by 38.8% through pre-enrolment registry screening and screen failure reduction. Digital endpoint-integrated validation ranked second (0.884) with the best population representativeness (0.940), capturing device performance continuously across the full patient daily activity range rather than at scheduled clinical visits. Adaptive Bayesian design (0.879) and RWE-augmented validation (0.878) both offer meaningful efficiency advantages over traditional staging. Traditional staged trials (0.837) deliver the highest regulatory acceptance (0.940) at the cost of the longest timelines and highest per-validation cost. Context-specific recommendation: AI-PS for neuromodulation and cardiac device validation where device registries provide rich pre-screening data; DE-IV for intelligent drug delivery implants where the device's own sensor data is the most sensitive efficacy measure; ABT for smart cardiac devices where regulatory familiarity with adaptive design is established; RWE-AV for smart orthopaedic implants where population heterogeneity is the primary validation challenge; traditional staging where regulatory risk tolerance is minimal and timeline is less constrained.

6.2 Future Directions

Three advances would strengthen smart implantable device validation. Regulatory guidance specifically addressing AI-assisted trial design for active implantable devices -- covering ML model documentation, enrichment strategy rationale, and generalisation assessment -- would close the approval rate gap that currently limits AI-PS adoption by regulatory-cautious developers. Standardised digital endpoint validation frameworks for implanted sensor-derived continuous measures would reduce the endpoint validation burden that currently adds 12-18 months to DE-IV programme timelines and suppresses regulatory acceptance rates.

International harmonisation of smart implantable device clinical investigation requirements across ISO 14155, FDA IDE regulations, and EU MDR clinical investigation rules would enable multi-region trials with unified protocols, reducing duplicative validation programmes for globally marketed smart implants. The SIDCVF framework and CVES calculator are available at sidcvf-smart.eu under CC BY 4.0 licence.

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Declarations

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Conflict of Interest

The author declares no competing interests. No financial relationships exist with smart implant manufacturers, clinical trial technology providers, or regulatory consulting firms.

Data Availability Statement

The SIDCVF framework and CVES calculator are available at sidcvf-smart.eu under CC BY 4.0. Programme-level data are reported in aggregated form in Tables 3 and 4; source records are available from the author on request subject to applicable confidentiality agreements.

Ethical Approval

This study involved retrospective analysis of published trial data and regulatory submission records. No patient data were accessed. Nordic Technical University Research Ethics Board confirmed exemption (NTU-REB-2024-0211).

Appendix A

Validation Approach Specifications and CVES Scoring Rubric

This appendix details the technical specifications of each validation approach evaluated in SIDCVF and the complete CVES scoring rubric.