Palm-coein classification of abnormal uterine bleeding and clinicohistopathological correlation

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Received: 07 February 2021  
Revised: 13 March 2021  
Accepted: 15 March 2021

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ABSTRACT

Background: The aim was to categorize women with AUB as per the PALM-COEIN classification system as this is a step towards cause based diagnosis and focused management of patients. The acronym PALM-COEIN comes from arranging basic categories of the classification system. The PALM group comprises the structural entities, which can be measured visually or by using imaging techniques and histopathology. The COEIN group comprises the non-organic types which cannot be defined by imaging or histopathology.

Methods: The study comprised 350 women of reproductive age with AUB for minimum 3 month time span. It describes and observes AUB in amount, interval and frequency for women attending out-patient Gynaecology department of C. U. Shah Medical College and Hospital, Surendranagar (Gujrat) over a period of year from November 17 to October 18. They were assessed on the basis of structured history, physical examination, local pelvis examination, investigations, USG findings and endometrial histopathological report. Cause of AUB was determined and treatment was given to the patient as appropriated by categorization done in agreements with the PALM-COEIN classification.

Results: The most prevalent cause of AUB was ovulatory dysfunction (n=99, 28.2%). Next common cause was leiomyoma (n=90, 25.7%), followed by endometrial causes (n=52, 14.5%), adenomyosis (n=30, 8.5%) not yet classified (n=32, 9.7%), malignancy and hyperplasia (n=28, 8.1%), polyp (n=9, 2.5%), iatrogenic (n=7, 2.2%) and coagulopathy (n=1, 0.3%).

Conclusions: The PALM-COEIN classification helps to practically as certain because of AUB, and there by effectively adopt the correct treatment for AUB patients.

Keywords: Abnormal uterine bleeding, AUB, Adenomyosis, Classification system, Malignancy, Ovulation, Polyp, leiomyoma

INTRODUCTION

AUB is a significant clinical entity, affecting 14-25% women of reproductive age. It is a common and debilitating condition with high direct and indirect cost. Since long, word such as menorrhagia, metorrhagia and dysfunctional uterine bleeding have been used to describe AUB which are confusing, controversial and poorly defined. FIGO menstrual disorders working group proposed abandoning such terms for menstrual disturbances as such differing term make it extremely difficult to interpret the patient’s pathology or bleeding condition. The consensus established that AUB is an appropriate term because it includes different types of menstrual bleeding and at the same time implies that it should exclude bleeding from the cervix or the lower genital tract. It also proposed that AUB in non-pregnant women can be Acute or Chronic. Acute AUB requires

April 2021 · Volume 10 · Issue 4 · Page 1587
prompt intervening to prevent further blood loss. Chronic AUB is bleeding from the uterine corpus persistent in the last 6 months and can be abnormal in terms of amount, interval or frequency.4

In recent years, concern regarding use of terminologies and definition around symptoms of AUB has increased. Simpler terms with clear meaning were needed that can be easily understood by the medical community. Therefore an improved classification system has been named by International Federation of Gynaecology and Obstetrics (FIGO) in 2011, which is called PALM-COEIN.5 PALM holds for the pathologies related to the uterine structural anomalies (polyp, adenomyosis, leiomyoma, malignancy and endometrial hyperplasia). COEIN holds for the pathologies unrelated with uterine structural anomalies (ovulatory dysfunction, coagulopathy, endometrial, iatrogenic, and unclassified). The PALM-COEIN system structurally evaluates AUB in women which helps to understand and identify causes and contributors to the symptoms.7

METHODS

The present study is descriptive observational conducted at Obstetrics and Gynecology department of C. U. Shah Medical College and Hospital, Surendranagar (Gujarat) over a period of 1 year from November 17 to October 18. In this study, we have enrolled 350 nongravid women of age group 15 to 55 years with irregular, unpredictable, abnormal volume, excessive or scanty duration or abnormal frequency of menses and inter-menstrual bleeding for a minimum of 3 months duration attending Obstetrics and Gynecology outdoors.

Data were analysed by SPSS version 16 and descriptive statistics were presented as frequencies, percentages and bar charts. Z-test was applied to know the significance of the correlation.

P: Polyps were categorized either absent or present and diagnosed by history, per speculum exam, ultrasound and/or histopathological exam.

A: Adenomyosis was identified based on medical history and ultrasound (asymmetrical myometrial appearance accompanied by a large uterus), and diagnosed by MRI and even on hysterectomy specimen.16

L: Leiomyoma was identified and diagnosed by ultrasound. This study includes only primary classification of leiomyoma, i.e., it reflect sonly the presence or absence of leiomyoma regardless of location, number and size.

M: If malignant or premalignant lesion was suspected, endometrial biopsy was performed for histopathology.

C: Coagulopathy was identified by patterned medical history, and diagnosed by coagulation test.

O: Ovulatory dysfunction included AUB cases of unpredictable time period and inconsistent amount of flow. It can be due to anovulation or disturbed ovulation. Endocrinopathies, polycystic ovarian syndrome, hypothyroidism, hyperprolactinemia and weight changes are included in this group.

E: Endometrial causes include those AUB women who have predictable and cyclic bleeding typical of ovulatory cycles. The cause might been do metrial origin. It is a diagnosis of exclusion

I: Iatrogenic group includes intrauterine contraceptives, gonadal steroids, anticonvulsant, antibiotics, antidepressants and anticoagulant drugs.

N: Not yet classified. It is inevitable that there will be pathologies that are either are or poorly defined that do not easily fit with incategories described earlier.

RESULTS

A total 6,300 women attending the gynaecology OPD during the study duration, 70 (18.6%) women put up with AUB of these women, 350 were studied in this report. All these cases were placed in then in categories of PALM-COEIN classification. Maximum patients, 47.7%, were in the age group of 40-50 years and 37.4% were in the 30-40 years age group (Table 1). Majority of patients, 37.4%, complained of heavy bleeding as chief complaint. 27% had irregular heavy bleeding and 22% had frequent bleeding (Table 2).

Table 1: Age distribution of study population.

| Age group(year) | Total number | Percentage |
|-----------------|--------------|------------|
| < 20            | 5            | 1.40       |
| 20-30           | 15           | 4.20       |
| 30-40           | 131          | 37.40      |
| 40-50           | 167          | 47.70      |
| > 50            | 32           | 9.10       |

Table 2: Distribution of study population based on presented complaints.

| Symptoms (complaints)       | Total number | Percentage |
|-----------------------------|--------------|------------|
| Heavy menstrual bleeding    | 131          | 37.4       |
| Irregular heavy bleeding    | 95           | 27.0       |
| Intermenstrual bleeding     | 7            | 02.0       |
| Frequent bleeding           | 77           | 22.0       |
| Post menopausal bleeding    | 28           | 08.0       |
| Infrequent or scanty bleeding | 12          | 03.4       |

As per the PALM-COEIN classification, ovulatory dysfunction (28.2%) was the most prevalent cause of AUB in our study. Simple ovarian cysts and PCOS were common sonographic findings. Hormone imbalance was
This study focuses to categorize the patient of AUB as per the PALM-COEIN classification and is similar to studies by presented with AUB were in age group 40-50 years (47.7%) and 30-40 years (37.4%). Of the presented complaints, heavy menstrual bleeding (37.4%) was the most common, followed by irregular heavy bleeding (27%) and frequent bleeding (22%). It was also noted that infrequent and scanty bleeding was more common in obese and PCOS women.

This study encapsulates the ease of use and implementation of this classification system. Moreover, treatment of pathology was easier where the cause of AUB was determined. In present study, we could understand the major causes of AUB grouped into structural and non-structural cause. In both groups, management plans were different, hence management was more focused and tailored to specific cause. The major disadvantage was in cases of patient who belonged to AUB-N category because treatment is vague in this category in absence of diagnosis. Also, COEIN part of classification needs further improvement through elaborate research.

**DISCUSSION**

The aim to conduct this study was to test the efficiency and practicality of PALM-COEIN classification system in clinical practice in determining the cause of disease and treatment modality for patient showing AUB at out patient department. The new FIGO classification was developed to clear longstanding apprehension regarding terminologies and definitions related to AUB. These terms referred to symptoms or diagnosis, were not clear, and on the contrary these terms created confusion in treatment of AUB cases. This study focuses to categorize the patient of AUB as per the PALM-COEIN classification and is similar to studies by Khrouf et al; Munro et al; Madha et al; Bahamondes et al.6-10 With this, necessary investigations can be easily done and better management of specific causes can be planned.

In present study, most of the patients presented with AUB were in age group 40-50 years (47.7%) and 30-40 years (37.4%). Of the presented complaints, heavy menstrual bleeding (37.4%) was the most common, followed by irregular heavy bleeding (27%) and frequent bleeding (22%). It was also noted that in frequent and scanty bleeding was more common in obese and PCOS women.11 According to study done by Gouri et al in May'16, category which had the most patients was ovulatory dysfunction (27%), followed by leiomyoma (24.7%).11 In study done by Goel et al, ovulatory dysfunction was found to be the most common cause of AUB (28.3%) followed by leiomyoma (22.7%).12 In present study also, ovulatory dysfunction was found to be

### Table 3: Distribution of study population according to PALM-COEIN classification (total 350 patients).

| Causes                      | Total number | %     |
|-----------------------------|--------------|-------|
| Polyp (AUB-P)               | 9            | 0.25  |
| Structural                  |              |       |
| Adenomyosis (AUB-A)         | 30           | 0.85  |
| Leiomyoma (AUB-L)           | 90           | 25.7  |
| Malignancy (AUB-M)          | 28           | 0.81  |
| Non Structural              |              |       |
| Coagulopathy (AUB-C)        | 1            | 0.03  |
| Ovulatory dysfunction (AUB-O) | 99       | 28.2  |
| Endometrial (AUB-E)         | 52           | 14.5  |
| Iatrogenic (AUB-I)          | 7            | 0.2   |
| Not yet classified (AUB-N)  | 32           | 0.97  |

### Table 4: Comparison of distribution of causes.

| Causes                      | Number of patients |
|-----------------------------|--------------------|
|                            | Present study      | Gouri et al | Goel et al | Qureshi and Yusuf | Ratnani et al |
| Polyp                       | P                  | 09 (02.5%)  | 06 (02.0%) | 08 (02.7%) | 30 (03.0%) | 40 (13.3%) |
| Adenomyosis                 | A                  | 30 (08.5%)  | 38 (12.7%) | 28 (09.3%) | 150 (15%) | 60 (20.0%) |
| Leiomyoma                   | L                  | 90 (25.7%)  | 74 (24.7%) | 68 (22.7%) | 250 (25%) | 105 (35%) |
| Malignancy or hyperplasia   | M                  | 28 (08.1%)  | 15 (05.0%) | 08 (02.7%) | 66 (06.7%) | 65 (21.6%) |
| Coagulopathy                | C                  | 01 (00.3%)  | 09 (03.0%) | 03 (01.0%) | 03 (03.0%) | 02 (00.6%) |
| Ovulatory dysfunction       | O                  | 99 (28.2%)  | 81 (27.0%) | 85 (28.3%) | 236 (24%) | 60 (20.0%) |
| Endometrial                 | E                  | 52 (14.5%)  | 27 (09.0%) | 62 (20.7%) | 48 (05.0%) | 12 (04.0%) |
| Iatrogenic                  | I                  | 07 (02.2%)  | 24 (08.0%) | 13 (04.3%) | 53 (06.0%) | 03 (01.0%) |
| Not yet classified           | N                  | 32 (09.7%)  | 19 (6.3%)  | 25 (08.3%) | 155 (15%) | 03 (01.0%) |
the most common cause of AUB (28.2%) (Table 4). PCOS, hormonal dysfunction, thyroid dysfunction, simple ovarian cyst were included in this category. This study encapsulates the ease of use and implementation of this classification system. Moreover, treatment of pathology was easier where the cause of AUB was determined. In present study, we could understand the major causes of AUB grouped into structural and non-structural cause. In both groups, management plans were different, hence management was more focused and tailored to specific cause. The major disadvantage was in cases of patients who belonged to AUB-N category because treatment is vague in this category in absence of diagnosis. Also, COEIN part of classification needs further improvement through elaborate research.

**Limitation**

Patients giving negative consent for hysterectomy and patients denies for histopathological examination.

**CONCLUSION**

To identify the exact cause is essential to successfully treat patients with AUB. The PALM-COEIN classification helps to practically as certain the cause of AUB, and there by effectively adopt and plan for focused treatment of patients. It is also important to regularly improvise and improve this classification system in line with changes and improvements in medical science and technology. It also needs to adapt to the available options as per demographics.

**Funding: No funding sources**

**Conflict of interest: None declared**

**Ethical approval: The study was approved by the Institutional Ethics Committee**

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Cite this article as: Vasava VH, Airao BB, Shingala MR Palm-coein classification of abnormal uterine bleeding and clinicohistopathological correlation. Int J Reprod Contracept Obstet Gynecol 2021;10:1587-90.