Intraprocedural complications of uterine fibroid embolisation and their impact on long-term clinical outcome

Javorka V1, Malik M1, Mizickova M1, Palenik S1, Mikula P1, Redecha M2

Clinic of Radiology, Faculty of Medicine of Comenius University, Slovak Medical University and University Hospital Bratislava, Slovakia. mikula.dr@gmail.com

ABSTRACT
OBJECTIVES: Authors evaluate the impact of intraprocedural complications on successful technical realisation and long-term clinical outcome of the uterine fibroid embolisation.

BACKGROUND: The uterine artery embolisation (UAE) has become an accepted treatment method for uterine fibroids. In general, the unilateral embolisation is considered to be insufficient due to poor clinical effect.

METHODS: Overall, 165 uterine artery embolisations were analysed (retrospectively-prospectively) in 163 female patients. Intraprocedural complications and their impact on the possibility to perform bilateral embolisation were evaluated. In patients with unscheduled unilateral embolisation, short-term as well as long-term clinical effects were observed with mean follow-up period of 41 months.

RESULTS: The bilateral uterine artery embolisation was possible in 95.7 % (95 %, CI 91.3–99.4 %) procedures. The unilateral embolisation was reported in 7 procedures (4.3 %, CI 1.2–9.3 %) and reasons were following: resistant arterial spasm in 4 patients (2.5 %, CI 0.7 %–5.3 %) and impossible catheterisation due to unfavourable anatomic situation in 3 patients (1.8 %, CI 0.3–4.1 %). Other complications, such as dissection and perforation, did not affect the successful technical realisation. The long-term clinical effect of unscheduled unilateral embolisation was reported in 5 patients.

CONCLUSION: The results of our series of unscheduled unilateral uterine fibroid embolisation had high long-term clinical success rate. In way of unscheduled unilateral embolisation, we recommend MRI follow-up and re-intervention only in way of persistence or recurrence of symptoms with concurrent MRI finding of residual fibroids (Tab. 5, Fig. 3, Ref. 12). Text in PDF www.elis.sk.

KEY WORDS: uterine fibroid embolisation, unilateral embolisation.

Introduction

The uterine artery embolisation (UAE) has become an accepted treatment method for uterine fibroids. Similar to other treatment procedures, also UAE has its intraprocedural, early and late complications. The authors determine the frequency and severity of intraprocedural complications. Their impact on successful technical completion of the procedure and short-term as well as long-term clinical outcomes of the treatment were evaluated.

Materials and methods

165 uterine artery embolisations (UAEs) were performed in 163 female patients with symptomatic uterine fibroids at our workplace from July 2007 to August 2017. Two interventional radiologists with years of professional experience in radiological interventions performed all embolisations.

Prior to intervention, the number, location and dimensions of fibroids were verified via the transabdominal and transvaginal ultrasound (USG) examination (USG instruments HDI-5000 ATL, Sonoscape 5000, Aloka 2500) and MRI examination (Siemens MAGNETOM Symphony 1.5T). Female patients with USG-suspected pendulating fibroid, adenomyosis, non-specific fibroid, or multiple fibroids underwent MRI examination. The inclusion criteria included symptomatic intramural fibroid or fibroids which did not invade subserosally or submucosally by more than one half of their volume. The size of dominant fibroid in its largest dimension was at least 3 cm; neither the upper limit of fibroid’s size nor uterine size was limited. Also patients with known adenomyosis and endometriosis were included in the study set. Besides contraindications (current pregnancy, indeterminate uterine tumour other than fibroid, malignant tumour in the pelvis, inflammation of the urogenital tract, or other acute or active inflammatory disease in the pelvic region), exclusion criteria included pendulating fibroid or fibroids which invaded suberosally by more than one half of their volume, menopause, and endometrial hyperplasia.
After the procedure, patients came for scheduled follow-ups at intervals of 1, 3, 6, 12, and 24 months to detect early and late complications, evaluate regression of dominant fibroid and evaluate resolution of clinical difficulties. USG examination and laboratory testing (blood count, inflammatory markers) were performed during these follow-ups. Patients with pre-procedural MRI underwent a follow-up MRI examination 6 months after the procedure.

The same endovascular technique under general anaesthesia with the access site in the right common femoral artery through 5F sheath was used in all procedures. Using 5F catheter Cobra (Terumo Europe N.V. Leuven, Belgium) and 0.035 inch Guide Wire M, angled (Terumo Europe N.V. Leuven, Belgium), we catheterised the contralateral common iliac artery (CIA). For catheterisation of the internal iliac artery (IIA) (Fig. 1) and branches of the uterine artery (UA), we used a reshaped catheter RUC (Roberts Uterine Curve) (COOK, William Cook Europe, Bjaeverskov, DK). We catheterised the distal course of UA (Fig. 2) with micro-instruments using coaxial technique (0.025“ System Micro Catheter, Progreat, Terumo Europe, N.V., Leuven, Belgium or EmboCath Plus 0.028 inch and micro-guide wire Sequitor 0,018“ BioSphere medical, S.A., Paris Nord 2, France). We always placed a microcatheter beyond the branches of cervicovaginal arteries. Microparticles PVA500, size 500–710 μm, and microparticles PVA700, size 710–1000 μm (COOK, William Cook Europe, Bjaeverskov, DK), or trisacrylgelatin microspheres Embosphere, size 500 μm and 700 μm (Biosphere Medical, Rockland, USA), were used as an embolisation material. If the utero-ovarian anastomosis was found, we firstly placed a micro-coil Trufill (Cordis Endovascular Systems, Inc., Miami, FL, USA) into it to prevent non-targeted embolisation of ovarian vascularisation. After the completion of the left UA embolisation (Fig. 3), we catheterised the right UA in the same way. The access site was endovascularly closed to reduce the risk of haemorrhagic complications and improve the patient’s comfort after the procedure. FemoSeal (Terumo Medical Corporation, Cottontail Lane, Somerset, USA).

We considered the bilateral embolisation as successful if the flow in the uterine artery slowed down or stagnated with no saturation of pathological vascularisation of the fibroid and with preservation of perfusion in cervicovaginal small branches and, where appropriate, also a part of typical myometrial small branches. If only unilateral embolisation was possible, we considered such procedure as technically unsuccessful.

During the procedure, we observed intraprocedural complications, such as resistant spasm, dissection, perforation, unfavourable anatomic course or absence of the uterine artery, and acute allergic reaction to contrast agent. We evaluated their association with the technical success of embolisation retrospectively and observed their impact on clinical success of the therapy prospectively.

Spasms which did not respond to vasodilators (Isoket, UBC Pharma, Germany), did not resolve after 30 minutes since their onset, and resulted in inability to perform catheterisation and embolisation of affected UA were evaluated as resistant arterial spasms. 5 patients underwent scheduled unilateral embolisation due to clearly unilateral supply of the fibroid based on angiographic finding.

In the practical part of the study, tools of descriptive statistics were used. We used characteristics of the position, such as mean, modus, median, and characteristics of variability, such as variance and standard deviation. For statistical analysis, we used frequency tables, including confidence intervals for portions, contingency tables and Fisher’s exact test, Pearson’s correlation coefficient, and linear regression. Data was analysed using IBM SPSS Statistics 20 software.

Results

Overall, 165 embolisations of uterine arteries were performed in 163 patients with symptomatic uterine fibroid; two patients underwent repeated embolisation. The mean age of patients in the study set was 37.9 years, ranging from 22 to 51 years (Tab. 1).
One of the causes of technical failure was the uncrossable spasm that we observed in 4 procedures (2.5 %, 95 % CI 0.7 %–5.3 %). Another cause of UAE technical failure was anatomically unfavourable branching of the uterine artery that we observed in 2 patients. In one patient, there was an occlusion of UA as a consequence of a gunshot wound, however 3 collaterals supplying the fibroid and branching from ipsilateral internal iliac artery could be embolised. The anatomically unfavourable branching and missing uterine artery was the cause of technical failure in 3 patients (1.8 %, 95 % CI 0.3 %–4.1 %). Other complications included 4 perforations of uterine arteries (2.5 %, 95 % CI 0.7 %–5.3 %). Perforations were non-severe in all patients, they closed spontaneously during the embolisation and did not avoid the successful completion of the procedure. A haemodynamically non-significant dissection of internal iliac artery occurred in one patient (0.61 %, 95 % CI 0.0 %–2.0%). In 7 of 12 patients, mentioned complications resulted in a technical failure (Tab. 3). Complications associated with catheterisation, such as retroperitoneal haematoma, post-catheterisation pseudoaneurysm or arteriovenous fistula and allergic reaction to contrast agent, did not occur in our study set. Overall, 156 procedures were successfully technically completed during the first session (95.7 %, 95 % CI 91.3 %–99.4 %).

In 4 procedures of unscheduled unilateral embolisations, the fibroid was dominantly supplied from the side that can be treated. Only small arterial conjunctions to the fibroid were present on the untreated side. Since the unilateral treatment resulted in the clinical success with resolution of symptoms, we did not indicate the reintervention.

Due to persistent clinical symptomatology, in two patients with technical failure the reintervention was performed. The fibroid was dominantly supplied from untreated uterine artery in both patients. In the first patient, it was caused by the uncrossable spasm and the embolisation was successful in the second session with good clinical response and resolution of symptomatology. Although only unilateral embolisation was performed, MRI after 6 months showed 90 % devitalisation of the dominant fibroid with 58 % volume reduction and resolution of clinical symptoms (Tab. 4). The disease had recurred after 5 years and it was treated with myomectomy. Also the patient with missing uterine artery after the gunshot wound was included in the evaluation of clinical success rate of unilateral embolisation (Tab. 4).
In five procedures of scheduled unilateral embolisation, the angiography showed the unilateral supply of the fibroid. Only vascularisation of the myometrium was displayed from the contralateral uterine artery. Due to young age of majority of patients who have been planning a family, we decided to minimize the radiation load and risk of non-targeted embolisation in the utero-ovarian conjunction and perform the embolisation only from the supply side of the fibroid. We achieved a long-term clinical success in 4 patients; 2 patients became pregnant and gave a birth within 3 and 7 years. In one patient, hypermenorrhoea recurred after 12 months. In the long-term follow-up period, we reported 2 recurrences, 7 and 10 years after the embolisation, in this set of patients (Tab. 5).

Discussion

At workplaces performing UAEs worldwide, there are various minor modifications to the generally accepted technical process of this procedure. The highest percentage of the technical failure (17 %) was published in EMMY study (Volkers et al, 2006) probably due to the fact that it was a multicentric study in which many surgeons completed only a small number of procedures. In large studies: FIBROID (Worthington-Kirsch et al, 2005; Goodwin et al, 2008), REST (Edwards et al, 2007; Moos et al, 2011), FUME (Manyonda et al. 2001), the technical failure ranging from 3.0 % to 5.8 % was reported. We observed 4.3 % technical failure in our study set.

In our study, we only focused on arterial catheterisation-associated complications during the procedure. We evaluated not only technical success of the procedure but also the clinical effect of the treatment in condition of technical failure. In our study set, 95.7 % of procedures were successfully completed and it corresponds with published data and recommendations (Toor et al, 2012; Dariushnia et al, 2014).

Generally, the unilateral embolisation is considered to be insufficient since fibroids are usually supplied bilaterally. A risk of opening of contralateral collaterals, leading to a continuous perfusion of the tumour tissue, has been described after the unilateral embolisation. It results in insufficient fibroid necrosis associated with poor volume reduction and persistence of clinical

| Tab. 4. Technical failure of UAE. |
|-------------------------------|
| Patient | Age (years) | Supply of the fibroid | Embolisation (side) | Cause of failure | Volume regression | Clinical success | Disease recurrence | Duration of the follow-up period (months) |
|---------|-------------|------------------------|---------------------|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------|-------------------|------------------------------------------|
| 1       | 42          | Dominant from the left side | From the left side | Spasm | Yes 34.6 % | Yes | No | 6 |
| 2       | 35          | Bilateral | From the right side | Missing uterine artery on the left | No | | Short-term | 27 |
| 3       | 48          | Dominant from the left side | From the left side | Spasm | Yes 84.6 % | Yes | No | 108 |
| 4       | 45          | Dominant from the left side | From the left side | Spasm | Yes 30 % | Yes | | 36 |
| 5       | 40          | Dominant from the left side | From the left side | Arched branch | Yes 81,4 % | Yes | No | 12 |
| 6       | 31          | Bilateral | 1st session, only right one | Arched branch | Yes 58 % | Yes | | 72 |
| 7       | 39          | Dominant from the left side | 1 session, only right one | Spasm | | No | No | 26 |

| Tab. 5. Scheduled unilateral embolisation. |
|-------------------------------|
| Patient | Age (years) | Unilateral supply of the fibroid | Unilateral embolisation from any side | Volume regression | Clinical success | Disease recurrence | Duration of the follow-up period (months) | Other notes |
|---------|-------------|-------------------------------|---------------------------------|-----------------|-----------------|-------------------|------------------------------------------|-------------|
| 1       | 25          | From the right side | From the right side | Yes 92,6 % | Yes | No | 36 | Parturition 3 years after UAE |
| 2       | 28          | From the right side | From the right side | Yes 62,3 % | Yes | Myomectomy after 7 years | 120 | Parturition 7 years after UAE |
| 3       | 28          | From the right side | From the right side | Yes 57,4 % | Yes | Myomectomy after 10 years | 120 | – |
| 4       | 48          | From the right side | From the right side | Yes 98,7 % | Yes | | 84 | – |
| 5       | 33          | From the left side | From the left side | Yes 45,6 % | Short-term improvement | Hypermenorrhoea during hormone therapy after a year | 24 | Unsuccessful IVF after UAE |
symptomatology. Conclusions from several studies strongly recommend bilateral embolisation which has better clinical outcomes and less percentage of treatment failure versus unscheduled unilateral embolisation. (Gabriel-Cox et al, 2007, Spies et al, 2005).

In the study with scheduled unilateral embolisation and its good clinical effect, the fibroid was dominantly supplied by one uterine artery and the second artery supplied a healthy myometrium (Bratby et al. 2008).

In the study (Stall et al, 2011) evaluating 1431 uterine artery embolisations, 28 scheduled unilateral fibroid embolisations with fibroids supplied only by ipsilateral uterine artery were identified. Compared to the same set of bilateral embolisations, there was no significant difference in a complete fibroid necrosis (92 % vs 88 %); and less intensive post-embolisation pain with lower doses of anaesthetic agents and shorter total skiascopy time were reported in the set of unilateral embolisations.

In our study set, the clinical success was observed in 6 of 7 unscheduled unilateral embolisations. In one patient with missing left uterine artery, the clinical success was short-term and the patient experienced the recurrence of symptoms after 2 years.

Conclusion

Our results show that also the unscheduled unilateral embolisation has high long-term clinical success rate, especially provided that the treated uterine artery was the main supply source for the fibroid. The scheduled unilateral embolisation is clinically effective and reduces the duration of the procedure as well as the radiation dose, reduces the risk of non-targeted embolisation of ovarian circulation only to one ovary and half of healthy uterine tissue. Based on our results from individual patients long-term follow-up as well as published papers, we prefer the unilateral embolisation if the fibroid is only supplied by one uterine artery. In young patients who plan a family, it is also possible to consider the unilateral embolisation also in fibroids which are dominantly supplied from one side with good conjunctions from the second uterine artery. In patients with unscheduled unilateral embolisation, we recommend MRI follow-up and reintervention only in insufficient clinical outcome and concurrent MRI finding of residual fibroids.

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