

5th International Conference and Exhibition on Surgery & ENT

November 07-08, 2016 Alicante, Spain

Treatment of trismus in head and neck cancer: Two-year follow-up after exercise intervention

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Aim: Aim of this study is to investigate the long-term effects of structured trismus intervention in patients with head and neck cancer (HNC) and trismus in terms of trismus related symptoms and health related quality of life (HRQL) and mouth opening.

Material & Methods: Patients with HNC to receive radiotherapy±chemotherapy (n=50) were included in this prospective study along with a matched control group. The intervention group received a 10 weeks structured exercise with a jaw mobilizing device. Patients were assessed before and after trismus exercise intervention and at a two-year follow-up. Primary endpoint was maximum inter-incisal opening (MIO) and secondary endpoints included trismus-related symptoms and HRQL assessed with patient-reported outcome (PRO)-instruments European Organization for Research and Treatment of Cancer Core Questionnaire (EORTC QLQ-C30) and the related HNC-specific module the EORTC Head & Neck Questionnaire (EORTC QLQ-H&N35) and Gothenburg Trismus Questionnaire (GTQ).

Results: At the two-year follow-up, the intervention group had a higher MIO compared to the control group (40.5 mm and 34.3 mm, respectively), which was statistically significant. The intervention group also reported less jaw-related problems according to the GTQ and higher functioning as measured by EORTC QLQ-C30 and QLQ-H&N35 compared to the control group.

Conclusion: A positive persistent effect of exercise intervention for trismus in HNC patients was found with regard to trismus-related symptoms, MIO and HRQL. Exercise intervention is important in long-term treatment of radiation-induced trismus in HNC patients. The trismus-specific questionnaire, GTQ, is a valuable tool for observing and evaluating trismus over time.

Biography

Professor and senior ENT-consultant and Director of research and development at Sahlgrenska University Hospital and Sahlgrenska Academy at Department of Otorhinolaryngology, Head and Neck Surgery, Institute of Clinical Sciences, Sahlgrenska Academy at the University of Gothenburg, Sweden. Research in Clinical and translational research applied to risk organs and intervention for complications following Head and Neck Cancer treatment. Medical licence issued by the Government Sweden 1987, senior ENT-consultant 2002. Also credits in Quality improvement from Chalmers University of technology Gothenburg parttime-2009-2011, and Pedagogical credits at the Pedagogical Development and Interactive Learning (PIL) University of Gothenburg part-time 2012-2015.

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