Application of Bethesda Reporting System of Thyroid Cytology and Its Clinical Significance
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DOI: 10.36348/sjpm.2020.v05i05.007 | Received: 29.04.2020 | Accepted: 10.05.2020 | Published: 17.05.2020

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Abstract

Final diagnosis of thyroid lesions requires morphological examination for which FNAC and histopathological examination become mandatory tests. In our study preoperative FNAC on 100 patients and along these histopathology reports of 22 patients were correlated and conclusions drawn after statistical analysis. Results: Diagnostic categorization of FNACs based on Bethesda classification showed that of the benign lesions (category 2), 45 were Nodular colloid, 13 Hashimoto thyroiditis, 13 multinodular goitre, 3 Primary hyperplasia and 2 Hyperplastic nodule. 1 was de Quervains thyroiditis, 1 was of adenomatous goitre. Of the 12 malignant lesions (category 6), 7 were papillary carcinoma, 2 anaplastic carcinoma, 1 medullary carcinoma, 2 metastatic carcinoma on FNAC, 8 were suspicious for follicular neoplasm (category 4) and 1 was of follicular lesion of undetermined significance on FNAC (category 3).

Among 100 cases, 22 were biopsied and subjected to histopathology. 11 cases were benign. Out of these, 2 were of colloid goitre, 3 follicular adenoma, 3 multinodular goitre 2 was of hasimoto’s, 1 was of thyroglossal cyst. 11 cases were malignant, Out of these, 6 were papillary carcinoma, 3 were Follicular carcinoma and 1 medullary carcinoma 1 case of noninvasive follicular thyroid neoplasm with papillary like nuclear features. Out of 22 cases examined histopathologically findings were similar to FNAC in 21 cases and findings differed in 1 case. The sensitivity & specificity for FNAC of thyroid neoplasm in present study were 82.6, 95.2%, respectively. Conclusions: FNAC is simple, safe & cost effective modality in investigation of thyroid swellings with high accuracy. The Bethesda system of reporting has high concordance with the histopathological findings. Keywords: Thyroid swelling, FNAC thyroid, Bethesda system of thyroid cytology, histopathology, papillary carcinoma, colloid goitre.

INTRODUCTION

Thyroid lesions are among the most common clinical conditions. The prevalence of the thyroid nodules ranges from 4% to 10% in the general adult population and from 0.2% to 1.2% in children [1]. It is estimated 4-7% adults have palpable enlargement of thyroid and 10 times more have impalpable nodules. Most of them are benign and fewer than 5% are actually malignant [2]. In India, thyroid cancer comprises approximately 1% of all head and neck cancers.

A multitude of diagnostic tests like clinical method (T3, T4, TSH), palpation method, ultrasonography, fine needle aspiration cytology are available to evaluate thyroid swelling. Final diagnosis requires morphological examination of lesions for which FNAC and histopathological examination become mandatory tests [3].

FNAC examination has proved to be a method for the preoperative diagnosis of benign and malignant thyroid nodules [4].

Direct FNAC and guided FNAC is a diagnostic tool in which cells are aspirated from a palpable and non-palpable swelling using syringe and fine needle. It is a simple, accurate, safe and cost effective minimally traumatic; it is ideal first line rapid diagnostic technique.

AIMS AND OBJECTIVES

The aims and objectives for the study are:-
1. Application of the Bethesda category for FNAC and correlate the results with final histopathological diagnosis in which ever cases possible
2. To observe the spectrum of thyroid lesions, their incidences, frequencies, age distribution and occurrence.
3. To study the cytomorphological features in various benign and malignant thyroid lesions on fine needle aspiration cytology and to provide accurate diagnosis.
4. To correlate the finding of FNAC of thyroid lesions with USG thyroid and estimates the concordance and discordance between two modalities.

**MATERIAL AND METHODS**

The study was undertaken in the Department of Pathology, Chirayu Medical College and Hospital, Bhopal during the period from June 2017 to June 2019.

The study comprised of 103 patients who presented with the history of swelling of thyroid.

The cytology reporting has been done by following reporting system:

The Bethesda for Reporting Thyroid cytopathology: Recommended Diagnostic Categories

| 1. Nondiagnostic or unsatisfactory |
|-----------------------------------|
| Cyst fluid only                    |
| Virtually acellular specimen       |
| Other(obscuring blood, clotting artifact etc) |

| 2. Benign                           |
|------------------------------------|
| Consistent with a benign follicular nodule(includes adenomatoid goitre, colloid nodule, etc) |
| Consistent with lymphocytic (hashimoto)thyroiditis |
| Consistent with granulomatous (subacute) |
| Thyroiditis other                  |

| 3. Atypia of undetermined significance or follicular lesion of undetermined significance |

| 4. Follicular Neoplasm OR Suspicious for a Follicular Neoplasm |
|---------------------------------------------------------------|
| Specify if hurthle cell (oncocytic) type                      |

| 5. Suspicious for Malignancy                                  |
|---------------------------------------------------------------|
| Suspicious for papillary carcinoma                           |
| Suspicious for medullary carcinoma                           |
| Suspicious for metastatic carcinoma                         |
| Suspicious for lymphoma                                      |
| Others                                                        |

| 6. Malignant                                                   |
|---------------------------------------------------------------|
| Papillary thyroid carcinoma                                  |
| Medullary carcinoma                                          |
| Poorly differentiated carcinoma                              |
| Undifferentiated (anaplastic) carcinoma                      |
| Squamous cell carcinoma                                      |
| Metastatic carcinoma                                         |
| Non-hodgkin lymphoma                                         |
| Others                                                       |

Thyroid ultrasound examination was performed with a real-time instrument using a 7.5 mHz linear transducer in the Radiology Department of Chirayu medical college and Hospital.

All the patients were clinically examined in detail according to the proforma and a careful palpation of the thyroid gland was done to judge precisely the location for aspiration. After brief explanation about the procedure to the patient, aspiration was done with the...
patient in supine or sitting position with extended neck, so as to make the thyroid swelling appear prominent.

Under aseptic precautions 23 gauge needle with a 10ml disposable plastic syringe was inserted into the lesion and to and fro movements performed quickly. Under negative pressure material gets collected in the needle, after collection of material negative pressure was released, needle with syringe holder was removed, the material was spread over a clean labelled slide and smears were prepared.

The air dried and 95% alcohol fixed smears were prepared for giemsa, papanicolaou stains respectively. Whenever fluid was obtained all the contents were aspirated and centrifuged, smears were made from the sediment and stained by the stains as described above.

When the surgery was done, the received specimens were fixed with 10% formalin and detailed gross examination was done and sections were taken from the representative areas for paraffin sections and stained by H & E. The sections were studied under light microscopy.

Cytological diagnosis was correlated with histopathology where ever cases possible.

RESULTS

The present study deals with the fine needle aspiration cytology (FNAC) of thyroid lesions and its clinico-pathological correlation. During the period of this study from June 2017 to June 2019, 103 ultrasonography and FNACs were performed out of which 22 cases were biopsied subsequently and subjected to histopathological study

Age and gender distribution

Age group of patient referred for thyroid aspiration ranged from 0 to 100 years with mean age of 42.14.

In the present study, it has been observed that the incidence of thyroid lesions were more in the age group of 21-40yrs with 51 cases (49.5 %), and least common in the age group of 81-100yrs with 1 case (0.9%). The mean age is 42.14 yrs. The youngest patient was 10yrs male and oldest was 83yrs female

Majority of the patients were female accounting for 79%, forming male to female ratio of 1:3.68.

TSH LEVELS

In the present study, it has been observed that Out of 103 cases, maximum no. of cases was euthyroid (89%), followed by hypothyroid (6%) and 5 % hyperthyroid.

Incidences of benign and malignant lesions on USG

Table-2: Incidences of benign and malignant lesions of thyroid on USG findings

| Types of finding | Frequency |
|------------------|-----------|
| Benign           | 82        |
| Malignant        | 12        |
| Suspicious       | 9         |
| TOTAL            | 103       |

In the present study, it has been observed that among the total thyroid lesion (103) USG, 82 were benign, 12 were malignant and 9 were suspicious.

Distribution of cases

Table-3: Cytological diagnosis of thyroid lesion (n=100)

| Thyroid lesion of FNAC | No. of cases | Bethesda category |
|------------------------|--------------|-------------------|
| Nodular colloid        | 57           | 2                 |
| Hasimoto thyroiditis   | 13           | 2                 |
| Grave's disease        | 3            | 2                 |
| De-quervans            | 1            | 2                 |
| Adenomatous goiter     | 1            | 2                 |
| Follicular neoplasm    | 8            | 4                 |
| Papillary thyroid carcinoma | 9      | 6                 |
| Medullary carcinoma    | 2            | 6                 |
| Metastatic carcinoma   | 2            | 6                 |
| Follicular lesion of undetermined significance | 1 | 3 |
| Anaplastic carcinoma   | 2            | 6                 |
| Thyroglossal cyst      | 1            | -                 |
| **Total**              | 100          |                   |

Total 100 cases diagnosed by FNAC, out of which 57 cases were nodular colloid (colloid goitre, mutli nodular goiter, colloid nodule), 13 cases were thyroiditis, 3 cases were grave’s diseases, 1 case de-quervans thyroiditis, 1 adenomatous goiter, 1 thyroglossal cyst, 8 were follicular neoplasm(suspicious for malignancy), 1 follicular cell of insignificant determined(suspicious for malignancy), 9 cases of papillary carcinoma, 2 were anaplastic carcinoma, 2 medullary carcinoma and 2 were metastatic carcinoma.
Sonography and cytology correlation

Table-4: sonography and cytology correlation

| Broad diagnosis on USG | No of cases on sonography | No. of cases on FNAC | Correlated | Non correlated |
|------------------------|---------------------------|----------------------|------------|---------------|
| Benign                 | 79                        | 77                   | 77         | 2             |
| Malignant              | 12                        | 14(12+2)             | 12         | 0             |
| Suspicious             | 9                         | 9                    | 9          | 0             |
| Total                  | 100                       | 100                  | 98         | 02            |

Out of 100 cases, 79 were broadly diagnosed on USG as benign pathologies however, among these cases FNAC suggested benign pathology of 77 cases and 2 cases were diagnosed on as malignant pathology. On FNAC one of these cases were diagnosed as papillary carcinoma and one of these diagnosed as medullary carcinoma.

12 cases given as malignant on USG, all 12 malignant cases turned out to be malignant on cytology, giving accuracy of malignant cases 100%

9 cases which were given as suspicious to malignant, 8 cases were turned out to be suspicious to follicular neoplasm on FNAC and 1 case which was given as suspicious for malignancy was turned out to be follicular lesion of undetermined significance.

Histopathological Diagnosis of the Lesions
In the present study of 100 cases, 22 patients underwent surgery and the histopathological diagnosis of the cases are given below

Benign lesions -11
Malignant lesions -11

Table-5: Histological diagnosis of thyroid lesions (n=22)

| Thyroid lesion on histopathology | No. of cases | Percentage |
|---------------------------------|--------------|------------|
| Colloid goiter                  | 2            | 9          |
| Hashimoto’s thyroiditis         | 2            | 9          |
| Multinodular goiter             | 3            | 13.6       |
| Thyroglossal cyst               | 1            | 4.6        |
| Follicular adenoma              | 3            | 13.6       |
| Follicular carcinoma            | 3            | 13.6       |
| Papillary carcinoma             | 6            | 27.4       |
| Medullary carcinoma             | 1            | 4.6        |
| NIFTP                           | 1            | 4.6        |
| Total                           | 22           | 100        |

Cytology-histopathology correlation of lesions

Table-6: cytology-histopathology correlation

| Cytological diagnosis | no. of cases | Histopath diagnosis available | Co related with histopath | not correlated |
|-----------------------|--------------|--------------------------------|----------------------------|---------------|
| Benign                | 76           | 8                              | 7(87.5%)                  | 1(12.5%)      |
| Nodular colloid goiter| 57           | 5                              | 4(80%)                    | 1(20%)        |
| Hashimoto thyroiditis | 13           | 2                              | 2(100%)                   |               |
| Grave’s disease       | 3            | 0                              |                           |               |
| De-quervans           | 1            | 0                              |                           |               |
| Adenomatous goiter    | 1            | 0                              |                           |               |

Thyroglossal cyst       | 1            | 1                              | 1(100%)                   |               |
Malignant
Papillary thyroid carcinoma | 9          | 6                              | 6(100%)                   | 0             |
Medullary carcinoma     | 2            | 1                              | 1(100%)                   |               |
Metastatic              | 2            | 0                              |                           |               |
Anaplastic              | 2            | 0                              |                           |               |
NIFTP                   | 0            | 1                              | 1(100%)                   |               |
Atypia with undetermined significance | 1 | 0 | | |
Suspicious for Neoplasm | 8            | 6                              | 6(100%)                   | 0             |
Follicular neoplasm     | 8            | 6                              | 6(100%)                   | 0             |
Out of 100 adequate cases on FNAC, histopathology was available in 22 cases. Out of 22 cases, 21 (95.4%) cases were confirmed on histopathology and 1 case was diagnosed as colloid nodule with cystic degeneration on fnac which was turned out to be papillary carcinoma on histopathology. Out of 22 cases, 11 were benign and 11 were malignant.

Present study showed 90% specificity, 72.7% sensitivity for benign lesions while for malignant lesions; it was 100% specificity.

Table 7: Statistical Values for Benign and Malignant Lesions Calculated by Galen and Gambino’s Method

| SL.No. | Statistical index          | Benign lesions | Malignant lesions |
|--------|---------------------------|----------------|-------------------|
| 1      | Sensitivity               | 72.7%          | 91.6%             |
| 2      | Specificity               | 90.9%          | 100%              |
| 3      | Positive predicted value  | 88.8%          | 100%              |
| 4      | Negative predicted value  | 76.9%          | 90.9%             |

Case images

Image 1: FNAC showing papillary cluster showing powdery chromatin and intranuclear inclusion in papillary carcinoma Giemsa 400X

Image 2: FNAC of Anaplastic carcinoma 100X

Image 3: FNAC showing compact microfollicular cluster in follicular neoplasm giemsa 400X

Image 4: Histopathology of follicular variant of papillary carcinoma H&E 400X

Image 5: Histopathology of medullary carcinoma H&E 400X

DISCUSSION

1. FNAC was performed on 103 cases for cytological evaluation.

2. Age range of the patients taken for the study was from 0-100 yrs with a mean age of 42.32 yrs. According to our study 51 cases (49.5%) belonged to 21-40 yrs of age which indicated higher incidence of thyroid lesions in 21-40 yrs of age. The youngest patient was 10 yrs male and oldest was 85 yrs female.

3. Majority of the patients were females in the present study with 81 females and 22 males, with a age ratio of 1:6.5 respectively.
4. On FNAC Out of the 103 cases of thyroid lesions,
   A. 79 were benign lesions (Bethesda category 2)
   B. 12 were malignant lesions (Bethesda category 6)
   C. 8 were suspicious for follicular neoplasm (Bethesda category 4)
   D. 1 was follicular lesion of undetermined significance (Bethesda category 3)
   E. 3 samples were found inadequate for evaluation (Bethesda category 1)
5. Out of the 79 benign lesions (Bethesda category 2), 45 were Nodular colloid goiter, 13 Hashimoto thyroiditis, 13 multinodular goitre, 3 Primary hyperplasia and 2 Hyperplastic nodule 1 was of de-quevans thyroiditis, 1 was of adenomatous goitre.
6. Out of the 12 lesions, 7 were Papillary carcinoma, 2 anaplastic carcinoma, 1 medullary carcinoma, 2 metastatic carcinoma.
7. On FNAC, 8 were suspicious for follicular neoplasm.
8. 1 was of follicular lesion of undetermined significance (Bethesda category 3).
9. Among 100 cases, 22 were biopsied subsequently and subjected to histopathological study. (Table 6)
   A. Among these cases 8 were initially diagnosed as Benign on FNAC, out of which findings of 7 correlated with the histopathology, 1 which was diagnosed as Colloid cyst on FNAC turned out to be papillary carcinoma.
   B. There were 8 cases which were diagnosed as malignant on FNAC and findings of all these cases correlated with histopathology indicating significant concordance.
   C. There were 6 cases which categorised as suspicious for follicular neoplasm on FNAC, findings of all these 6 cases correlated with histopathology (3 were diagnosed as follicular adenoma and 3 as follicular carcinoma).
10. The diagnostic accuracy of benign and malignant lesions is 95.7% and 90% respectively.
11. The sensitivity, specificity, positive predictive value and negative predictive value for FNAC of thyroid neoplasm in the present study are 77%, 98.3%, 87.5% and 96.7% respectively.
12. The overall diagnostic accuracy of FNAC for thyroid lesions is 95.7%.

The comparison of various parameters in our present study was done with that of studies by other authors.

Table-8: Age range in different studies in comparison with present study

| Study                | Age range(years) | Mean age (years) |
|----------------------|------------------|------------------|
| Burch HB [1].(1996)  | 15-83            | 51.1             |
| Aravinthan [5](2007) | 26-59            | 46               |
| Present study        | 0-100            | 42.14            |

In the present study of 103 patients, the youngest patient was 10 years (patient with cytological diagnosis of thyroglossal cyst). The oldest patient was of 83 years with cytological diagnosis of nodular colloid goiter. The mean age of the patients was 42.14 yrs age group is similar to the study of Aravinthan as seen above.

Table-9: Comparision of Sex distribution and Male and Female ratio of with present study

| Study                | Total cases | Male | Female | M : F |
|----------------------|-------------|------|--------|------|
| Burch HB .[1] (1996) | 422         | 91   | 331    | 1:3.6 |
| Present study        | 103         | 22   | 81     | 1:3.6 |

In the present study of 103 cases, majority were females with 81 cases and 22 males with a male to female ratio of 1:3.68, which correlates well with the study of Burch HB et al.

Table-10: Comparison of TSH levels with different studies

| Study                | Total cases in which TFTs done | Functional thyroid status in % |
|----------------------|-------------------------------|--------------------------------|
|                      |                               | Euthyroid | Hyperthyroid | Hypothyroid |
| Godinho-Matos L[6](1992) | 144                           | 88        | 9           | 3          |
| Present study        | 103                           | 89        | 5           | 6          |
In present study, total no cases were 103, out of which 89% of euthyroid, 5 % of hyperthyroid and 6% were hypothyroid which is more or less consistent with Godinho-Matos L

Table-11: Comparative incidences of benign and malignant lesions on FNAC in different studies

| Study            | Benign | Malignant | Ratio |
|------------------|--------|-----------|-------|
| Silverman JF [7](1986) | 228    | 80        | 1:2.9 |
| Present study    | 76     | 15        | 1:5   |

In the present study of 103 cases, 76 were benign and 15 were malignant, 9 were suspicious and 3 were inadequate, with a ratio of 1:5 which is consistent with the study Silverman JF.

Table-12: Comparative study of different benign lesions on FNAC

| Study            | Nodular colloid goitre | Hashimoto Thyroiditis | Primary hyperplasia |
|------------------|------------------------|-----------------------|--------------------|
| Silverman JF [7](1986) | 156(52.8%) | 3(1.0%) | 5(1.6%) |
| Hawkins F [8](1989)     | 885(63.2%) | 611(43.6%) | 40(2.8%) |
| Present study       | 57 (57%)   | 13(13%)  | 3(3%)   |

Hence findings of the present study are similar to the above mention studies if compared on the basis of percentage of various benign lesions found in the studies.

Table-13: Comparison of malignant lesions on FNAC in different studies

| Study            | FNAC |
|------------------|------|
|                  | Follicular neoplasm | Papillary carcinoma | Medullary carcinoma |
| Hawkins F [8](1989) | 52    | 50    | -     |
| Present study    | 8     | 9     | 1     |

In the present study, 8 cases were of follicular neoplasm, 9 cases were papillary carcinoma and 1 case was of medullary carcinoma hence the present study is similar to Hawkins F.

Table-14: comparative study of Diagnostic Accuracy of Papillary Carcinoma

| Study            | FNAC diagnosis | Histopathology Diagnosis | Accuracy % |
|------------------|----------------|--------------------------|------------|
| Hall TL [9](1989) | 29             | 26                       | 89.6       |
| Gagneten CB [10] (1987) | 4           | 5                        | 80         |
| Present study    | 6              | 7                        | 85.7       |

In the present study, 6 cases of papillary carcinoma on FNAC were confirmed with histopathology. 1 case which was diagnosed as Colloid nodule with cystic degeneration on FNAC turned out to be papillary carcinoma and its variants. The accuracy of FNAC was 85.7% which is comparable with the study of Hall TL.

Table-15: comparative study of Diagnostic Accuracy of Follicular neoplasm

| Study            | FNAC diagnosis | Histopathology Diagnosis | Accuracy % |
|------------------|----------------|--------------------------|------------|
| Silverman JF [7](1986) | 27             | 36                       | 75         |
| Present study    | 6              | 6                        | 100        |

In the present study, of the 6 cases of Follicular neoplasm on FNAC, 3 cases were of Follicular adenoma on histopathology and the other 3 cases turned out to be follicular carcinoma on histopathology, giving a diagnostic accuracy of 100% which is more consistent with the study of Silverman JF.
Comparision of statistical data

Table 16: Comparison of Statistical data

| Study            | Sensitivity | Specificity | Accuracy |
|------------------|-------------|-------------|----------|
| Silverman JF [7][1986] | 93%         | 95.1%       | 94%      |
| Hawkins F [8](1987)  | 86.3%       | 95.3%       | 93.7%    |
| Burch HB [1](1996)   | 80%         | 73.2%       | 75.2%    |
| Present study     | 82.6%       | 95.2%       | 97.5%    |

In the present study sensitivity is 82.6%, specificity 95.2%, positive predictive value 95%, negative predictive value 83.3%, and diagnostic accuracy of 97.5%, which are consistent with the study of Hawkins F (1987) with a sensitivity of 86.3%, specificity of 95.3% and diagnostic accuracy of 93.7%.

CONCLUSION

In our study we re-emphasize the importance of the Bethesda system and we have found that the Bethesda system for reporting of cytopathology is clinically very significant and highly correlates with other investigative modalities and with the histopathological findings.

FNAC is an excellent, safe diagnostic procedure with high degree of accuracy, rapid results and less invasive procedure than a tissue biopsy. It plays a crucial role in the selection of patients for surgery.

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