

Radiofrequency Ablation: A Technique in the Management of Low Anal Fistula

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Abstract : Background: Over the decades, several surgical techniques have been developed to treat anal fistulas with variable success rates and complications. Large amount of work has been done in radiofrequency excision of the fistula for several years but no work has been done for ablating the tract. Therefore one can consider for obliteration of anal fistula by Radiofrequency ablation (RFA). Material and Methods: A randomized controlled clinical trial was conducted at Lok Nayak Hospital, where a total of 40 patients were enrolled in the study and they were randomly assigned to Group I (fistulectomy)(n=20) and Group II (RFA) (n=20). Aim of the study was to compare the efficacy of RFA of fistula versus fistulectomy in the treatment of a low anal fistula and to evaluate RFA as an effective alternative to fistulectomy with respect to time taken for wound healing as primary outcome and post-operative pain, time taken to return to work as secondary outcomes. Patients with simple low anal fistulas, single internal and external opening, not more than two secondary tracts were included. Patients with high complex fistula, fistulas communicating with cavity, fistula due to condition like tuberculosis, Crohn's, malignancy were excluded from the study. Results: Both groups were comparable with respect to age, sex ratio, type of fistula. The mean healing time was significantly shorter in group II (41.02 days) than in group I (62.68 days). The mean operative time was significantly shorter in group II (21.40 min) than in group I (28.50 min). The mean time taken to return to work was significantly shorter in group II (8.30 days) than in group I (12.01 days). There was no significant difference in the post operative hospital stay, mean postoperative pain score, wound infection and recurrence between the two groups. Conclusion: The patients who underwent RFA of fistula had shorter wound healing time, operative time and time taken to return to work when compared to those who underwent fistulectomy and therefore RFA shows outcome comparable to fistulectomy in the treatment of low anal fistula.

Keywords : fistulectomy, low anal fistula, radio frequency ablation, wound healing

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