Pulmonary embolism from an attempt to unblock an occluded arterio-venous fistula

A patient died from pulmonary embolism following massage of soft clot from a newly occluded brachiocephalic AVF. Massage, and even karate chopping of fairly solid clotted fistulae and grafts, has been accepted here as a temporary way of restoring flow and buying time for angioplasty of the underlying stenosis, thereby avoiding surgical re-exploration. The reporting physician comments that this is probably not the first adverse event to occur and have also probably caused a pulmonary abscess by dislodging an infected thrombus, and may have had another patient die following pulmonary embolism, but this incident was the most dramatic.

Investigation
Reporting to hospital risk manager, and report form submitted to NPSA. Re-evaluation of this practice in the renal unit is being undertaken.

Please submit comments, solutions, and personal experience of similar incidents to:
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or contact Kate Beaumont, Response Lead, NPSA for further information about the National Patient Safety Agency and its work Catherine.beaumont@npsa.nhs.uk