

A Retrospective Study of Vaginal Stenosis Following Treatment of Cervical Cancers and the Effectiveness of Rehabilitation Interventions

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Abstract : Vaginal stenosis is a common side effect associated with pelvic radiotherapy in cervical cancer patients which contributes negatively to woman's health and prevents adequate vaginal/cervical examination. Vaginal dilation with a dilator is routine practice and is internationally advocated as a prophylactic measure to preserve vaginal patency. This retrospective study was carried out with the aim to know the usefulness of vaginal dilation following pelvic radiation therapy in cervical cancer patients in India. Data from medical records of 183 cervical cancer patients, which met the study criteria, were collected related to the stage of the disease, treatment received, commencement period of dilation post radiation therapy, sexual status and side effects associated to dilation practice. Data related to vaginal dimensions as per the length of insertion of a small, medium and large dilator were collected on regular follow-ups until 36 months and/or more. Vaginal dimensions as measured with the length of medium dilator insertion were used for analysis of dilation therapy results using paired t-test. Patients who underwent vaginal dilation with dilator maintained vaginal patency, also the mean vaginal length significantly increased, from 8.02 cm \pm 2.69 to 9.96 \pm 2.89 cm with a p value $<$ 0.001. There was no significant difference found on vaginal patency with different intervals of initiation of dilation therapy. At the third year and more following dilation therapy, significant increase in vaginal length observed with a p value of 0.0001 in both sexually active and inactive patients. Compilation of vaginal dosage during brachytherapy was inadequate, and hence, the secondary objective of the study to determine the effect of radiotherapy on the outcome of rehabilitation intervention was not studied in detail. This retrospective study has found that dilation therapy with vaginal dilators post pelvic radiotherapy is effective in preventing vaginal stenosis and improving vaginal patency and cannot be substituted with vaginal intercourse. Sexual quality of life assessment in the Indian population needs much attention.

Keywords : dilator, sexually active, vaginal dilation, vaginal stenosis

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