COMPARISON OF OPERATIVE FIXATION OF ACUTE SCAPHOID FRACTURES WITH THE NON-OPERATIVE TREATMENT: A PROSPECTIVE CLINICAL STUDY.

Dr. Kanhaiya Lal Gupta

Associate Professor, Department of Orthopedic, Jawaharlal Nehru Medical College, Bhagalpur, Bihar, India.

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Corresponding author: Dr. Kanhaiya Lal Gupta

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Abstracts

Aim: to compare the results of operative fixation of acute scaphoid fractures with those of non-operative treatment.

Materials & Method: This clinical study was carried out among 26 patients with an acute nondisplaced or minimally displaced scaphoid fracture reported to the OPD of Orthopedics, Jawaharlal Nehru Medical College and Hospital, Bhagalpur, Bihar, India. Patients were non-randomly allocated to group A (non-operative treatment with a cast) and group B (internal fixation with a Herbert screw).

Results: mean age of the study population was 41.23 years. Majority of them were male 21 (80.7%) and rest 5 (19.3%) were female. Out of total 26 scaphoid fracture cases 16 (61.5%) were of right hand and rest 10 (38.5%) found on the left hand. Most common location of fracture was waist fracture (B2) 10 cases. 100% union was observed in group B.

Conclusions: study proves that Cast treatment has the disadvantages of longer immobilisation time, joint stiffness, reduced grip strength, and longer time to return to work whereas the operative fixation of acute scaphoid fractures results in predictable satisfactory union rate and good functional outcome.

Keywords: cast treatment, scaphoid fracture

Introduction

Hand injuries are one of the commonest injuries seen in the accident and emergency department. Misdiagnosis of hand injuries may result in major morbidity from loss of hand function.ⁱ Hand and wrist injuries contribute a considerable workload for any individual accident and emergency department. There is little information concerning the prevalence of hand fractures and their distribution between the phalanges, metacarpals and carpal bones.ⁱⁱ

The carpal scaphoid bone is known to play a key role in the function of the wrist. Therefore, pathologic abnormalities of the scaphoid may have serious consequences. It is the most common carpal to get fractured. Over the years, identification and management of acute scaphoid fractures has generated substantial interest and research.

Scaphoid is very notorious to go into nonunion and ultimately avascular necrosis (AVN) which inevitably causes scaphoradial arthritis. Studies have shown that 95.6% of total scaphoid fractures are of waist and of these 63% are displaced fractures.ⁱⁱⁱ The incidence in Western countries is approximately five fractures in every 10,000 inhabitants.^{iv,v} However, because of the diagnostic challenge that scaphoid fractures often present, the exact incidence is unknown.

Diagnosis is difficult; classification is controversial & there is never ending debate on appropriate treatment protocol.

Once diagnosed, there is no clear-cut protocol for deciding appropriate treatment technique. There is controversy regarding whether to be managed conservatively or operatively. If managed conservatively, literature review revealed that there is insufficient evidence regarding position of immobilization (extension, ulnar deviation, neutral) or type of cast to be used in the nonoperative treatment of nondisplaced scaphoid fractures.^{vi} As a result of the complex three-dimensional anatomy of the scaphoid, there are also technical difficulties associated with the operative management.^{vii}

Hence the aim of the current study was to investigate the outcomes of operative treatment for minimally-displaced and undisplaced scaphoid fractures compared with non-operative treatment; furthermore, we also attempted to illuminate the limitations of current studies and to provide suggestions for further studies to evaluate these therapeutic options for the treatment of acute scaphoid fractures.

Material & Methods

Study Design

A Prospective non-randomized clinical study was conducted for the period of Oct 2018 to Oct 2019 among patients with a suspected or confirmed injury of the Scaphoid who had attended Out Patient Department of Orthopedics, Jawaharlal Nehru Medical College and Hospital, Bhagalpur, Bihar, India.

The study protocol was reviewed by the Ethical Committee of the Hospital and granted ethical clearance. After explaining the purpose and details of the study, a written informed consent was obtained.

Inclusion criteria

- Patient who signed the “informed consent” form
- Patients ≥ 18 years of age
- Patients with isolated scaphoid fractures and acute i.e. no more than 2 weeks gap between injury and treatment

Exclusion criteria

- Patients with acute fractures of both hands or with one hand missing
- All injuries other than isolated scaphoid fractures
- Patients with radiological signs of carpal instability
- Patients with signs of any rheumatoid, osteoarthritis or polyarthritis
- Patients with previous skeletal or severe soft tissue trauma to the same wrist

Treatment allocation

The decision on whether to choose an operative or nonoperative treatment procedure is taken by the patient together with his treating surgeon. The participation in the study is completely independent of this decision and does not influence the choice of treatment procedure. Patients are classified as operative or non-operative according to the initial treatment decision taken during the first two weeks following injury.

Interventions

Group A: (non-operative treatment) with cast (below elbow POP thumb-spica cast in glass holding manner sparing the IP joint of thumb with thumb in palmar abduction and the wrist in neutral or slight extension).

Group B: (operative treatment) preliminary reduction was achieved with K-wire fixation and once satisfactory reduction achieved, Herbert screw fixation was done and confirmed using image intensifier.

Patients in both groups received 10 sessions of physical therapy.

Outcome assessment

All patients were asked to attend for routine review at three months, 6 month and one-year, additional visits being scheduled as required.

Standard Scaphoid series radiographs were taken at each visit and a full clinical assessment was recorded. Modified MAYO Wrist score^{viii} was used to assess functional outcome of individual patient after treatment.

Union was considered to have occurred when there was no tenderness at the anatomical snuff box or at scaphoid tubercle and there was evidence of trabeculae crossing fracture on at least three views. Grip strength was measured asking the patient to squeeze the examiners index finger, and the strength was compared on contralateral side. To avoid subjective bias two surgeons assessed grip strength separately and the average of two findings was taken as a final outcome. Grip strength was graded according to MRC grading. Range of motion was measured using goniometer.

Statistical Analysis

The recorded data was compiled and entered in a spreadsheet computer program (Microsoft Excel 2010) and then exported to data editor page of SPSS version 19 (SPSS Inc., Chicago, Illinois, USA). Descriptive statistics included computation of percentages. The statistical test applied for the analysis was Pearson's chi-square test (χ^2). The confidence interval and p-value were set at 95% and ≤ 0.05 respectively.

Results

Table 1: Distribution of subjects as per Gender

Gender	Group		Total
	A	B	
Male	12	9	21
	80.0%	81.8%	80.7%
Female	3	2	5
	20.0%	18.2%	19.3%
Total	15	11	26
	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%
Mean $\pm$ SD (Age Years)		29.21 $\pm$ 2.18	

Test applied: chi-square test ($p \geq 0.05$)

Table 1: depicts the mean age of the study population was 41.23 years. Majority of them were male 21 (80.7%) and rest 5 (19.3%) were female.

Table 2: Distribution of subjects as per Laterality of the Fracture

Laterality	Group		Total
	A	B	
Right	9	7	16
	60.0%	63.6%	61.5%
Left	6	4	10
	40.0%	36.4%	38.5%
Total	15	11	26
	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

Test applied: chi-square test ($p \geq 0.05$)

Table 2: revealed that out of total 26 scaphoid fracture cases 16 (61.5%) were of right hand and rest 10 (38.5%) found on the left hand.

Table 3: Distribution of subjects as per Herbert Classification

Herbert Classification	Group		Total
	A	B	
A1	1	1	2
	6.6%	9.1%	
A2	1	1	2
	6.6%	9.1%	
B1	3	2	5
	20.0%	18.2%	
B2	6	4	10
	40.0%	36.3%	
B3	2	2	4
	13.4%	18.2%	
B4	2	1	3
	13.4%	9.1%	
Total	15	11	26
	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

Test applied: chi-square test ($p \geq 0.05$)

Table 3: Most common location of fracture was waist fracture (B2) 10 cases followed by distal oblique fracture (B1) 5 cases, proximal pole fracture (B3) 4 cases, Trans scaphoid perilunate dislocations (B4) 3 cases.

Table 4: Distribution of subjects as per Modified MAYO Wrist score

Modified MAYO Wrist score	Group		Total
	A	B	
Poor	6	1	7
	40.0%	9.1%	26.9%
Fair	2	2	4
	13.3%	18.2%	15.4%
Good	4	6	10
	26.7%	54.5%	38.5%
Excellent	3	2	5
	20.0%	18.2%	19.2%
Total	15	11	26
	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

Test applied: chi-square test ($p \leq 0.05$)

Table 4: Mayo wrist score was calculated for all patients in follow up. Out of all patients managed conservatively 6 patients had poor results (<65), 2 patient had fair results (65-79), 4 patients had good results (80-89), 3 patients had excellent results (≥ 90). In patients managed operatively poor results was obtained in 1 patient, fair result was obtained in 2 patients, good result was there in 6 cases & excellent result was obtained in 2 cases.

Table 5: Distribution of subjects as per Fracture Union

Fracture Union	Group		Total
	A	B	
Union	11	11	22
	73.3%	100.0%	84.6%
Non-union	4	0	4
	26.7%	0.0%	15.4%
Total	15	11	26
	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

Test applied: chi-square test ($p \leq 0.05$)

Table 5: All fractures managed by operative procedure united eventually. But there were 4 cases of non-union with conservative management.

Discussion

The incidence of scaphoid fractures quoted in different literatures ranges from 1.47 to 121 per 100,000 of the population per year and is one of the key areas of discrepancy in the scaphoid fracture literature. This is likely due to the retrospective nature of many studies, low capture rates, small population sample sizes, the lack of a defined captive population, and the limitation of many databases in their ability to distinguish between a true and suspected fracture.

In a prospective study conducted by Saeden B et al.^{ix} compared Herbert screw fixation versus short arm cast for acute scaphoid fracture in 61 patients with 62 fractures and found that the operative group returned to work in a shorter period of time. Hence there has been a trend towards surgical fixation of these fractures.^x Even the primary treatment demands expertise and familiarity with different treatment options. If those requirements are met a good prognosis can be expected. Open reduction and internal fixation of acute fracture of the scaphoid using a compression lag screw was recommended by McLaughlin^{xi} and Maudsley^{xii} to allow early mobilization of wrist. Herbert and Fischer first described the technique in 1984, since then the Herbert screw has become widely accepted as a mode of treatment.^{xiii}

The average age of presentation in our study was 29.21 years. This was found in agreement with the study conducted by Parajuli NP et al.^{xiv} found only two (13.3%) patients were above 30 years, rest 13 (86.7%) patients were below 30 years. This finding suggests that scaphoid fracture is common in young adults.

In the present investigation Most common location of fracture was waist fracture (B2) 10 cases followed by distal oblique fracture (B1) 5 cases, proximal pole fracture (B3) 4 cases, Trans scaphoid perilunate dislocations (B4) 3 cases. This was found in agreement with the results of the study conducted by Leslie & Dickson.^{xv}

In a review study conducted by Duckworth et al.^{xvi} Low-energy falls from a standing height were most common cause of scaphoid fracture. Contact sports comprised the next largest group, with football injuries being the most common. Major cause of injury in our study was Road traffic accident (51%) followed by sports injury (18%), work place injuries (16%), house hold injuries (8%), assault injury (7%).

In randomized clinical trials comparing the conservatively and surgically treated patients Bond and Saeden with co-

workers found a significantly shorter period of sick leave in patients treated by percutaneous osteosynthesis. Differences in grip strength compared to the uninjured wrist between both groups were statistically insignificant with a better outcome in the surgically treated patients.⁹ Adolfson^{xvii} reported 13% mean loss of range of wrist motion in the conservatively treated group and 6% in the operated group.

Our results confirm that internal fixation leads to better functional results & union of fracture than conservative treatment. We found more complain-free patients in the surgically treated group and fewer patients with resting pain and pain during sports and physical activities at the time of check-up which signifies a marked improvement in functional status with operative management. A high successful union rate of approximately 95% can be achieved after adequate screw fixation; however malpositioning can result in nonunion of scaphoid fractures.^{xviii, xix} Nonunion may occur in 5% to 10% of all cases, with an even higher incidence in displaced fracture and proximal pole fracture. The reason behind such incidence is attributed to the tenuous blood supply of the scaphoid.^{xx}

Limitation

We did not compare the time to union in the conservatively and surgically treated patients because, we did not perform CT examination routinely for all patients at the time of follow up evaluation. This was, along with a small sample, the main limitation of our study.

Conclusion

Open reduction and internal fixation is an option to reliably diminish the incidence of nonunion and malunion with residual carpal instability that occur with cast immobilization in scaphoid fracture. Our study proves that Cast treatment has the disadvantages of longer immobilisation time, joint stiffness, reduced grip strength, and longer time to return to work whereas the operative fixation with Herbert screw results in predictable satisfactory union rate and good functional outcome. Hence we recommend use of Herbert screw for fixation of scaphoid fracture whether displaced or undisplaced for better radiological and functional outcome.

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