

The type of loose seton for complex anal fistula is essential to improve perianal comfort and quality of life

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Aim:

The use of a loose seton for complex anal fistulae can cause perianal discomfort and reduced quality of life. The aim of this study was to assess the impact of the novel knot-free Comfort Drain on quality of life, perianal comfort and faecal continence compared to conventional loose setons.

Method:

Forty-four patients treated for complex anal fistula at a single institution between July 2013 and September 2014 were included in the study. A matched pair analysis was performed to compare patients with a knot-free Comfort Drain and controls who were managed by conventional knotted setons. The 12-item Short Form survey (SF-12) questionnaire was used to assess quality of life. Additionally, patients reported perianal comfort and faecal incontinence using a Visual Analog Scale (VAS) and the St Mark's Incontinence Score.

Results:

The Comfort Drain was associated with improved quality of life with significant higher median physical ($P = 0.001$) and mental ($P = 0.04$) health scores compared with a conventional loose seton. According to the VAS, patients with a Comfort Drain in situ reported greater perianal comfort with significantly less burning sensation ($P < 0.001$) and pruritus ($P < 0.001$). Faecal continence was similar in each group.

Conclusion:

The Comfort Drain offers improved perianal comfort and better quality of life compared with a conventional loose seton and therefore facilitates longterm therapy in patients with complex fistula-in-ano.

The Comfort Drain: a new device for treating complex anal fistula

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Introduction:

Surgery for anal fistula remains challenging [1]. Colorectal surgeons need to choose the appropriate treatment for each patient, but also be aware that aggressive surgery can lead to significant deterioration of anorectal function and quality of life. A recent review found that a great variety of different materials have been used as setons to treat complex anal fistula [5]. In our experience, most setons have to be tied with a knot which may cause local irritation and discomfort. A new fully closed ring device produced by the Agency for Medical Innovations (A.M.I.), Feldkirch, Austria, has the potential benefit to be a knot-free drain without the above-mentioned limitations.

Materials and methods:

We inserted the new Comfort Drain device in 5 patients (median age 46 years, range 33–73 years, 2 (40 %) females) with complex anal fistula at the Vienna General Hospital, Vienna, Austria, between 2013 and 2014. Clinical data were extracted from an institutional database and individual chart review. Anal fistulas were classified according to the criteria developed by Parks et al. [6]. The Comfort Drain consists of 3 components: the metal probe, the silicone drain and the polypropylene closure mechanism.

Results:

Four (80 %) patients had trans-sphincteric fistulas of cryptoglandular origin, and 1 (20 %) patient suffered from a trans-sphincteric fistula due to Crohn's disease. Two (40 %) patients reported previous anal fistula surgery. The median operation time was 35 min (range 20–35 min). Altogether, 7 Comfort Drains were inserted. No postoperative complications developed during the observational period. The median duration of hospital stay was 2 days (range 2–3 days). During the follow-up period, 4 out of 5 drains (80 %) were still in situ. In 1 (20 %) patient, the drain became disconnected and fell out.

Discussion:

This is the first report about the new Comfort Drain for treating complex anal fistula. Although loose seton drainage is considered a common surgical procedure, there is a paucity of studies about the quality of life of patients who undergo this treatment [7]. The potential advantage of the Comfort Drain is the minimal skin irritation due to a knot-free design of the device. None of the patients with a Comfort Drain reported perianal discomfort in daily life, which is usually a common complaint of patients with conventional seton drainage.

Conclusions:

The Comfort Drain is a new seton device for treating complex anal fistula. It can easily be inserted with no obvious complications. Based on our preliminary experience, patients experience less discomfort and skin irritation due to the knot-free drain.