A Novel Insertion Technique for the Extra-Long Montgomery T-Tube in Patients with a Large Mediastinal Tumor

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The Montgomery T-tube is widely used to stent airway stenotic diseases. Conventional insertion methods can sometimes fail in the case of long-distance subglottic stenosis due to the flexibility of a T-tube made of silicon, which kinks when forced against resistance. Therefore, an alternative approach can assist in the insertion of an extra-long T-tube, especially when using a long proximal limb. We report herein the case of a patient with a large mediastinal tumor caused by neurofibromatosis type 1 in which airway obstruction was avoided through the use of a novel extra-long T-tube placement technique.

Keywords: Montgomery T-tube, airway management, tracheal stenosis

Introduction

Although a silicone T-tube is convenient and widely used for the management of obstructive airway disease, difficulties are often encountered in the insertion process, especially when placing the long proximal end of an extra-long T-tube. This may be due to the flexibility of the extra-long T-tube. Some modifications of the insertion technique have been introduced using rigid bronchoscopy or suspension laryngoscopy\(^1\);\(^2\); however, these methods require the use of cumbersome maneuvers and skilled medical personnel. Therefore, the development of the below technique may be highly beneficial to patients as it allows healthcare practitioners to keep non-ventilated time during the procedure to a minimum.

A Case Presentation

This study reports the case of a teenage girl who had been receiving care for neurofibromatosis type 1 from her family doctor since childhood. She had experienced cardiopulmonary arrest (CPA) on several occasions as a result of airway obstruction by a large mediastinal tumor (Fig. 1A). On this occasion, she presented with a sudden onset of dyspnea and was intubated in the emergency room at a hospital in the neighborhood. She was then referred to the Hokkaido University Hospital for further management. Following cytoreductive surgery for the mediastinal stenosis around the trachea, she was extubated in the intensive care unit. However, on extubation, sudden obstruction of the subglottic portion of the trachea leads to dyspnea and suffocation, resulting in CPA. Re-intubation was immediately performed, and a tracheostomy was later performed surgically; she required mechanical ventilation for a month. T-tube insertion was considered in order to provide ambulatory management. Based on the
detailed measurement of the length of the stenotic portion using computed tomography (CT), an extra-long T-tube was ordered (Koken Co., Ltd., Tokyo, Japan). The length from the glottis to stenosis was approximately 5 cm, and the length of the normal distal trachea to the carina was 6 cm (Fig. 2A). The caliber of stenosis of the subglottic tracheal portion was less than 2 mm at the point of minimal diameter due to compression by the tumor (Fig. 1B). The stenosis did not involve the tracheostoma. The patient described in this study provided informed consent for the publication of this case report. Approval from the institutional review board is not needed for case reports.

**Technique Description**

A general anesthesia with spontaneous ventilation was performed on the patient. Insertion of an extra-long T-tube is known to be difficult as the flexibility of the T-tube complicates placement of the proximal end. Therefore, we developed a novel insertion technique as follows (described in Fig. 2). 1) Preparation: An adequate length of 1-0 silk suture was inserted through the proximal limb of the T-tube extending to the T-tube’s stoma port. The 1-0 silk suture was then further inserted through a 12-Fr Nelaton catheter (Fig. 2A). 2) Connection to an airway exchange catheter: an airway exchange catheter was inserted by an anesthesiologist through the 6.5-mm internal diameter of the endotracheal tube. Intubation could be performed smoothly because the neurofibromatous tumor was soft and dilated easily at the first operation. The end of the airway exchange catheter was caught at the tracheostoma by the first operator. The airway exchange catheter was then attached to the proximal portion of the 1-0 silk. The airway exchange catheter was then pulled back through the subglottic portion, and the attached 1-0 silk was caught at the mouth by an anesthesiologist. Ventilation had been available for the patient at this time, had it become necessary. However, ventilation was not required in this case (Fig. 2B). 3) Insertion of the distal limb of the T-tube under bronchoscope guidance by the first operator was performed (Fig. 2C). 4) Pulling the proximal limb of the T-tube and Nelaton catheter: a Nelaton catheter was passed through the proximal limb of the T-tube by pulling the 1-0 silk, to which lubricating oil had been applied. The Nelaton catheter and T-tube were then inserted together through the stoma port by the second operator. By pulling further on the 1-0 silk, the anesthesiologist extended the proximal end of the T-tube and Nelaton catheter toward the area of tracheal stenosis. Stretching the set of the T-tube with the Nelaton catheter assisted in the introduction of the proximal limb of the T-tube into the subglottic portion of the trachea (Fig. 1C and 2D). The patient required periodic T-tube replacement every 3 months to maintain hygiene because the dried sputum frequently adhered to the T-tube. Moreover, optimal placement of the proximal limb of an extra-long T-tube was successfully performed on each occasion without bending by using this technique, and with experience, the procedure could be performed more rapidly.

**Discussion**

Some modifications of the insertion technique of a long T-tube have been described in the literature.
Pinedo-Onofre et al. introduced a modified insertion technique using umbilical tape in order to sustain proximal traction. This tape is placed in the direction of the tracheal longitudinal axis in order to ensure correct positioning of the T-tube. However, it is difficult to keep the lumen of the proximal limb patent, especially in case of an extra-long T-tube because of its flexibility. Tedde et al. used a folded double nasogastric tube and a Foley catheter to assist in the introduction of the proximal end into the trachea. However, it is difficult to maintain the patient’s oxygen saturation due to the difficulty in providing consistent ventilation throughout the procedure.

This method has four advantages. 1) A long T-tube can be inserted without rigid bronchoscopy. 2) The bronchoscopic direct vision allows the long distal limb of the T-tube to place in the appropriate position in the trachea or main bronchus. 3) A long T-tube can be inserted within a short period of time, and this procedure can be performed with a minimal period of restricted ventilation. 4) This is a practical technique because Nelaton catheters are cheap and widely available in most hospital settings. With the Nelaton catheter guidance, the proximal limb of the T-tube inside the stenotic area is easily inserted and adjusted.

**Conclusion**

This procedure has improved the insertion safety when compared to alternate T-tube insertion techniques. Further, this technique has been proven to be successful in the insertion of an extra-long Montgomery T-tube in patients with a long-distance subglottic stenosis. The novelty of this study and the documentation of this new T-tube introduction method make this study relevant in the current...
field, and this research has good applicability in the clinical setting. Further research is indicated in a wider variety of patient settings and degrees of tracheal obstruction.

**Disclosure Statement**

All authors have no conflicts of interest.

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