Doptaus - A simple criterion for improving sonographic diagnosis of acute appendicitis

Saba Sohail
Kausar Jehan Siddiqui
Introduction

Acute appendicitis is a common surgical emergency but its pre-operative diagnosis often imposes difficulty due to its mimicking other inflammatory, vascular, calculous and obstetric conditions. A number of preoperative diagnostic measures have been applied to improve the diagnostic accuracy and reduce the rate of negative appendicectomies. Clinical judgment remains the most important diagnostic tool. However, it is the clinically ambiguous case that requires the use of other ancillary techniques. To improve accuracy, a 10-point scoring system (Alvarado score) was introduced based on clinical symptoms, sign and laboratory findings. Later studies found it beneficial for surgeons with limited experience only. It has also been considered a means for selecting patients who should undergo imaging.

The imaging methods used to compliment the diagnosis of acute appendicitis include primarily the ultrasound, computerized tomography and MRI. Traditionally, barium enema is not very helpful. It requires bowel preparation, purgation and shows indirect signs only. CT scan has a reported accuracy of 87-99%. MRI is also reported to have high diagnostic accuracy. However these investigations incur additional cost and are not as freely available as ultrasound.

Ultrasound in acute appendicitis has an accuracy of 94-96%. The conventional criteria are identification of a non-compressible bowel loop in right iliac fossa with thickened walls that may show an intra-luminal calculus or per appendiceal fluid or collection (Figures I and II). Inexperienced operators can not fully elicit its potential. Combining a simple maneuver of clinical skill and ultrasound expertise, a new criterion was developed as ‘Detection Of Pin point Tenderness on the Appendix under UltraSonography’ and was given the acronym DOPTAUS. The main difference here

Figure I: An inflamed appendix showing multiple appendicoliths.
is that the point of maximum tenderness is identified by the patient and a focused ultrasound of that particular spot is done instead of concentrating on the right iliac fossa or doing a whole abdomen scan.

Using this simple innovation, this study was planned to determine the improvement in the ultrasound diagnosis of acute appendicitis among senior as well as junior radiologists and residents at the radiology department of a public sector hospital.

Patients and Methods

The study was conducted at the department of radiology, Dow University of Health Sciences and Civil Hospital, Karachi from March 2005 to December 2006.

The inclusion criteria for the patients were adults of either gender referred to the department through emergency with suspected acute appendicitis for diagnostic ultrasound of abdomen or right iliac fossa. All of the cases were referred during regular working hours. Patients with palpable lump, chronic or repeated episodes of pain and those scanned in emergency after regular working hours and operated without or re-scan by seniors were excluded. Those patients whose follow up was not available, were also excluded.

All the included subjects were scanned on Toshiba Nemio with 3.5- 5 MHz probe first by a junior and then by senior operators. The former were defined for the purpose of study as third or fourth year radiology residents or medical officers with postgraduate qualification and experience of two years or less. The non-qualified medical officers not enrolled in a training program and the residents in first two years of training were not considered. Senior operators were defined as faculty members or medical officers with post-graduate qualification in radiology and post-qualification experience of more than two years. Ultrasound was performed fist using conventional ultrasound criteria and then focused scan after the patient pinpointed the site of maximum tenderness as reported by Soda et al.11,16 The findings were recorded by an independent observer. Final report was issued based on the seniors’ findings.

Patients were followed till their operation and surgical findings were taken as the gold standard for accuracy determination i.e. sensitivity, specificity and predictive values. Kappa (K) statistics were applied for comparison between the operator groups to determine agreement. K value of 0.8 was taken as excellent, 0.4-0.79 as intermediate to good, and less than 0.4-0 as poor to no agreement.

Results

A total of 100 patients were included in the study in compliance with the criteria. There were two senior and four junior operators. The mean post-qualification experience of the senior operators was 4.8±2.1 years at the start of study. The junior operators had a mean experience of 1.6±0.7 years.

Among the patients there were 42 females and 58 females with age ranging from 17 to 54 years, mean 32.6±7.8 years. Acute appendicitis was diagnosed sonographically in 85 patients. All the 100 patients were operated due to clinical suspicion. Among those, 94 had acute appendicitis on surgery while appendix was normal in 06 patients giving a negative appendicectomy rate of 6% for this cohort. The causes of missed ultrasound diagnosis in the 09 patients were retro-caecal location of appendix in 02 cases and surrounding bowel gases obscuring the right iliac fossa/point of maximum tenderness in seven patients.

The junior operators had correctly diagnosed without pin-pointing in 48 out of 85 and with pin-pointing in 69 cases. The seniors had diagnosed 74 out of 85 in the former and all 85 in the latter condition.

The percentage agreement between the groups was 48% (k= 0.48) using conventional criteria and 69% (k=0.69) using DOPTAUS criteria. The over all accuracy values are stated in Table.

Discussion

Clinical diagnosis remains the mainstay of diagnosing
specificity by Khan et al. in females. The western figures are 94-96%.

The inexperienced ultrasound looses its benefits and is used as a stethoscope evaluation for abdominal viscera. This is particularly true with the uncheck short ultrasound training courses in the country and the surge in the number of ‘sonologists’ without an adequate, structured training and certification by an examining body.

To overcome this problem regarding the diagnosis of a common surgical emergency in the less experienced hands, a simple technique of DOPTAUS developed by Soda et al. was used in this study to determine the changes brought in diagnosis by combining clinical and conventional sonographic criteria. The over all sensitivity of ultrasound was 90% and the specificity was 83.3%. The western figures are 94-96%. The local figures are quoted as 88.8% sensitivity and 91.8% specificity by Qureshi et al. and 86.2% sensitivity and 91.8% specificity by Khan et al.

The patient gender also affects the accuracy. Chen et al found the diagnostic accuracy as 78-92% in males and 58-85% in females. On the other hand, a surgical audit by Bhopal et al. reported that only 7.7% of their male patients required ultrasound for the diagnosis. The ultrasound diagnosis was correct in 81.2% and incorrect in the remaining subjects. In female patients, it was required in as many as 42.5% and out of those 30% who had an inflamed appendix was reported as normal on ultrasound. This effect was not observed in our study where the gender distribution was nearly even. However the patient’s gender appears to be a confounding factor that may add to the fallacy of ultrasound diagnosis.

The practice of focused ultrasound under maximum pin-point tenderness improved the diagnosis of acute appendicitis from 74 to 85% for the seniors and from 48 to 69% for the junior operators. The improvement in juniors was more marked as proved by better observer agreement. Hence the technique turned out to be a simple innovation with greatly improved results. The developers of DOPTAUS technique had conducted a prospective study at a 100-bedded community hospital without a helical CT, MRI or a radiology specialist, circumstances much comparable to the local scenario in secondary or community level hospitals. They found a sensitivity of 86.7%, specificity of 89.7%, PPV of 94.5% and an over all accuracy of 87.6% using the DOPTAUS technique.

Radiological evaluation has a potent role to perform in the management of acute appendicitis. It reduces misdiagnoses and negative appendicectomies besides helping in treating peri-appendiceal abscess and post-operative complications. Utilizing ultrasound and helical CT for acute appendicitis diagnosis reduces hospital stay by reducing delay in diagnosis. However, indeterminate and incorrect reports adversely affect patient management decisions. Hence the combination of clinical and ultrasound criteria in DOPTAUS have the potential to lead to shorter hospital stay, early diagnosis and surgery, and fewer unnecessary laparotomies.

**Conclusion**

Focused ultrasound after detecting maximal pin-point tenderness resulted in improved diagnosis of acute appendicitis in clinically suspected cases. Moreover, the percentage agreement between the operator groups increased from intermediate to good with improved accuracy. This shows that by using focal pin-point tenderness as the guide, less experienced operators can improve their diagnostic accuracy of acute appendicitis.

**References**

pinpoint tenderness on the appendix under ultrasonography is useful to confirm acute appendicitis. Arch Surg 2001; 136: 1136-40.

Original Article

Public private mix model in enhancing tuberculosis case detection in District Thatta, Sindh, Pakistan

Jameel Ahmed,1 Mubashir Ahmed,2 A Laghari,3 Wasdev Lohana,4 Sajid Ali,5 Zafar Fatmi,6
Department of Community Health Science, Aga Khan University,1-3,5,6 National Tuberculosis Control Programme, District Thatta, Sindh,4 Pakistan.

Abstract

Objectives: To enhance the TB case detection through Public Private Mix (PPM) model by involving private practitioners in collaboration with National TB Control Program, (NTP) in district Thatta.

Methods: Private practitioners (PPs) of district Thatta involved in treatment of TB cases were requested to participate in the study. All consenting physicians were provided with training on Directly Observed Treatment Short course (DOTS) module. In addition to routine cases, TB cases diagnosed by private practitioners through sputum microscopy were also registered with the district TB control program and medicines were provided by NTP. After intervention of PPM-DOTS change in Case Detection Rate (CDR) were estimated.

Results: An increased number of sputum smear positive cases were found in the intervention period - the third quarter of 2007, from 188 to 211 and CDR from 69% to 77%. The improvement in case detection rate was significant as this moderately added to the total number of cases detected from the whole of the district Thatta during the study period.

Conclusion: Public private mix (PPM) model was effective in increasing the CDR of TB cases in district Thatta. It is recommended that the public private partnership model in Tuberculosis case detection needs to be taken on a larger scale so as to reduce the heavy TB burden in the country (JPMA59:82; 2009).

Introduction

The concept of public-private mix model (PPM) in health care has emerged in the past decade with a view that a large majority in the developing countries utilizes private sector as a source of health care. This partnership between governmental and private for-profit or not-for-profit organizations emerged as a novel approach to improve the system of health care service delivery.1,2 PPM model has been successful and also received attention in terms of tuberculosis control in many developing countries.1-4 Besides effectiveness as a strategy it also has financial benefits in control of tuberculosis for the country.5-8 Pakistan ranks 6th among the countries of the Eastern Mediterranean Region (EMRO) of World Health Organization (WHO), in terms of TB disease burden. Every year about 250,000 new cases are included in the country's TB burden. Despite the fact that the government, with huge support from international health agencies, considered TB an emergency in 2001, given TB a priority and implemented DOTS all over the country; the case detection rate is still low (27% in 2004).9

Majority of the population (more than 75%) of Pakistan attends private sector for their health problems which is also true for Tuberculosis.10,11 The great dependence of people on the private sector is due to the relative inefficient and inadequate government health care sector. To complicate this problem, these private practitioners may not follow the standard criteria in TB case management. This is partly due to poor regulation of the practice health care sector.6,11-12

It is important to involve private practitioners in detection and treatment of tuberculosis. Also linking private practitioners with public sector would improve the practices and enhance TB control. It would standardize and improve the diagnostic techniques, decrease maltreatment, partial treatment. There is sufficient evidence that privately practicing physicians in Pakistan lack sufficient knowledge to manage a typical case of tuberculosis.13,14-16 This is true for disadvantaged