



Management of the Acute Phase of Peyronie's Disease: a Contemporary Review

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Abstract

Purpose of Review The goal of this article is to review the current management options for Peyronie's disease (PD), focusing on the acute phase of the disease. Additionally, we aim to highlight the most recent literature on the subject.

Recent Findings Contemporary studies suggest that there are promising novel therapies on the horizon for acute phase PD, such as topical H-100 gel and intralesional interferon- α 2b and mycophenolate mofetil. Recent findings also suggest that intralesional collagenase *Clostridium histolyticum* (CCH) may be effective for the acute phase of PD, in addition to its conventional use in the chronic phase.

Summary A variety of treatments have been proposed for PD, with more recent literature focusing on the acute phase. Novel topical therapies are on the horizon and may show promise. External mechanical therapies have shown clinically meaningful changes. CCH may have efficacy during the acute phase of PD. Other intralesional therapies are promising but still require additional large studies to confirm efficacy. Future research on the acute phase of PD may expand treatment options and impact disease management.

Keywords Peyronie's disease · Acute phase · Intralesional injection · Collagenase *Clostridium histolyticum*

Introduction

Peyronie's disease (PD) is a chronic inflammatory disease involving the tunica albuginea of the penis in which progressive fibrosis leads to plaque formation. The etiology is thought to be multifactorial and includes singular or repetitive trauma to the penis, genetic factors, inflammatory predispositions, and vascular or metabolic associations; however, the pathogenesis of the disease remains uncertain. Plaque formation as a result of fibrosis often causes pain in the acute phase of PD, followed by curvature (Fig. 1a) and other deformities of the erect penis such as narrowing, indentation, hourglassing, and loss of penile length and girth. Although pain usually subsides

as the acute phase ends, deformities persist into the chronic, stable phase of the disease.

The prevalence of PD is reported to be up to 3.2% of men in the USA, and up to 20.3% of men with metabolic comorbidities [1, 2]. PD deformities can have a considerable impact on a man's sexual function and the psychological and sexual well-being of his partner and himself. Approximately 48% of men with PD suffer from clinical depression and the overall prevalence of emotional and relationship problems attributable to PD has been estimated at 81% and 54%, respectively [3, 4]. One attributes these problems to the association of PD with erectile dysfunction (ED); 40–50% of men with PD present with concomitant ED [5].

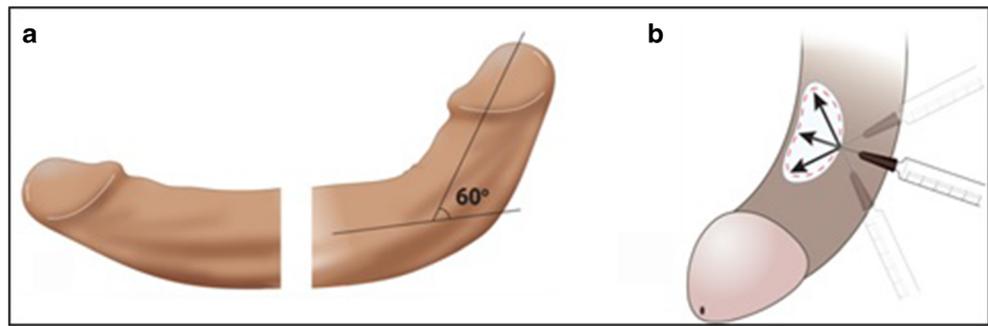
A variety of treatment options have been proposed for PD, but the disease remains a therapeutic challenge for urologists; there is no definitive surgical or non-surgical cure, especially during the acute phase. While surgical reconstruction is the gold standard treatment for the disease, it requires stability of the disease process and comes with an increased risk of morbidity, evidenced by high rates (65%) of patient dissatisfaction [6]. Thus, the clinical and social consequences of PD illuminate the urgency with which suitable treatments are needed. The goal of this article is to review the current management

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Fig. 1 **a** Normal erect penis without curvature and erect penis with 60° dorsal curvature due to Peyronie’s disease. **b** Intralesional CCH injected into PD plaque using “fan” technique



options for PD, focusing on the acute phase of the disease, while acknowledging the variable definitions of the disease course that have been used across different studies.

Defining the Acute Phase

There are two phases that have been recognized in PD: active/acute phase and chronic phase. According to the most recent guidelines by the American Urological Association (AUA), active disease is characterized by dynamic and changing symptoms, with pain or discomfort regardless of erectile function status. Chronic phase is defined as clinically unchanged symptoms for at least 3 months with very little pain [7]. Additionally, the acute phase has been defined by the presence of inflammatory infiltrate within the lesions on the tunica albuginea, whereas those of the stable phase exhibits fibrosis and calcification [8]. The length of time of active phase, however, has been shown to vary across studies and trials and early studies even show no significant association between disease duration and spontaneous improvement in penile bending. This confounds the assignment of defining parameters to acute phase [9]. It is generally accepted that the acute phase can last 12 to 18 months, yet some studies do not use a temporal factor at all in the categorization of acute phase [10, 11]. Table 1 summarizes the definition of acute phase in the inclusion criteria of various studies, highlighting the variation that can be seen in the literature.

Management with Oral Agents

Oral treatments are an alluring option for many patients because of the convenience. However, in examining the published controlled trials, there is no evidence of benefit with the use of colchicine, tamoxifen, vitamin E, potassium aminobenzoate, carnitine, or omega-3 fatty acids [5]. While pentoxifylline and L-arginine have been shown to have beneficial effects in animal model studies, demonstrating scar regression in PD via increasing the levels of nitrous oxide and/or cGMP/cAMP, the literature does not support these as a

beneficial therapeutic modality thus far, especially as monotherapeutic agents, and therefore they are not recommended in the International Consultation on Sexual Medicine (ICSM) guidelines [19, 20]. Additionally, the European Association of Urology (EAU) guidelines recommend against the use of oral vitamin E and tamoxifen with level 2b evidence, and against L-carnitine and pentoxifylline with level 3 evidence [21].

Phosphodiesterase type 5 inhibitors (PDE5Is) have been established as a safe option to treat ED that is often associated with PD, but there is a lack of evidence to show benefit of use of PDE5Is in the treatment of PD-related penile deformity. Thus, their use would not be recommended for this purpose and have not been studied for use in the acute phase of PD [22, 23]. It is also important to note that as there are no FDA-approved oral therapies for PD, physicians who recommend oral therapy to their patients must inform them that it is an off-label indication.

Topical Management

Verapamil

Topical therapy is an attractive option for patients given its self-directed nature and minimization of systemic adverse effects, but there is a lack of evidence suggesting that agents, such as topical verapamil, are sufficiently able to penetrate transdermally into the tunica albuginea. Topical verapamil has been previously investigated for use in the setting of PD because of its antifibrotic effect on fibroblasts, but because of its lack of penetration as well as the lack of adequate studies to support its use, it is not recommended in PD patients according to ICSM guidelines (grade B, level 3) [24–26].

H-100

The most recent literature evaluating topical therapies has demonstrated that H-100 gel may be a promising novel topical agent. H-100 gel, which combines a natural carrier agent, nicardipine, superoxide dismutase, and emu oil, has been

Table 1 Studies demonstrating varying definitions of acute/active phase PD as mentioned in the inclusion criteria

Author(s)	Study design	N	Symptom duration defining acute phase	Pain as a defining criterion	Other criteria (besides curvature)
Gelbard, M. 2012. [12]	Phase II randomized clinical trial	147	≤ 6 months	Not defined	Functional difficulty required (ED or difficulty with intromission)
Gelbard, M. et al. 2013. (IMPRESS I & II) [13]	Phase III randomized placebo-controlled trial	832	≤ 12 months	Not defined	-
Levine, L. et al. 2015. [14]	Phase III open-label clinical trial	347	≤ 12 months	Not defined	-
Zucchi, A. et al. 2016. [15]	Prospective interventional study	65	Not defined	Required	Palpable nodule or plaque required
Twidwell, J. et al. 2016. [16••]	Prospective randomized controlled study	22	< 12 months	Not defined	-
Nguyen, HMT. et al. 2017. [17••]	Retrospective cohort study	162	≤ 12 months	Required	-
Favilla, V. et al. 2017. [10•]	Prospective, randomized trial	201	< 12 months	And/or painful erection	And/or recent change in penile curvature
Martínez-Salamanca, J. et al. 2014. [18]	Prospective, non-randomized, controlled trial	96	< 12 months	Pain at rest or with erection	Progressive penile curvature > 15°

shown to reduce penile curvature and pain and increase penile length in the setting of PD, while maintaining safety [16••]. The prospective, randomized, double-blinded, placebo-controlled pilot study involved 22 patients, all of whom were required to have documented PD of < 12 months duration and were therefore in the acute phase. Compared with the placebo group, the H-100 group experienced a statistically significant reduction in mean curvature (40.8%), as well as a 22.6% increase in penile length, and 85.7% decrease in pain level. Additionally, crossover patients from placebo to H-100 groups also showed significant improvement in all parameters [16••]. As this was a pilot study and the only publication investigating the use of H-100 for PD, larger randomized trials examining efficacy are required before this therapy can be recommended for usage [19•].

Electromotive Drug Administration

As a result of the lack of penetration that was seen in topical therapy, electromotive drug administration (EMDA), or iontophoresis, was developed in an attempt to improve effectiveness. The technique involves the transport of ions through tissue via an electric current in order to electrokinetically direct the medication towards the target lesion. However, the procedure is labor and equipment intensive compared with standard topical application [27]. Initial trials showed promise with the use of various topical drugs using this method in the setting of PD, but subsequent studies continued to demonstrate no benefit of using pharmacologic agents augmented

by iontophoresis for the use of PD [28–31]. Additionally, as EMDA is rarely used clinically, there have been no recent studies conducted to further evaluate the efficacy of this therapy for treatment of acute or chronic PD.

Intralesional Injection

Intralesional therapy has the benefit of local drug delivery with high concentrations and has proven to have greater efficacy than topical and oral medications in the treatment of PD. It has been suggested that traumatic disruption of the plaque by the needle might also have a benefit, and with certain injection techniques such as the “fan” technique (Fig. 1b) or percutaneous needle tunneling, procedural morbidity can be minimized while maximizing efficacy [23•, 32•, 33•].

Corticosteroids

Corticosteroids were the first intralesional therapy for PD, employed for their anti-inflammatory effects and initial studies suggesting curvature improvement; however, subsequent studies showed no significant difference between corticosteroid and placebo groups [34–36]. Furthermore, because of the adverse systemic effects associated with corticosteroid use, such as tissue atrophy and wound infection, along with its limited efficacy, the AUA and the EAU do not recommend its use for the treatment of PD [7, 21].

Table 2 Comparison of CCH treatment protocols and their efficacy for PD

	Dose of CCH	Maximum number of cycles	Cycle duration (week)	Total duration of treatment (week)	Curvature improvement (from baseline)
Standard protocol	0.58 mg	4	6	24	34% [13]
Shortened modified protocol	0.9 mg	3	4	12	31.4% [46•]

Collagenase *Clostridium histolyticum*

To date, the only medication Food and Drug Administration (FDA) approved for the treatment of PD is Collagenase *Clostridium histolyticum* (CCH), which works to cleave irregular amalgamations of collagen. It is administered as injections directly into a plaque at multiple clinic appointments, followed by several weeks of mechanical stretching of the penis (Fig. 1b) [13, 37•, 38]. Previously used to treat Dupuytren's contracture, CCH consists of purified enzymes produced by the bacterium *Clostridium histolyticum*, cleaving types I and III collagen, the most abundant types found in PD plaques [19•, 39].

Initial randomized, placebo-controlled, double-blinded trials demonstrated statistically significant improvement in penile curvature while maintaining safety, thereby prompting larger studies [40, 41]. IMPRESS I and II, two large randomized double-blinded, placebo-controlled phase II trials, confirmed the efficacy of CCH with a low complication rate. In these trials, the subjects received up to 8 injections of 0.58 mg CCH separated into 4 cycles with 2 injections each, separated by 24 to 72 h, a regimen that ultimately showed a statistically significant 34% improvement in curvature compared with placebo (18.2%), and became the standard protocol [13]. Subsequent studies continued to show similar results, confirming the safety and efficacy of CCH for the treatment of PD [14, 38, 42•, 43]. In addition, recent studies have shown that the standard protocol of CCH is both safe and effective specifically during the acute phase of PD, a result that still needs confirmation by large multi-institutional studies [44••].

Besides the efficacy and safety that has been consistently reported with the use of CCH, the cost of the drug therapy is considerable, with one cost analysis totaling treatment of severe disease to US\$26,375 (considerably more expensive than other therapies), an aspect of treatment that cannot be ignored [45]. Some clinicians are beginning to propose new modified protocols of CCH treatment administration aiming at lowering the cost to patients while maintaining efficacy [46•]. Table 2 draws a comparison between the standard protocol and the shortened modified protocol, though these protocols have yet to be directly compared in studies examining the acute phase of PD. Additionally, given that CCH treatment for PD is approved specifically for dorsal or dorsolateral curves between 30° and 90°, ventral plaques have not been widely studied due to previous concerns of urethral injury during

penile modeling [47]. However, recent studies suggest that men with ventral PD may be effectively treated with CCH, with similar adverse events to treatment of other curvature directions [48••].

Intralesional Verapamil

Similar to the mechanism of action of topical verapamil, intralesional verapamil has been used for PD based on evidence showing its interference with fibroblast cellular proliferation [24, 49]. Multiple randomized studies have evaluated intralesional verapamil for the treatment of PD; however, results are mixed [50–55]. Recent studies have compared it against various therapies, including tadalafil, hyaluronic acid (HA), and thiocholine [10•, 56, 57]. In the trial comparing intralesional verapamil with tadalafil, there was no statistically significant improvement in curvature observed with verapamil, a result also seen in a prospective, randomized, double-blinded study comparing verapamil with HA. This trial did, however, show a greater efficacy of HA regarding penile curvature and patient satisfaction [10•, 56]. Intralesional thiocholine had similar curvature improvements to that of verapamil in a prospective, randomized study, but the study was limited due to a small sample size ($N = 25$) [57]. Overall, intralesional verapamil has been shown to be modestly beneficial in the treatment of PD in the acute phase.

Hyaluronic Acid

Intralesional HA functions to decrease inflammatory cytokines and, as mentioned, has shown efficacy in the treatment of PD, with improvements in penile curvature and patient satisfaction [10•]. Studies have also shown similar results with HA use specifically during the acute phase of PD, yet further prospective, randomized controlled trials are required in order for intralesional HA to be regularly recommended [58].

Plasma-Rich Platelets + Hyaluronic Acid

Platelet-derived therapies are a growing interest in multiple medical and surgical specialties and one of the most well-described platelet-based therapies is autologous plasma-rich platelets (PRP) [59]. Initial small studies suggest that the anti-inflammatory and wound-healing properties of platelets are safe and efficacious in the treatment of various urologic

conditions such as ED, PD, and stress urinary incontinence [60•]. However, this is controversial and hotly debated. Currently, the Sexual Medicine Society of North America (SMSNA) positions against these therapies as nothing more than experimental.

PRP is derived from the centrifugation of whole blood with a separator gel to remove the red and white blood cells; this results in a supernatant that has a greater-than-fourfold increase in platelets and other plasma proteins. This is the concentrate that is then injected; studies are also evaluating strategies that focus on maximizing efficacy of drug delivery by creating a fibrin matrix to prevent extravasation [61, 62].

A recent study evaluated the use of a combination of PRP and HA for the treatment of PD. Ninety patients were injected with 8 ml of the combination 4 times over the course of 2 months. The study found a statistically significant improvement in penile curvature and thickening of the tunica albuginea, with 70% of patients reporting the treatment as positive [63•]. With confirmation by larger studies, this treatment may prove effective as another treatment for PD. It is critical to point out that this treatment will likely never approach FDA scrutiny and therefore is still considered controversial.

Interferon- α 2b

Interferon- α 2b (IFN α 2b) is an immunomodulator approved for utilization in various malignancies and infections and functions by inhibiting cellular proliferation. It has been shown to decrease fibroblast proliferation and collagen production in PD plaques in vitro and was first used to treat PD in the 1990s [64–66]. Evidence has shown that intralesional IFN α 2b leads to significant improvement in penile curvature and has even shown this improvement when applied to ventral deformities, for which the FDA has contraindicated the use of CCH [65, 67, 68]. While IFN α 2b is associated with self-limiting flu-like symptoms, it has a good safety profile in general and can produce clinically meaningful results to patients, recognized as one of the superior agents (along with CCH) regarding outcomes of penile curvature; however, it still remains off-label according to the FDA and AUA guidelines [7, 69•].

Mycophenolate mofetil

Mycophenolate mofetil (MMF) is an immunosuppressive drug used to prevent organ rejection after transplantation and has shown some efficacy in preventing the fibrotic complications of autoimmune disease such as systemic sclerosis or graft-versus-host disease [70]. It has been proposed that MMF may have a role in altering fibroblast function via altering collagen production, extracellular matrix contraction, and cell migration [70]. Given this property, one study evaluating

the role of MMF in a murine PD model suggests that the drug acts as a regenerating antifibrotic agent that may be useful for translation to human PD [71••]. No current human trials exist to develop this therapy into a viable option in the near future.

Shockwave Therapy

Local extracorporeal shockwave therapy (ESWT) is hypothesized to act in the setting of PD by two mechanisms. First, it is thought that the shockwaves directly disrupt the PD plaque, leading to lysis by way of an inflammatory reaction; second, the shockwaves are thought to promote angiogenesis around the plaque, resulting in plaque resorption [72].

Most of the published literature thus far has failed to show any significant benefit of ESWT in the treatment of PD-related penile curvature [73–76]. Some studies demonstrated a statistically significant improvement in curvature; however, the degree of change was minimal and likely clinically meaningless [74]. Other studies suggest that ESWT may be beneficial in the management of PD for refractory penile pain and plaque size reduction, but given that pain usually resolves spontaneously over time in PD, ESWT may be nothing more than a financial burden [77]. ESWT is not recommended for use in PD at this time; however, more recent studies showing reduced plaque size, increased penile length, and clinically and statistically significant improvement in curvature specifically in acute phase PD suggest that ESWT may be entered into consideration in the future [78•]. Again, physicians who offer ESWT to patients should strive to inform them that there are no validated, reproducible protocols for PD.

External Mechanical Therapy

External mechanical therapy can be divided into two categories: vacuum therapy and penile traction therapy. Vacuum therapy utilizes external physical force in an attempt to reorder collagen and promote remodeling within the scar tissue. A series of 31 patients applied vacuum therapy for 10 min per session twice daily for 12 weeks. Authors reported a statistically significant improvement in length and curvature, with 21 men seeing improvement, 7 men seeing no change, and 3 men experiencing worsened curvature [79]. Importantly, this study contained men in the acute phase, with the average duration of symptoms being 9.9 months and ranging from 2 to 23 months [79]. However, since the men in the acute phase were not separated for analysis, it may be that these patients were over or underrepresented in the 21 men seeing improvement. A pilot study evaluating the role of vacuum therapy in addition to a shortened and modified CCH injection protocol found all patients who received CCH in addition to vacuum therapy had an average of roughly 40% improvement in curvature [80].

Vacuum therapy was applied twice daily and involved repeating 40-s applications 5 times. The authors concluded that vacuum therapy with or without additional modeling is a viable adjunct to CCH therapy, but the limited sample size of this study requires verification [80]. The inclusion criteria of this study required stable PD symptoms and therefore excluded men in the acute phase.

Penile traction therapy has been investigated with or without accompanying CCH in the treatment of PD [18, 81, 82, 83, 84, 85]. Certain studies have showed limited benefits of penile traction therapies; however, they have been limited by patient self-discontinuation of therapy due to practical considerations [81, 82]. A larger prospective study found that among the 113 patients who completed both CCH and daily traction therapy, traction therapy with the RestoreX device gained an additional 71% in curvature improvement over CCH alone [83]. Importantly, only 113 of 287 total patients completed therapy. This highlights the practical burden of traction and CCH therapy [83]. A pilot study of 19 patients showed limited improvement in penile length, but increased satisfaction in men with traction therapy in men with curvatures less than 50° [84]. An earlier pilot study of 10 men found curvature reductions of 33% with traction therapy that required application 2 to 8 h a day for 6 months [85]. The prolonged daily use and the limited sample size may be factors contributing to the reported efficacy, which has not been reproduced by subsequent studies. Finally, a study evaluating the role of traction therapy specifically in the acute phase found that men experienced a 20° average curvature reduction and 42% of men regained the ability to have penetrative intercourse [18]. These impressive results may be due to the daily 6 h of traction therapy for at least 6 months; however, men in the acute phase may see similar results with extensive traction therapy.

Surgical Management

Surgical therapies can be divided into two categories: reconstructive surgery and penile prosthesis implantation. Both require that patients are not in the acute phase of PD [86]. Reconstructive operations generally fall into two categories: shortening of the convex side or lengthening of the concave side [86]. The Nesbit and Yachia procedures fall into the

former and while correcting curvature in a vast majority of patients, they are prone to penile shortening and sensory changes [87–95]. Additionally, they can result in post-operative erectile dysfunction. A less technically demanding option for shortening the concave surface is penile plication, which exhibits slightly lower rates of curvature correction and similar rates of shortening, ED, and sensory changes [96–102]. The other category of operations which rely on lengthening the concave surface of the PD penis involves plaque incision and grafting. Grafting is more appropriate for patients with larger and more complex deformities and can utilize a variety of autologous and cadaveric tissues [86]. Incision-and-grafting is a lengthening procedure and thus corrects curvature effectively with minimal penile shortening experienced in the literature [102–116]. However, this surgery also results in significant rates of post-operative ED and penile numbness [102–117]. In order to optimize patient selection and satisfaction, men must be counseled to not expect a result that resembles their penis before PD as the invasive surgical technique results in permanent aesthetic changes. Table 3 provides a comparison of the post-operative complication rates between the various surgical techniques, based on the literature.

The other category of surgical management is penile prosthesis placement, which is more appropriate in men with severe ED in addition to PD, both of which are not amenable to conservative therapies [86]. Compared with a traditional prosthesis placement, the operative technique often involves additional steps specifically aimed at reducing curvature in the patient with PD. As a result, efficacy is somewhat lower than the reconstructive options; however, ED is simultaneously corrected [118–125]. Additional grafts can be placed in order to correct curvature in addition to the prosthesis itself. Finally, complications of the prosthesis itself, such as infection, erosion, and explant, are possible with prosthesis placement [86].

Conclusion

A variety of treatments have been proposed for PD, the majority of which focus on the chronic phase of the disease. More recent literature, however, has focused on the acute phase of the disease. Oral monotherapy for PD has shown minimal

Table 3 Comparison of post-operative complication rates between various surgical techniques [87–125]

Surgical procedure	Subjective penile shortening to any degree	Sensory changes	Erectile dysfunction
Nesbit procedure	17.4–100%	3.8–21.4%	0–23%
Yachia procedure	7–67%	2–31%	4–7%
Plication-only procedure	8.3–90%	3.5–75%	3–36%
Incision-and-grafting	0–59%	8–20%	0–25%

efficacy in general and is not currently recommended for treatment of acute phase PD. Topical therapies have also shown to be ineffective; however, novel therapies are on the horizon and may show promise. External mechanical therapies have shown clinically meaningful changes but require much dedication and time from the patient in order to be successful.

As the only FDA-approved medication for PD, CCH is a reasonable alternative to surgery and has proven to be effective in stable PD. It has also been suggested that CCH has similar efficacy during the acute phase of the disease, a finding that will likely continue to be evaluated in future studies. Other intralesional therapies are promising but still require additional large studies to confirm efficacy in order for them to be considered for regular recommendation.

The most advantageous regimen for the treatment of acute phase PD likely incorporates multiple modalities, and further research along with the illumination of novel therapies will increase the amount of options. At this time, however, surgery remains the gold standard for the treatment of PD.

Compliance with Ethical Standards

Conflict of Interest Dr. Jesse Mills reports a grant and personal fees from Boston Scientific as a consultant and speaker, and a grant and personal fees from Endo Pharmaceuticals, outside of submitted work. Dr. Eleswarapu reports personal fees from Metuchen Pharmaceuticals as consultant and speaker, outside of submitted work. Dr. Amighi, Dr. Walker, and Dr. Steven Mills declare no conflicts of interest.

Research involving human participants and/or animals This article does not contain any studies with human or animal subjects performed by the author.

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- Of major importance

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