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Surgery for Obesity and Related Diseases ■ (2016) 00–00

SURGERY FOR OBESITY
AND RELATED DISEASES

Original article

Barium swallow for hiatal hernia detection is unnecessary prior to primary sleeve gastrectomy

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Received March 21, 2016; revised May 28, 2016; accepted August 2, 2016

Abstract

Background: Hiatal hernia (HH) is common in the bariatric population. Its presence imposes various degrees of difficulty in performing laparoscopic sleeve gastrectomy (LSG). Preoperative upper gastrointestinal evaluation consists of fluoroscopic and or endoscopic studies

Objectives: To evaluate the efficacy of routine, preoperative barium swallow in identifying HH in patients undergoing LSG, and determine if such foreknowledge changes operative and immediate postoperative course regarding operative time, intraoperative adverse events, and length of hospital stay (LOS). In addition, to quantify HH prevalence in these patients and correlate preoperative patient characteristics with its presence.

Setting: High-volume bariatric practice in a private hospital in Israel

Methods: Retrospective analysis of prospectively collected data between October 2010 and March 2015: anthropometrics, co-morbidities, previous barium swallow, preoperative HH workup (type and result), operative and immediate postoperative course.

Results: Primary LSG was performed in 2417 patients. The overall prevalence of HH was 7.3%. Preoperative diagnosis of gastroesophageal reflux disease and female gender were independent risk factors for HH presence. Operative times were significantly longer when HH was concomitantly repaired but “foreknowledge” thereof did not assist in shortening this time. Looking for an HH that was suggested in preoperative upper gastrointestinal evaluation slightly prolonged surgery. LOS was not changed in a significant fashion by HH presence and repair, whether suspected or incidentally found.

Conclusion: Routine, pre-LSG barium swallow does not seem to offer an advantage over selective intraoperative hiatal exploration, in the discovery and management of HH. Conversely, when preoperative workup yields a false-positive result, surgery is slightly prolonged. (Surg Obes Relat Dis 2016;■:00–00.) © 2016 American Society for Metabolic and Bariatric Surgery. All rights reserved.

Keywords:

Hiatal hernia; Paraesophageal hernia; Diaphragmatic hernia; Sleeve gastrectomy; Barium swallow

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<http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.soard.2016.08.006>

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Hiatal hernia (HH) is not uncommon, with prevalence increasing with age and obesity [1–3]. The association between HH, gastroesophageal reflux disease (GERD), and morbid obesity is well documented [4]. HH diagnosis is

achieved by upper gastrointestinal (GI) fluoroscopy, endoscopic studies or manometry [5]. Unsurprisingly, evaluation of upper GI anatomy before bariatric surgery (BS) is common, with fluoroscopic and or endoscopic examination of the gastroesophageal junction (GEJ) routinely performed in most centers [6,7]. Some centers advocate a more selective approach, studying only patients with upper GI symptoms such as dysphagia, heartburn, etc. [8,9].

Despite preoperative upper GI evaluation, incidental or unexpected HH are often found during surgery, whereas some patients, in whom a preoperative workup shows a HH, are not found to have one during intraoperative hiatal exploration [6].

Identifying the required anatomic landmarks when performing laparoscopic sleeve gastrectomy (LSG), requires definite visualization and identification of the GEJ. In the presence of a HH, when the GEJ resides in the lower mediastinum, failure to correctly identify it will result in completing the gastric partitioning at an incorrect location, leaving part of the fundus above a misconstructed sleeve.

The primary aim of this study was to evaluate the efficacy of routine, preoperative barium swallow in identifying HH, and to determine if such foreknowledge changed the operative and immediate postoperative course in regards to operative time, intraoperative adverse events, and length of hospital stay (LOS).

The secondary aims were to quantify HH prevalence in patients undergoing primary LSG and correlate preoperative patient characteristics with its presence.

Methods

A retrospective review of a prospectively maintained, detailed database of all bariatric procedures performed in a high-volume bariatric service was carried out quarrying patients who underwent primary LSG. Data collected included demographic, anthropometric, co-morbidities, preoperative barium swallow result, operative and immediate postoperative course. For this work, only selected co-morbidities were recorded: GERD; hypertension (HTN); type 2 diabetes mellitus (T2D); obstructive sleep apnea (OSA); and dyslipidemia (all requiring pharmacologic treatment, except OSA, which necessitated nightly CPAP).

A directive issued by the Israeli ministry of health mandates a uniform prebariatric surgery series of tests, including upper GI fluoroscopy for all candidates. Surgeon discretion allows performance of preoperative endoscopy in selected cases. A government-subsidized health maintenance organization (HMO) is provided for all citizens and completes all preoperative testing and thus, upper GI evaluation was performed by different diagnostic imaging and or gastroenterology centers, as provided by the individual HMOs.

Surgical technique: LSG was performed as previously described [10]. The posterior aspect of the stomach was

meticulously dissected to completely expose the left crus of diaphragm from the esophago-phrenic ligament superiorly, to the crural junction with the posterior lesser curvature, inferiorly.

Hiatal exploration was undertaken when an HH was suggested in the preoperative workup or when a frank opening or distinct indentation was observed in the hiatus. This included opening of the pars flaccida and complete exposure of the right crus, in addition to the aforementioned careful exposure of the left crus. If an HH was suspected, the peritoneum alongside the crura was opened to verify or rule out this condition. When found, HH repair consisted of complete mobilization and reduction of the hernia sac, stomach, associated lipoma (when present), and distal esophagus until the GEJ was returned to the abdominal cavity (at least 3 cm, without retraction). The vagus nerve was visualized and conserved. The crural defect was suture-closed after sleeve formation over the bougie, using a nonabsorbable, braided suture. Anterior and or posterior closure was utilized according to surgeon preference.

Statistical analysis: Continuous variables are described as mean \pm standard deviation and range and were compared by using Student's *t* test. Categorical variables are described using frequency distributions and are presented as frequency (%). Categorical variables were compared using the chi square, or Fisher's exact test as necessary. All tests are 2-tailed and considered significant at $P < .05$. Calculations were performed using STATA SE software.

Results

Between October 2010 and March 2015, 2417 patients (907 males; 37%) underwent primary LSG. Mean age and body mass index (BMI) were 43 ± 11.5 years and 42.7 ± 5.3 kg/m², respectively (Table 1). Males were significantly older (44.3 ± 11.2 versus 42.3 ± 11.6 ; $P < .0001$).

At least one co-morbidity was present in 1607 (66%) of the patients. There were statistically significant prevalence differences between genders: females had significantly higher rates of T2D, dyslipidemia, HTN, and GERD, whereas males had significantly more OSA (Table 1).

All patients underwent a preoperative barium swallow. A total of 215 patients (9%) had a putative preoperative diagnosis of an HH. Of these, 54 were male, making the gender distribution significantly skewed, compared with the entire group (25% versus 37%, respectively; $P < .0001$). Of these 215 patients, an HH was found and repaired in 65 patients (true positive 30%). Of the 2202 patients with a negative preoperative upper GI evaluation, 112 were found to have an HH (false negative 5.1%), which was repaired.

We considered intraoperative detection of an HH as the "gold standard" for diagnosis. All such hernias were repaired. The prevalence of HH in the entire cohort was 7.3% (177 of 2417 patients), but more prevalent in females (8.5% versus 5.3% in males; $P = .004$). Thus, the

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