



Laparoscopic ventral hernia repair with intraperitoneal onlay mesh—results from a general surgical unit

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Abstract

Background Symptomatic ventral herniation is a common clinical presentation. The treatment, whether elective or as an emergency, can be difficult and a variety of surgical repairs are utilised. Intraperitoneal onlay mesh (IPOM) involves the placement of a reinforcing prosthesis, usually supported by primary closure of the defect. Intra-abdominal adhesions have been highlighted as a potential complication in utilising this form of mesh placement. Several methods of laparoscopic mesh placement outside of the peritoneal cavity are gaining prominence as potential alternatives to IPOM.

Aims This study reviews our experience with IPOM in the repair of ventral hernia by a single surgical team.

Methods A prospectively maintained electronic database of all laparoscopic ventral hernia repair (LVHR) performed within the study period was analysed and reported. Follow-up questionnaires were sent to patients to follow long-term outcomes.

Results One hundred eight patients underwent LVHR over a 7-year period. Demographics demonstrated an obese patient group (BMI 30.89 ± 4.9 kg/m²), with a variety of hernia sizes and morphologies. Hernia recurrence was found in two patients (1.8%). Twenty-nine (26.8%) patients suffered a complication, but only eight (7.4%) of those required intervention beyond pharmacotherapy. Two patients required mesh explantation.

Conclusions IPOM for the general surgeon is a relatively safe and effective method of repairing ventral hernias, with a low recurrence rate.

Keywords Intraperitoneal onlay mesh · Laparoscopy · Recurrence · Ventral hernia

Introduction

Ventral hernia (VH) is a common presentation in surgical patients with approximately 300,000 incisional hernias repaired every year in Europe [1]. Herniation may be primary, (i.e. umbilical, paraumbilical, epigastric and Spigelian) or secondary (incisional hernia) [2]. When the integrity of the abdominal wall is disrupted by surgery, multiple factors may lead to inadequate healing resulting in an hernia [3].

Many surgical methods have been utilised for VH repair with ongoing debate regarding the most appropriate form of repair [4–14]. Conventional repair focuses on closing the fascial defect and reinforcing the tissue with a supportive mesh [14–16]. Siting of the mesh remains controversial. Options

include onlay, bridging, retro-rectus, pre-peritoneal and intraperitoneal onlay mesh (IPOM).

Evidence suggests that laparoscopic ventral hernia repair (LVHR) with IPOM mesh is superior to open onlay technique in hernia with a fascial defect greater than 2 cm with fewer overall perioperative complications, decreased length of hospital stay, decreased mortality and lower total hospital [1, 10–12, 17–23]. However placement of foreign mesh material can be associated with mesh adhesion [24, 25], fistulation [8], migration [26–28], erosion [28, 29] and chronic pain [9, 30–33].

The aim of this article is to detail our experience with IPOM meshes in LVHR as a potentially safe and effective option for patients.

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Methods

All patients undergoing laparoscopic IPOM for ventral hernia in a single surgical service from 01/01/2010 to 01/12/2016

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were included. Data on all patients were recorded on the day of surgery in a prospectively maintained database. As this prospective series had no control or intervention groups, and patient care was not altered, ethical approval was not sought. Exclusion criteria included patients with an emergency condition such as acute incarceration/strangulation and those undergoing either open or mesh free repair.

Technique was standardised over the 7-year period. Intra-peritoneal access was gained by establishing pneumoperitoneum with a Veress needle or Optiport™ placed at Palmer's point. Subsequent placement of a 5-mm bladeless trocar at least 1–2 cm away from the fascial defect was performed under direct vision. We used a 0°, 10-mm laparoscope. Exact 5 mm port sites were based on hernia site and previous incision sites.

Following confirmation of peritoneal access, adhesiolysis was performed when required utilising a combination of sharp and blunt dissection. The necessity for adhesiolysis was variable as several procedures were performed for recurrent incisional hernias or for herniation following major abdominal surgery. Use of diathermy and ultrasonic scalpel was limited to minimise risk of iatrogenic intestinal injury. If required, the falciform ligament was taken down to facilitate adequate space for mesh placement in abdominal wall defect. The herniation was reduced in its entirety. Primary closure of the fascial defect was then performed with intra-abdominal suturing using nonabsorbable monofilament suture. The predominant suture material was Endoknot® suture (Ethicon), although nonabsorbable locking suture (V-Lock by Medtronic) was utilised in later cases.

Adjuvant component separation was not performed. The mesh was placed intraperitoneally via the 10-mm camera port. Meshes included composite Physiomesh™ (Ethicon, subsequently withdrawn) or Parietex™ (Medtronic). A minimum overlap of 5 cm outside the sutured fascial defect was utilised to allow for mesh shrinkage. The mesh was secured with absorbable tacks in a double crown pattern (AbsorbaTack™ Medtronic). Patients were discharged on the day of surgery.

Patients were initially reviewed in the surgical outpatient's department post-operatively with long-term follow-up achieved utilising a postal questionnaire. Nonresponders were surveyed by telephone. Any patient reporting difficulty was again recalled to the surgical outpatient department for re-examination. Primary outcome was recurrence of the hernia at time of long-term follow-up. Secondary outcomes included 30-day morbidity, re-admission and prolonged hospital stay.

Results

In total, 108 patients were included in this study. Patient demographics and comorbidities are included in Table 1. Details on hernia morphology, including laparoscopic primary

Table 1 Patient demographics

Age (mean)	55 ± 12.9 years
Sex	M 82 (75.9%) F 26 (24%)
Smoker	15 (14%)
Medical history	
Type 2 diabetes	4 (3.7%)
Hypertension	2 (1.8%)
Ischaemic heart disease	3 (2.7%)
CCF	2 (1.8%)
Atrial fibrillation	4 (3.7%)
Liver cirrhosis	3 (2.7%)
Asthma	15 (14%)
COPD	4 (3.7%)
Renal failure	2 (1.8%)
ASA score	
I	35 (32%)
II	63 (58%)
III	10 (9%)
BMI	30.89 ± 4.9 kg/m ²

epigastric (16), incisional (31) and paraumbilical/umbilical (61) hernias were recorded (Table 2). Six of the paraumbilical hernia repairs had a second concurrent hernia repaired simultaneously, four were epigastric hernia and two were incisional hernia. Three hernias were recurrent following previous open repair. Defects were sized as small (less than 4 cm), medium (4–10 cm) or large (> 10 cm). At operation, all defects greater than 1 cm were closed using intraperitoneal suturing. Eighty-seven patients (80.5%) had repair using Parietex™ composite, a hydrocolloid-treated lightweight polyester mesh (Medtronic.) The remainder were repaired with Physiomesh™, a composite polypropylene (Ethicon). Absorbable polydioxanone tacks (AbsorbaTack™ Medtronic) were the primary method of mesh fixation. The mean operating time was 82.98 ± 33.5 min. Seventy-four (68.5%) of the patients were admitted on the day of surgery and stayed an average of 2.9 days (median 1 day with a range from 1 to 55 days).

Complications were defined as any deviation from the normal post-operative course, with or without the requirement for additional intervention including pharmacotherapy, occurring within 30 days of the procedure. They were classified using the Clavein-Dindo score (Table 3). There were 29 complications, 15 of these were minor (Clavein-Dindo I)—including mild desaturation during recovery, acute post-operative pain requiring analgesics, wound haematoma and a single patient who had a self-limiting thrombocytopenia post-operatively. Six patients were classified as Clavein-Dindo II complications, requiring pharmacological treatment beyond the normal requirements in the post-operative period such as analgesics, laxatives or antiemetics. Seven patients required intervention

Table 2 Hernia characteristics

Characteristics	Number	Recurrent	Incarcerated	Size (small/med/large)		
Epigastric	16	1	1	16	0	0
Incisional	31		2	15	11	5
Paraumbilical/umbilical	55	2	3	46	8	1
+ epigastric	4			3	1	0
+ incisional	2			2	0	0
Total	108	3	6	82	20	6

for management of post-operative ileus, urinary retention, liver haematoma or intraperitoneal haematoma.

Two patient developed serious post-operative infections and ultimately failed mesh repair. An elderly man developed seroma and had repeated aspiration which unfortunately was complicated by surgical site infection, wound breakdown and enterocutaneous fistula. He subsequently required mesh explant; at his most recent review 5 years later (now in his nineties), he was managing satisfactorily with the assistance of an abdominal binder. One patient sustained an iatrogenic jejunal injury presumably during extensive adhesiolysis. He presented on the fourth post-operative day with peritonitis. At laparoscopy, there was peritoneal soiling requiring lavage, endoscopic repair and mesh removal. He required a prolonged post-operative stay. Subsequently, he had repair of the hernia which was not included in this series.

The average follow up duration was 40.4 months with a range of 3 to 78 months. Two patients died during the study follow-up from unrelated causes—streptococcal endocarditis 3 months post-operatively and head injury secondary to a fall 14 months post-operatively. There were two late recurring hernias—a recurrent, medium-sized, paraumbilical hernia and a large, midline, incisional hernia. A further four patients thought they had recurrence which was not confirmed on

subsequent clinical examination. Radiological investigations concurred with clinical exam and a diagnosis of a seroma was made. Two patients complained of pain several months following hernia repair. One required laparoscopic adhesiolysis with subsequent referral for pain management and the other required no intervention.

Discussion

Methods of ventral hernia repair vary considerably in regard to location of mesh. Commonly used sites for placement include onlay, bridging, retro-rectus, pre-peritoneal and intraperitoneal onlay mesh (IPOM). There is increasing concern that IPOM utilisation is associated with higher rates of long-term complications [1, 24, 34] and include mesh erosion into the stomach, eosophagus and other viscera [28, 29]. IPOM frequently does result in pain post-operatively. Chronic pain from the mesh and from mesh adhesions has been reported in 2–4% of patients [9, 30–33]. We observed this in two of our patients in the long-term follow-up. One patient in our series required laparoscopic adhesiolysis of predominantly mesh-related adhesions and eventual referral to a chronic pain specialist. Intraoperatively, we utilised a variety of anaesthetic measures including TAP block and local anaesthetic. We add Chirocaine when hydrating the mesh.

The overall complication rate in the study cohort group was 26.8%. Careful observation was made to record all adverse outcomes at all stages. This has resulted in a larger number of relatively minor complications requiring no additional pharmacological, radiological or procedural treatments beyond those allowed as part of the normal therapeutic regimen (Clavein-Dindo I) or some pharmacotherapy without intervention (Clavein-Dindo II). However, only 8 (7.4%) patients required additional intervention despite our patient population having risk factors for increased operative time and post-operative complications such as obesity and large hernia sizes.

The risk of long-term complications relating to intraperitoneal mesh exposure has resulted in the development of newer techniques for hernia mesh placement, such as robotic mesh repair and laparoscopic extraperitoneal repairs with conflicting published results [35–37]. Data from a national database review have not demonstrated significant benefit in robotic

Table 3 Post-operative complications

Clavein-Dindo grade	Complication	Number
I	Desaturation	7
	Acute pain	6
	Haematoma	1
	Thrombocytopenia	1
II	Acute pain	2
	Nausea	3
	Ileus	1
III	Urinary retention	3
	Ileus	1
	Haematoma	2
	Enterocutaneous fistula	1
IV	Iatrogenic perforation	1
Total		29

hernia repair compared to laparoscopic [38]. In contrast, other studies revealed decreased pain and length of stay, including a recent comparative analysis [39]. No study thus far published has demonstrated lower long-term complications when compared to IPOM.

Currently, intraperitoneal mesh augmentation has been implicated in post-operative adhesions, fistula formation, intestinal obstruction and mesh migration. In our study, one patient required laparoscopic adhesiolysis. This was a failed attempt to manage wound pain—which was unrelated to hernia surgery, rather was probably due to his original flank incision. With this exception, we did not discover clinically symptomatic mesh related adhesions.

While LVHR has been shown superior to open on lay repair in terms of overall complications [1, 7–9, 25, 30, 32, 40], some studies show that up to 23% of the complications that do occur require surgical intervention [20, 22, 41]. Our cohort had two serious complications of the 29 reported that required surgical intervention—an undetected enterotomy requiring reoperation and an infected mesh requiring explantation. A 2007 review of existing literature [42] suggested the incidence of iatrogenic enterotomy during LVHR is 1.78% and that management should include explantation of the infected mesh, while the rate of infected mesh after LVHR is low, around 1% [6].

The recurrence rate was 1.8%—average follow-up time of 40.4 months. Other series suggest the majority of recurrences are identified in the first year following hernia repair [20, 41, 43, 44]. Multiple causal factors have been identified for increased hernia recurrence rates, including occurrence of perioperative complications [30], defect size [8, 34, 41, 45], previous hernia repair [30, 34, 43–45], infection [1, 8, 10, 12, 20, 30, 34, 45–47], multiple concurrent fascial defects [34, 41, 43, 45], ASA [4, 48–50] and obesity [4, 12, 13, 21, 23, 30, 41, 44, 49–55]. Despite the inclusion of patients with elevated BMI and hernias with large or multiple fascial defects, our recurrence rate was comparable to reported outcomes for LVHR with IPOM in the literature [9, 12, 20, 34, 45, 56]. Overall reported recurrence rates range from 2 to 32%.

Limitations of the study include a heterogeneity in mesh use where there was a switch from Physiomesh™ to Parietex™. All cases were performed in a single centre, by a single surgeon, although this also had the effect of providing a degree of homogeneity in the surgical technique.

Conclusions

Overall, our experience in LVHR with IPOM has shown that it can be safely and effectively used in a variety of hernia morphology and is suitable for large and recurrent hernias. Complication and recurrence rate was lower than open repair and comparable to other laparoscopic

techniques for mesh repair. There is a need for long-term observational studies to assess for mesh complications well beyond a typical 5-year follow-up as mesh implantation is a life-long prosthetic device.

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Compliance with ethical standards

Conflict of interest The authors declare that they have no conflict of interest.

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