Functional Outcome of Cemented Bipolar Hemiarthroplasty for Unstable Intertrochanteric Fractures of Femur in Elderly: An Indian Perspective

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Abstract

Introduction: The management of unstable intertrochanteric fracture in elderly patients poses the challenges of difficult anatomical reduction as well as the need for prolonged immobilization and delayed weight bearing to prevent implant failure secondary to poor bone quality. Because of prolonged immobilization, complications such as deep vein thrombosis, hypostatic pneumonia, pressure sores, dehydration, atelectasis, and metabolic disturbances may increase the morbidity and mortality. The purpose of this study was to evaluate the use of cemented bipolar hemiarthroplasty as the primary treatment in unstable intertrochanteric fractures in patients above 70 years of age.

Materials and Methods: This prospective study was conducted at Department of Orthopedics, B. J. Medical College and Sassoon General Hospital, Pune, Maharashtra, during July 2008 to May 2010. Records of total 34 patients with unstable intertrochanteric fractures treated under our hospital's Orthopedic Department were analyzed.

Results: Out of 34 patients enrolled in the study, 2 patients died during the study, hence the results of remaining 32 patients were analyzed with an average follow-up of 12 months. The average age of the patient was 79.35 years (range 70-94 years). The average surgery time was 82.53 min (range 62-110 min). The average intraoperative blood loss was 409.37 cc and average stay in the hospital was 14.53 days (range 5-21 days). At 1-year follow-up with help of Harris Hip Score, 8 patients (25%) were graded as excellent, 10 patients (31.25%) as good, 10 (31.25%) as fair, 2 (6.25%) as poor, and 2 (6.25%) as failed.

Conclusion: Treatment of unstable intertrochanteric fractures in elderly patients with cemented bipolar hemiarthroplasty results in reduced complications of prolonged immobilization and easy rehabilitation along with rapid return to functional level.

Key words: Cemented bipolar hemiarthroplasty, Complications, Unstable intertrochanteric fractures

INTRODUCTION

Intertrochanteric fractures of the femur are one of the most common fractures in elderly. Due to an increasing life span as well as higher incidence of concurrent osteoporosis in elderly, the incidence of these fractures is on the rise.¹

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Unstable intertorchanteric fractures in elderly patients are associated with high rates of morbidity and mortality due to the need for prolonged immobilization, although the results have improved with use of internal fixation.²

Due to combination of unstable fracture pattern and osteoporosis, early post-operative resumption of full weight bearing is difficult. In the elderly age group, it is also difficult for the patient to have adequate mobility due to problems such as cataract and other geriatric problems.

Of all the conditions that elderly people suffer from osteoporosis is a crucial factor that comes into play when the management of any fracture is undertaken. Nearly

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90% of the fractures are result of fall in elderly whose proximal femoral bone density is well below fracture threshold.³

Biological and biomechanical changes that occur in osteoporosis make the management of these fractures more difficult. Cortical bone becomes thin and cancellous bone has reduced bone mineral density with changes in the trabecular pattern. Thus, implant fixation is compromised. In case of comminuted fractures, fixation of fragments is difficult and the posteromedial void in this region makes the fracture very unstable and internal fixation with conventional implants such as dynamic hip screw or Jewett nail plate makes these implants more prone for cutting out.³

Newer modality of fixation of these fractures is by intramedullary nails such as the gamma nails or the proximal femoral nails.⁴ Even with these implants, immobilization is required for few days.

Management of such cases with primary cemented bipolar hemiarthroplasty permits early mobilization, thus avoiding most of the complications related to prolonged immobilization.⁵ The patient is mobilized early giving good rehabilitation and better options for dependence free living.

In the present study, we evaluated the use of cemented bipolar hemiarthroplasty as primary treatment in unstable intertrochanteric fractures in patients above 70 years of age.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

This prospective study was done is Sassoon Hospital and B. J. Medical College, Pune, under the guidelines of the Institutional Ethics Committee of the hospital. A total of 32 patients aged >70 years who were ambulatory before trauma who suffered fresh unilateral closed unstable intertrochanteric fractures and presenting to our tertiary hospital were considered. Patients having life-threatening head, abdominal, or chest injuries, those with mental illness, rheumatoid arthritis, or osteoarthritis of hip, burns, and/ or immunocompromised status were excluded from this study. Those patients with associated major lower limb injuries that would interfere with ambulation were also excluded from this study.

Anteroposterior X-ray of the pelvis with both hips and lateral view of the injured joint were taken (Figure 1). 100 mm scale views of the injured side taken for head size templating. Injured limb was kept in a Thomas splint with skin traction with adequate cotton padding to correct flexion deformity if any and to prevent overriding whenever present.

Pre-operative routine blood and urine investigations were done. Informed consent was obtained by the patient for both the surgical procedure and participation in the study. Pre-operative medical fitness was taken in all cases. The patients were operated on elective basis after overcoming the avoidable anesthetic risks. Surgery was performed spinal or general anesthesia. All the cases were operated by same surgical team using the standard posterolateral approach



Figure 1: (a and b) Pre-operative anteroposterior X-ray view of pelvis with both hips, and lateral view of affected hip in a 87-year-old male who sustained post-traumatic unstable intertrochanteric fracture



Figure 2: Exposure of fracture site for assessment of fracture and femoral head extraction using posterolateral approach to hip joint



Figure 3: Cementing and insertion of bipolar prosthesis

to hip under standard aseptic precautions. After assessing the fracture anatomy and extraction of the femoral head (Figure 2), appropriate size of cemented bipolar prosthesis was put (Figure 3). In cases of posteromedial communition, reconstruction using stainless steel wires, Kirschner wires, or ethibond sutures were done before insertion of the final bipolar prosthesis (Figure 4). Greater trochanteric comminution was also reconstructed in the same way as far as possible.

Post-operatively, adequate analgesics and antibiotics were given. Post-operative X-rays were done (Figure 5). Operated limb was kept in 30° abduction with help of pillow between both thighs. All the patients were allowed to sit in bed on the 2nd post-operative day and walking partial weight bearing with the help of walker from 3rd day. Full weight bearing was allowed gradually as per pain tolerance. Sutures were removed 2 weeks after surgery. Patients were followed up for 3, 6, 9 months,



Figure 4: Reconstruction of posteromedial comminution and greater trochanteric comminution (VL - vastus lateralis muscle, GT - greater trochanter, GM - gluteus medius muscle)



Figure 5: Post-operative X-ray after cemented bipolar hemiarthroplaty along with posteromedial and greater trochanteric reconstruction using stainless steel wires

and 1 year after surgery. Patients were assessed by both clinical and radiological examination at every follow-up. Clinical follow-up was based on Harris Hip Score with grading as <70 poor, 70-79 fair, 80-89 good, and 90-100 excellent.

RESULTS

The following observations were made from the data collected during the study.

Out of 34 patients, 2 patients could not complete the study as they expired due to causes unrelated to orthopedic surgery (one died due to myocardial infarction and another due to intracranial bleed following road traffic accident). Thus, a total study of 32 patients was carried out.

Of 32 patients, there were 8 (25%) females and 24 (75%) males. The youngest patient in our series was 70 years and the oldest was 94 years. The average age of the patient was 79.35 years. Thirty patients (93.75%) were community ambulatory pre-operatively, and 2 (5.88%) were only household ambulatory.

A total of 13 patients were operated within 3 days, 10 patients in 4-7 days, and 5 patients in 8-11 days. 4 required more than 11 days to get operated due to comorbidities.

The average surgery time was 82.53 min (range 68-110 min). The average intraoperative blood loss was 409.37cc (range 125-700 cc). Nine patients needed blood transfusion. The patients average stay in the hospital was 14.53 days (range 5-30 days). The patients started full weight bearing ambulation at an average of 5.1 days post-surgery (range 2-10 days).

One patient developed a stitch abscess which was drained under local anesthesia and healed uneventfully with 1 week of intravenous antibiotics and 1 week of oral antibiotics. One patient developed pneumonia which settled down in 3 weeks with intravenous antibiotics.

According to Harris Hip Score at 3 months (Table 1), 5 patients were graded as excellent, 11 patients as good, 12 patients as fair, 2 patient as poor, and 2 patients as failed.

At 1-year follow-up (Table 2), 8 patients were graded as excellent, 10 patients as good, 10 as fair, 2 as poor, and 2 as failed. 14 patients were walking without any aid, 14 patients had a limp and used a stick for walking, 2 patients used a walker, and 2 were wheelchair bound. The patient with

Table 1: Functional results at 3 months aftersurgery using Harris Hip Score.		
Results	Number of cases (%)	
Excellent	5 (15.625)	
Good	11 (34.375)	
Fair	12 (34.5)	
Poor	2 (6.25)	
Failed	2 (6.25)	

Table 2: Functional result 1 year after surgeryusing Harris Hip Score

Results	Number of cases (%)
Excellent	8 (25)
Good	10 (31.25)
Fair	10 (31.25)
Poor	2 (6.25)
Failed	2 (6.25)

a poor result had stitch abscess which was drained under local anesthesia and healed uneventfully with 1 week of intravenous antibiotics and 1 week of oral antibiotics. However, the patient had a limp while walking. Of the failed results, one patient was bed-ridden due to medical reasons and was wheelchair bound.

The second patient with the failed result was not cooperative with the physiotherapy program. The patient later had attempted squatting down causing dislocation of prosthesis but refused to take treatment. The patient eventually became wheelchair bound. No loosening or late infections occurred.

DISCUSSION

Literature concerning the treatment and results of comminuted intertrochnteric fracture of the hip are extensive. Massie, Hoit, Dimon and Hughston, Sarmeinto and Williams have done outstanding work in attempt to change an unstable intertrochanteric fracture into a stable one and fix it with a device until it heals.^{6,7} The reported complication rate for treating unstable intertrochanteric fractures ranges from 18% to 50%.^{6,7}

Despite the fact that union rates of as high as 100% have been published in cases of stable well-reduced fractures that had ideal implant placement, at the same time up to 56% of failure rate has been associated with comminuted, unstable fractures in osteoporotic elderly people with suboptimal fracture fixation.⁸

Intertrochanteric fractures in the elderly pose certain special problems. In this age group, the fracture configuration is generally comminuted, with extensive osteoporosis being present. Because of extensive osteoporosis and consequent poor mechanical property of bone, frequently inability to get good purchase of screws is encountered leading to subsequent implant failure. This leads to collapse and varus malposition of femoral head causing dysfunction of abductor mechanism manifesting as limping.9 As there are problems of correct and accurate placement of the implant and hold of the implant, hence prolonged immobilization for achieving bony union is advised. On the other hand, there is a need for rapid full weight-bearing mobilization of this group of patients as they are generally medically compromised due to age and associated diseases. In addition, these patients may not have adequate psychomotor skills required for graded and protected weight bearing. Hence, there are two conflicting requirements that need to be addressed to, in a balanced way.

We believe that treating unstable intertrochanteric fractures in a selected group of physiologically elderly group of patients with compromised general health and comminuted fractures in osteoporotic bone stock by primary hemiarthroplasty, the phase of fracture healing is essentially bypassed and a stable, mobile, relatively pain-free joint is immediately provided. This eliminates the need for prolonged immobilization and permits early ambulation. This gives an edge over internal fixation/osteosynthesis in which there is a dilemma between the need of early mobilization versus protection of the hip for bony union. And also, the fears of implant failures and cutouts are eliminated.

Essentially in these patients, there is a need for rapid painfree full weight-bearing mobilization to restore them to their pre-injury level of activity.

There are multiple studies showing good results with hemiarthroplasty. Liang *et al.*¹⁰ in their study of unstable intertrochanteric fractures concluded that it is an effective method to treat the unstable intertrochanteric fractures in elderly patients with hemiarthroplasty. The result was satisfactory. It can decrease the complications, reduce the mortality, improve the patients living quality, and reduce the burden of the patient's family.

Grimsrud *et al.*¹¹ studied 39 consecutive patients of unstable intertrochnteric fractures treated with a cemented bipolar hemiarthroplasty. They concluded that these fractures can be treated with a standard femoral stem and cerclage cabling of the trochanters. The technique allows safe early weight bearing on the injured hip and had a relatively low rate of complications.

Rodop *et al.*¹² in a study of primary bipolar hemiarthroplasty for unstable intertrochanteric fractures in 54 elderly patients obtained 17 excellent and 14 good results after 12 months according to the Harris Hip-Scoring system.

In a comparative study of cone hemiarthroplasty versus internal fixation, Kayali *et al.*¹³ reached the conclusion that clinical results of both groups were similar. Hemiarthroplasty patients were allowed full weight-bearing significantly earlier than the internal fixation patients. Cone hemiarthroplasty can be an alternative treatment for unstable intertrochanteric fractures in elderly patients so as to achieve earlier mobilization.

Stern and Goldstein¹⁴ reported on 29 patients with intertrochanteric fractures treated with Leinbach prosthesis with excellent results.

Proponents of conventional internal fixation have raised the issues of increased blood loss, infection, and dislocation associated with bipolar hemiarthroplasty. However, Stappaerts *et al.*15 found that there was no difference between two groups except high requirement of blood transfusion in replacement group. In our study, 9 out of 32 patients (28.12%) required intraoperative or post-operative blood transfusion. Haentjens *et al.*¹⁶ found a significant reduction in incidence of pressure sore and pneumonia in patients undergoing prosthesis replacement surgery. In our study, as our emphasis was on faster rehabilitation; out of total 32 patients, only 1 patient (3.12%) developed pressure sore and another 1 patient (3.12%) developed pneumonia.

The Indian perspective of using primary hemiarthroplasty as treatment option for unstable intertrochantric fractures is explored by few authors. Sancheti *et al.*¹⁷ concluded that hemiarthroplasty for unstable osteoporotic intertrochanteric fractures in elderly results in early ambulation and good functional results.

Kumar *et al.*¹⁸ also concluded that unstable intertrochanteric fractures in elderly are better treated with cemented hemiarthroplasty than with internal fixation. Besides an early ambulation and less hospital stay, cemented hemiarthroplasty provides stable and mobile hips. Weight bearing can be started earlier than in other methods of treatment, which prevents any recumbency related complications.

In our study, all the patients were initiated on static exercises on the first post-operative day for the glutei, hamstrings, and quadriceps and the patients were allowed full weight bearing by 2-10 days. In our study, early walking with full weight bearing was possible in most 32/34 patients with unstable intertrochanteric fracture who were previously mobile with or without support within 10 days of surgery.

In the present series, the incidence of complications was significantly less possibly due to faster rehabilitation.

CONCLUSION

Treatment of unstable intertrochanteric fractures in elderly patients with cemented bipolar hemiarthroplasty results in reduced complications of prolonged immobilization and easy rehabilitation along with a rapid return to functional level.

LIMITATIONS

The sample size is small and the follow-up is also relatively of shorter duration. Considering fewer Indian studies on the comparison of primary bipolar hemiarthroplasty *visa-vis* conventional internal fixation in elderly patients with unstable intertrochanteric fractures, a larger prospective study would be needed.

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