Defining Improvement After Varicocele Ligation: A Correlation of Semen Parameters and Pregnancy Outcomes

Dane Johnson MD1,2, Melissa St Aubin MD1, Jay Sandlow MD3

1. Medical College of Wisconsin Milwaukee WI
2. Washington University School of Medicine, St Louis MO

Objective

Treatment of clinically palpable varicoceles for infertility has been shown to improve semen parameters and pregnancy rates. However, there is no established definition for “significant improvement” after varicocelectomy. We sought to further investigate the correlation of improvement in semen parameters and pregnancy rates after varicocele ligation (VL), for the purpose of better defining “significant improvement”.

Design

We performed a retrospective review of all patients undergoing microsurgical sub-inguinal varicocele ligation for infertility between Jan 2006 and April 2016.

Materials/Methods

Exclusion criteria:
- pregnancies conceived within 2 months of surgery
- patients with non-obstructive azoospermia,
- female factor infertility secondary to tubal obstruction.

We defined “significant improvement” as
- ≥50% increase in Total Progressively Motile Sperm Count on postoperative semen analysis.

Patients were divided into two cohorts based on whether they experienced “significant improvement” after VL.

Natural pregnancy rates were then compared between the two cohorts. Statistical significance, defined as a p-value <0.05, was determined using Student’s t-test.

Results

During this study period 244 patients underwent VL, of which 128 patients met inclusion criteria.

Eighty-four patients (64.1%) experienced significant (≥50%) improvement in Total Progressively Motile Sperm Count after VL.

Patients who experience “significant improvement” after VL had a significantly higher natural pregnancy rate than those who did not (50% vs 19.0%, p<0.01).

Patients who did not achieve a natural pregnancy had statistically significantly lower pre-op Total Progressively Motile Sperm Count.

Conclusions

Patients who experience “significant improvement” post VL were found to have a significantly higher pregnancy rate (50% vs 19.0%) than those who did not achieve a natural pregnancy had significantly lower pre-op Total Progressively Motile Sperm Count (5.26 x10^6 vs 11.6 x10^6, p=0.012)

Based on these findings, we would consider “significant improvement” post VL as ≥50% increase in total progressively motile sperm.