Research article

A comparative study to evaluate the feasibility and efficacy of use of mehendi vs temporary pen markings for skin marking in patients undergoing conventional external beam radiotherapy with Cobalt 60 machine

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ABSTRACT

Introduction and Aim: The most common practice for marking the radiation field borders in conventional radiotherapy is with marker pens. In the hot and humid environment in India these markings rapidly fade and require remarking. In some cases, they require re-simulation and re-planning. Mehndi has been used in India for ceremonial marking on skin for long. Here we seek to evaluate the same for radiotherapy.

Materials and Methods: Eighty-two patients with no history of hyper-sensitivity to mehendi were scheduled to be analyzed on per protocol treatment basis, with 41 in each arm. Subjects were randomized by lottery method till the target number in one of the arms is reached. Since one subject in each arm had not received the per protocol management due to default, two more subjects were included and randomized. The minimum duration of treatment was 5 weeks. Markings were done either with mehndi cones (Arm A) or conventionally used Skin marking pens. They were repeated as per requirements. The number of application and gap between them were recorded. The data was later analyzed with SPSS v23 for frequencies, independent sample T test, including Mann-Whitney test. The analysis was per protocol.

Results: No incidence of hypersensitivity to mehendi occurred. The mean and median number of applications was significantly less in the Mehndi arm compared to control arm (median being 2 in mehndi arm compared to 4 in Pen arm). The median gap between applications and each application was also significantly lower in the Mehndi arm (11.5 days vs 7.25 days). There was no significant difference with visualization. The comfort level of the technologists, consultants and patients were better with Mehndi than with pen arm on Likert scale.

Conclusion: Mehndi is more durable than the pen marking it is equally visible for health care professionals and more comfortable to patients. The skin tone of our patients did not pose any challenge in visualization during set up either in ambient lighting or with lasers.

Keywords: Mehndi; skin markings; external beam radiotherapy.

INTRODUCTION

Radiation therapy is the most common and effective method for treatment of cancer. In India majority of the radiotherapy is delivered by Cobalt 60 beam with conventional technique. Treatment delivery by Cobalt 60 conventional technique requires marking of the field borders on the skin surface unlike the conformal technique where only three reference points are required. This is generally done by marker pens available in the market. Unfortunately, these markings are not indelible, and they wash off with even one wash or even sweat, especially in the summer season. Therefore, the patients had to instructed not to put water in those areas throughout the radiation period which varies at an average from 5 to 7 weeks i.e., nearly two months. This entails a very difficult task for the patient especially in the summer season to go without a bath. Moreover, despite best efforts the markings fade within a few days and in our experience the markings have to be repeated at least every week. If by any reason the markings are totally removed that happens quite often for no fault of the patients, the whole process of simulation has to be repeated. This means not only machine time or extra burden of work for the technician and oncologist and the physicist but also that the patient would be getting extra CT scans leading to unnecessary doses of radiation. Moreover, this loss of time often leads to break in RT for a day or two. Such break leads to accelerated repopulation and reduction in efficacy of the treatment especially in tumors with smaller spot or tumor doubling time. We had tried to obtain the indelible ink pen manufactured by Mysore Paints and Varnishes for Election commission of India from the manufacturers as well as their third-party listing, but no response was available.

In this study we compared the use of Mehndi which is often used in India for ceremonial tattooing as an alternative to pen makers and see the feasibility & efficacy of the same.
MATERIALS AND METHODS

Patient inclusion

Adult patients who are scheduled to receive External beam radiotherapy in cobalt 60 machine by conventional planning for a duration of at least 5 weeks were offered to be part of the study. Patients with any known skin reactions/ hyper-sensitivity in the past to henna or mehndi were excluded from the study. Once they have given informed consent, they were randomized by lottery method to Arm A (mehndi) and arm B (pen marking) till one of the arms were full.

Sample size calculation

The sample size is calculated based on accommodating for a Type I error 5%, power of the study – Not less than 90%, possibility of attrition at 20% for providing the maximum margin of validity and a sampling ratio of 1.

The mean duration of usage for pen markers have been about 8 days while that about mehendi in earlier literature referred to earlier is about 12 days while the standard deviation being 5 days.

\[ n_A = \kappa n_B \]
\[ n_B = \frac{(1+1/\kappa)[\sigma (z_1-\alpha/2+z_1-\beta)]}{(\mu_A-\mu_B)} \]

when

\[ k = n_A/n_B \] is the matching ratio

\[ \sigma \] is standard deviation

\[ \alpha \] is Type I error

\[ \beta \] is Type II error, meaning \( 1-\beta \) is power

Thus, the calculated sample size per arm works out to be 33 *1.25= 41.25~ 41.

Study Period: From July 2017 to January 2018.

Treatment planning and skin marking

Patients were planned as per requirement of their disease status in conventional manner for all patients.

In case of Arm A, the field border markings on the skin were done with commercially available Mehandi cones. The patients had to lie down for 60 minutes after application to give time for set up. They were advised not to apply water for the next 24 hours (one day) and then could have usual bath without scrubbing the local area.

In case of Arm B, the field borders were marked with skin marking pens. They were advised not to apply any water in the local area for the whole duration of radiotherapy.

The markings were inspected every alternate day for both the arms during radiation and reapplication was done as and when deemed fit by the investigators.

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Fig. 1: Consort diagram of the trial
RESULTS

There were 82 analyzable subjects with 41 in each arm and there were no incidence of hyper-sensitivity to mehendi during the procedure. Out of these patients, from the site of primary carcinoma cervix, breast, rectum, head and neck, sarcomas were included. They were fairly evenly distributed between the arms (table 1).

Thus, a large percentage of patients (52.4%) were treated at pelvis where maintain hygiene during radiotherapy is utmost important and difficult without bath. Independent sample T test was done which showed that there was no difference of total duration of radiotherapy planned between the two arms. (p=0.371). Thus, the intervention and control group had been adequately randomized.

The number of applications for test (mehndi) arm ranged from 2 to 3, with majority (32 out of 41 being 2). The same for the control arm ranged from 2 to 6, with one patient requiring 2 applications and one requiring 5 and 6 applications.

The mean duration of application for the test arm was 11.11 days compared to 7.5 days in control arm. The mean duration for 1st reapplication was 8.4 days in test arm compared to 6.8 in control arm. The mean duration for 2nd reapplication was 13.1 days in test arm compared to 7.8 days in control arm.

Independent sample T test and Mann-Whitney U test were significant across number of applications, average duration of application, Duration between reapplication 1, 2 and 3. Since there was only one reapplication for 4th and 5th time, statistical tests for the same could not be performed.
The conventional markings used extensively and have been found to be equivalent to permanent small tattoos. Permanent tattoos are more suitable for advanced radiotherapeutic techniques like IGRT, IMRT where three point localization is absolute and enough.

In our study we compared the conventionally used pen markings with that of the mehndi. The number of applications required were significantly less (Mean number of applications were 2.2 in Mehndi arm compared to 3.63 in Control arm, median being 2 and 4 respectively, P=.000), the duration of stability of each application were more from the first application itself in mehndi arm compared to test arm. These differences were statistically significant (Table2). The median durability when calculated across all applications was 11.5 days (range 9 to 14.5 days) with mehndi compared to 7.25 days with pen (range 5.5 to 10 days). In the study by Wurstbeuar et al., the median duration of henna application was 23 days (range 12-48 days) with number of required applications being 1 to 4.(12) In the study by Tunio...
and Hasmi, the mean duration was 10 to 28 days (mean 18 days).(13) In our study the required number of applications was 2-3 for mehndi arm and 2 to 6 in the control arm (Table 2). Moreover, the stability of mehndi increased over repeated number of applications while that remained static in case of pen marking. Only 7, however except in cases of breast patients, in both the studies only the isocenters were marked, while we had marked the whole field borders defined by light fields. This may have contributed to reduction of durability of the markings, since repeat marking was done even if a part of the same had become difficult to visualize.

There was no difference in the visibility as reported by healthcare personnel in ambient lighting, as well as under laser both green and red when compared with matched skin tones. However, pen marking was relatively difficult to visualise under green laser in cases of skin tones 29 and above in Felix von Luxchans skin colour chart. Under red laser both were equally visible.

The consultants were more comfortable with mehndi markings, along with the Machine room technologists. However, the residents were more comfortable with Pen markings as documented in the likert scale. The duration of the process was listed as reason for them being not comfortable with the process. The turnover simulator time was however same and there was no change in number of patients simulated whether they were marked with Mehndi or pen as we used a second room for stabilization of Mehndi. This duration (60 min) was kept much higher in our a study than in study by Wurstbauer (10 min) as they had used only point marking while we had used marking of the entire border of the light field (12).

Patient satisfaction scores were better in the mehndi arm. They could take bath without scrubbing at will.

CONCLUSION

The present study is the first known study on Indian patients which compared pen marking and mehndi in a randomized manner. The study shows that Mehndi not only is more durable than the pen marking it is equally visible for HCPs and more comfortable to patients. The skin tone of our patients did not pose any challenge in visualization during set up either in ambient lighting or with lasers. The time required for the procedure is lengthy but is worthy for the time.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST

Authors declare no conflicts of interest.

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