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What’s New in Orthopaedic Trauma

William M. Ricci, MD, James C. Black, MD, Christopher M. McAndrew, MD, MSc, and Michael J. Gardner, MD

This update presents a synopsis of the most clinically relevant high-quality studies related to orthopaedic trauma from the past twelve months. Key methods (♦), results (➢), and take-home points (★) for these studies are presented.

Clavicular Fractures

♦ With the use of administrative databases from Ontario, Canada, factors associated with reoperation and other complications after open reduction and internal fixation (ORIF) of midshaft clavicular fractures were identified in 1350 patients

➢ At least one reoperation occurred in 24.6% of the patients, the most common being implant removal (18.8%; females were at highest risk, with an odds ratio [OR] of 1.7). Reoperation due to nonunion, deep infection, and malunion occurred in 2.6%, 2.6%, and 1.1% of patients, respectively. Risk factors for nonunion included female sex (OR, 2.2) and a high comorbidity score (OR, 2.8).

★ Reoperation after ORIF of the clavicle is common, occurring in one of four patients, as found in this study. Reoperations for reasons other than prominent hardware removal were uncommon.

♦ Forty-six patients with acute clavicular fractures were evaluated to determine if measurements of fracture displacement and shortening were different between upright and supine radiographic examinations

➢ Fracture displacement was 89% greater when measured on upright radiographs. There was an average of 3 mm of shortening on upright images and 1.3 mm of lengthening on supine images.

Proximal Humeral Fractures

♦ Results of reverse shoulder arthroplasty for the nonunion of a proximal humeral fracture were studied in thirty-two patients at a mean of four years

➢ The mean Constant score increased from 14.2 to 46.6 points. Range of motion also increased, from a mean of 42.9° to 109.7° of flexion and 0.5° to 13.1° of external rotation. There were complications in 41% of the patients, leading to nine revisions. The most common complication was a dislocation (34%), which was associated with resection of the humeral head fragment and the tuberosities.

★ Reverse shoulder arthroplasty for proximal humeral nonunion is associated with improved clinical outcomes but also with a high rate of dislocations related to resection of the tuberosities.

♦ A prospective randomized study compared the deltopectoral (n = 60) with the deltoid-split (n = 60) approach used for proximal humeral fractures treated with ORIF

➢ No differences in complications, rate of reoperations, Constant scores, or pain at one year were found.

★ The deltoid-split and deltopectoral approaches result in similar patient outcomes for the treatment of proximal humeral fractures.

Distal Humeral and Elbow Fractures

♦ Elbow range of motion, triceps extension strength, and functional outcome via the DASH (Disabilities

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Pelvic and Acetabular Fractures

Union was achieved in all fractures. The triceps-sparing approach yielded better elbow range of motion and triceps strength. Both approaches were shown to result in reliable union and similar functional outcome.

A retrospective study in Edinburgh, Scotland, evaluated short and long-term outcomes of primary nonoperative management of isolated displaced olecranon fractures in forty-three elderly patients (mean age, seventy-six years).

At short-term follow-up (mean, four months), the mean Broberg and Morrey Elbow Score was 83 (range, 48 to 100), with 72% of the patients having good to excellent outcomes. No patients needed surgery for nonunion. In twenty-three patients available for long-term follow-up (mean, six years), the mean DASH score was 2.9 (range, 0 to 33.9) and the mean Oxford Elbow Score was 47 (range, 42 to 48). Ninety-one percent of the patients expressed satisfaction with their results.

For low-demand elderly patients, nonoperative treatment of a displaced olecranon fracture can yield satisfactory short and long-term outcomes comparable with those noted in the available literature on outcomes after operative management.

Five percent of the patients without a lower-extremity injury had good or excellent outcomes. Ninety-five percent of the patients without a lower-extremity injury had good or excellent outcomes. No fracture displaced to >1 cm.

This “intermediate severity” group of lateral compression pelvic fractures appears amenable to nonoperative treatment, with acceptable outcomes overall and minimal progressive displacement.

Four-hundred and four patients with an “intermediate severity” lateral compression type-1 pelvic fracture (complete sacral fracture with <1 cm of initial displacement) were treated nonoperatively. Fifty patients were assessed for functional status (Majeed score) at a minimum of fifteen months, and thirty-six were assessed radiographically.

Eighty-four percent of the patients had good or excellent outcomes. Ninety-five percent of the patients without a lower-extremity injury had good or excellent outcomes. No fracture displaced to >1 cm.

This “intermediate severity” group of lateral compression pelvic fractures appears amenable to nonoperative treatment, with acceptable outcomes overall and minimal progressive displacement.

Hip Fractures

A large national database (the American College of Surgeons National Surgical Quality Improvement Program [ACS NSQIP] database) was queried for all patients seventy years of age or older who were treated for an intertrochanteric hip fracture between 2009 and 2012. A total of 4432 patients were identified; 64% were treated with use of a nail, and 36%, with a screw and side plate. Multiple outcomes at a maximum of thirty days were analyzed.

Length of stay was shorter for patients treated with a nail (5.4 versus 6.5 days; p < 0.001). There were no differences in operative time, complications, or readmissions.

Multiple randomized trials have demonstrated minimal clinical differences between the devices. A shorter length of stay may offset variable increased cost of the nail implant.
**Femoral Shaft Fractures**

- Multiple studies that included the same prospective cohort of 417 patients investigated femoral rotation after treatment with intramedullary rods, with the use of postoperative CT to compare the injured and uninjured sides.
- When considering time of day, trauma fellowship training, patient body mass index (BMI), and rod entry site, the only significant difference in rotational malreduction was seen in a subset of ballistic fractures with higher degrees of comminution (Winquist 3 or 4).
- Low rates of clinically important femoral malrotation can be achieved with careful evaluation while using intramedullary fixation. There do not appear to be patient, injury, or surgical variables that increase the risk for malrotation other than increasing comminution.

- Use of electromagnetic targeting in the placement of femoral rod locking bolts was evaluated in a randomized clinical trial in which antegrade rods were used in fracture treatment and in a cadaveric study involving the use of retrograde rods.
- Decreased radiation doses were seen when using electromagnetic targeting (231 versus 690 μGy; p < 0.05), with no differences in operative time and failure rate noted, in the clinical study of antegrade rods. Electromagnetic targeting resulted in shorter times of insertion (311 versus 405 seconds; p < 0.05) in the cadaveric study of retrograde rods.
- Electromagnetic targeting for the application of locking bolts in femoral rods was shown to decrease radiation exposure and may decrease surgical time when applying proximal locking bolts in retrograde rods.

- A retrospective cohort of forty-eight patients treated with closed intramedullary rod fixation of Type-B or C femoral shaft fractures was divided into two groups on the basis of displacement of wedge and comminuted segments (>10 mm or <10 mm).
- Complete radiographic union by twelve months was seen in twenty-two (76%) of the patients in the small-gap group and four (21%) of the patients in the large-gap group. Modified RUST (Radiographic Union Score for Tibial fractures) scores were lower at all time points for the large-gap group. The presence of a “reversed” wedge fragment increased the likelihood of nonunion and multiple surgical attempts for repair.
- The presence of gaps of >10 mm between fracture fragments and “reversed” fragments after closed intramedullary rod fixation is associated with lower healing rates, and surgeons should consider direct reduction or indirect percutaneous fragment manipulation in such cases.

**Distal Femoral Fractures**

- A prospective cohort study of thirty-one distal femoral fractures treated with a dynamic locking plate construct was undertaken to measure union rate and callus formation.
- Healing, judged by two reviewers using twelve-week CT scans and digitized radiographs with quantitative imaging analysis, was achieved in thirty (97%) of the fractures, with only one revision for malalignment, one nonunion repair, and no case demonstrating failure of proximal fixation.
- Proximal fixation with the use of far cortical locking screws to dynamize bridge-plate fixation across distal femoral fractures appears safe and produces better healing results than in previous studies in which standard locking implants were used.

- A retrospective cohort study of 335 distal femoral fractures treated with precontoured lateral distal femoral locking plates was performed to identify risk factors for reoperation.
- Reoperation occurred for nonunion in sixty-four (19%) of the cases, for infection in seventeen (5%), and for implant failure in twenty-five (7%). Independent risk factors for nonunion and infection were diabetes and open fracture, and risk factors for implant failure were smoking, open fracture, higher BMI, and shorter plates.
- Pretreatment factors (diabetes, BMI, smoking, open fracture) increase the risk for complications following distal femoral fracture. Use of shorter plates was the only surgeon-controlled factor associated with complications following the treatment of distal femoral fractures.

**Tibial Plateau Fractures**

- Members of a large cohort of patients (8426) who received operative treatment of a displaced tibial plateau fracture were matched to 33,698 control patients. The rates of subsequent total knee arthroplasty after tibial plateau fracture were compared with those of the general population at two, five, and ten years.
- After adjustment for comorbidities, tibial plateau fracture surgery significantly increased the likelihood of total knee arthroplasty (hazard ratio [HR], 5.29; p < 0.0001). Higher rates of knee arthroplasty were associated with increasing age (HR, 1.03 per year over the age of forty-eight; p < 0.0001), bicondylar fracture (HR, 1.53; p < 0.0001), and greater comorbidity (HR, 2.17; p < 0.0001).
- Ten years after tibial plateau fracture surgery, 7.3% of the patients had had a total knee arthroplasty, corresponding with a 5.3-fold increase in the need for arthroplasty compared with the general population.
Older patients and more severe fracture patterns are more likely to result in subsequent total knee arthroplasty.

➢ Forty patients with intra-articular tibial plateau fractures treated operatively were randomized to the use of continuous passive motion (CPM) or standardized physical therapy in the first forty-eight hours postoperatively.22
➢ There was no significant difference in knee extension at any time point (forty-eight hours, two weeks, six weeks, three months, and six months postoperatively). Knee flexion was significantly greater at forty-eight hours in the CPM group (p < 0.005), but no difference was found at later time points. There were no significant differences in pain, outcome measures, or complications at the six-month follow-up. Six of twenty patients in the CPM cohort did not tolerate the use of the device because of pain.
★ The use of CPM in the immediate postoperative period after ORIF for tibial plateau fractures did not offer any lasting benefit with regard to knee range of motion or other clinical outcome measures.

Tibial Shaft Fractures

➢ A retrospective study compared the infection risk when internal fixation plates did and did not overlap previous external fixator pin sites in patients with bicondylar tibial plateau fractures (n = 85) and distal tibial pilon fractures (n = 97).23
➢ Fifty of the 182 study patients had overlapping pin sites. Overall, twenty-five patients (14%) developed a deep wound infection: twelve (24%) of the fifty patients in the overlapping cohort compared with thirteen (10%) of the 132 in the nonoverlapping cohort (p = 0.033).
★ Placement of plates for definitive fixation that overlap previous external fixator pin sites significantly increases the risk of deep infection in the staged treatment of bicondylar tibial plateau and pilon fractures.

➢ A retrospective study examined the association between the timing of antibiotic administration and the development of deep infection in Type-III open tibial fractures.24
➢ Among a study population of 137 patients, the authors found that age, smoking, diabetes, injury severity score, type-IIIa versus type-IIIb/c injury, and time to surgical debridement were not associated with infection. Greater than five days to wound coverage (p < 0.01) and greater than sixty-six minutes to initial prophylactic antibiotic dose (p < 0.01) were significant predictors of infection.

Distal Tibial Fractures

➢ A prospective randomized trial investigated the use of angular stable locking screws versus conventional locking screws for intramedullary nailing of distal tibial fractures.25
➢ One hundred and forty-two patients were allocated to two groups: seventy-five received the angular stable locking system and sixty-seven, conventional nailing. Outcome scores and clinical assessments were completed at six weeks, twelve weeks, six months, and one year post-surgery. The primary outcome measure was time to full weight-bearing with minimal pain. No differences were found for primary or secondary outcome measures between the groups for the entire study period.
★ The use of angular stable locking screws with intramedullary nailing in the treatment of distal tibial fractures did not improve short-term outcomes compared with the use of conventional locking screws.

Calcaneal Fractures

➢ Eight to twelve-year results from a randomized trial of operative compared with nonoperative treatment of displaced calcaneal fractures were analyzed. The fifty-six patients were divided into two groups on the basis of superior or inferior results, and multiple factors were compared between the groups.27
➢ Operative treatment, a higher Böhler angle postoperatively, and articular restoration were significantly...
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Polytrauma

The in-hospital mortality rate associated with bilateral femoral fractures (BFFs) for a contemporary cohort was compared with that for patients with unilateral fractures and with previous rates from the same center. In-hospital mortality for patients with BFFs was 7% in the modern cohort compared with 2% for contemporary patients with unilateral fractures and 26% for patients with BFFs treated two decades ago at the same center. BFFs are associated with higher in-hospital mortality compared with unilateral fractures. Improvements in automobile safety and changes in the delivery of trauma care have likely contributed to the decrease in overall mortality seen when comparing this modern cohort with a historical cohort from the same center.

Mental Health Outcomes of Orthopaedic Trauma

A prospective cohort study of 110 patients who were admitted with orthopaedic injuries was undertaken to determine the prevalence of depression at the time of injury and analyze factors associated with continued depression nine months thereafter. A prospective cohort of 152 patients completed pain, function, and depression questionnaires at one to two months after operative treatment of one or more fractures, and 136 patients completed the questionnaires again at five to eight months to evaluate the prevalence of depression and posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD), and their relation to pain and disability.

Thirty-five (23%) and twenty-nine (21%) met the criteria for depression at time 1 and time 2, respectively. PTSD scores decreased (mean, 28.3 to 26.1; p < 0.05) with statistical, but questionable clinical, significance. Catastrophic thinking was associated with worse pain at both time points, and anxiety was the sole predictor of disability at time 1.

Psychological challenges are highly prevalent in populations with orthopaedic injuries, and treatable factors, specifically catastrophic thinking, are associated with worse mid-term outcomes.

Infection and Open Fracture Management

Deep infection after immediate or delayed primary wound closure for Grade-I, II, and IIIA open fractures was analyzed retrospectively for 146 open fractures (seventy-three matched pairs).

Deep infection occurred in 4.1% of fractures treated with immediate closure and in 17.8% of fractures treated with delayed primary closure.

In properly selected open fracture wounds, immediate closure after thorough debridement appears...
safe and is associated with a lower infection rate compared with delayed primary closure.

- The effect of a performance-improvement program designed for open fracture care was evaluated in a study comparing the management of 127 patients with open fractures before program implementation with that of 132 patients after implementation.
- The performance-improvement program resulted in shorter times to antibiotic administration and physician evaluation and improved antibiotic dosing.
- A multifaceted performance-improvement program was very effective in improving early treatment of patients with open fractures.
- The association between the time to surgery and the development of deep infection in open fractures was evaluated in a prospective cohort of 737 fractures between 2001 and 2009.
- Infection developed in 6%. The median time to surgery was nine hours and four minutes for those without infection and seven hours and thirty-nine minutes for those with infection. Multivariate regression analysis found no association between infection and time to surgery. The Gustilo grade was associated with infection.
- Injury severity, not time to surgery, was associated with deep infection after open fracture.

**Basic Science of Fracture Fixation Biomechanics**

- Locking screws were inserted at a standard torque through bent plate holes. Screw stability was tested at plate angulations through a screw hole of 5°, 15°, and 45°.
- Screws inserted into plates with holes bent 15° and 45° were significantly less stable than controls. Survival was not significantly less in the 5° group (p = 0.17). Placement of a locking cap insert prior to bending did not affect the decreased stability caused by plate bending.
- Plate bending of >5° was shown to significantly affect the function and stability of locking screws. In light of these findings, surgeons should weigh the importance of plate contouring versus the necessity of locking screws in that fracture segment. A similar study also found that plate contouring at a 5° angle did not affect strength, but all greater angles did, and any amount of off-axis screw insertion decreased stability compared with orthogonal insertion.

**Basic Science of Bone Healing**

- With the use of a rat femoral defect model, the effects of combining low-intensity pulsed ultrasound (LIPUS) and recombinant human bone morphogenetic protein (rhBMP-2) were investigated.
- Combined with a low dose of rhBMP-2 (1.2 µg), LIPUS increased bone healing compared with sham treatment. With higher doses of rhBMP-2 (6 and 12 µg), LIPUS also increased bone quantity and strength.
- LIPUS, which is essentially a mechanical perturbation on the cellular level, augmented healing further than the effects of rhBMP-2 alone. This may stimulate additional research toward identifying opportunities to achieve healing in critical-sized bone defects.

**Evidence-Based Orthopaedics**

The editorial staff of *The Journal* reviewed a large number of recently published research studies related to the musculoskeletal system that received a higher Level of Evidence grade. In addition to articles published previously in this journal or cited already in the Update, nine other articles with a higher Level of Evidence grade were identified that were relevant to orthopaedic trauma. A list of those titles is appended to this review after the standard bibliography. We have provided a brief commentary about each of the articles to help guide your further reading, in an evidence-based fashion, in this subspecialty area.

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Evidence-Based Articles Related to Orthopaedic Trauma

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immobilization. Six RCTs involving 1490 patients were included in the analysis. The rate of venous thromboembolism (VTE) ranged from 4.3% to 40% in patients who had a leg injury that had been immobilized in a plaster cast or a brace for at least one week and who received no prophylaxis or placebo. The number was significantly lower among patients who received daily subcutaneous injections of low-molecular-weight heparin during immobilization (OR, 0.49; 95% confidence interval [CI], 0.34 to 0.72).

The authors concluded that the use of low-molecular-weight heparin in outpatients significantly reduces VTE when immobilization of the lower leg is required.


A total of 168 patients with a mean age of 38.5 years were randomized to receive either polylevolactic acid screws (n = 86) or metallic screws (n = 82). The Baird scoring system was used to assess satisfaction and functional recovery postoperatively. The mean follow-up was 55.8 months. The functional scores were similar in the two groups at the final follow-up. Patients in the polylevolactic acid group had a greater mean dorsiflexion and planter flexion of the injured ankle. In this group, eighteen patients had a foreign-body reaction that was mild and eight patients had a moderate reaction. In the metallic group, eight had a mild foreign-body reaction and no patient had a moderate reaction (p < 0.001). The authors concluded that both types of screws provide acceptable fixation and functional recovery; however, polylevolactic acid screws are associated with a higher incidence of foreign-body reaction.


One hundred and seventy-four participants who were sixty-five years of age or older and had a displaced or undisplaced intracapsular fracture of the hip were randomized to internal fixation with use of either a Targon femoral neck hip screw or standard cannulated screw. The absolute reduction in the risk of revision was 4.7% (95% CI, 14.2% to 22.5%) in favor of the Targon neck hip screw or standard cannulated screw. The absolute reduction in the rate of venous thromboembolism (VTE) ranged from 4.3% to 40% in patients who had a leg injury that had been immobilized in a plaster cast or a brace for at least one week and who received no prophylaxis or placebo. The number was significantly lower among patients who received daily subcutaneous injections of low-molecular-weight heparin during immobilization (OR, 0.49; 95% confidence interval [CI], 0.34 to 0.72).

The authors concluded that the use of low-molecular-weight heparin in outpatients significantly reduces VTE when immobilization of the lower leg is required.


The authors searched the standard profile of Cochrane databases as well as MEDLINE, EMBASE, and EBSCO CINAHL. (Cumulative Index to Nursing and Allied Health Literature) databases to identify trials that allocated patients to treatment randomly and compared negative pressure wound therapy (NPWT) with any other type of wound dressing. Nine trials, including 785 participants, were aggregated. Seven trials compared NPWT with a standard dressing (two of the NPWT devices were “homemade”). One trial compared one homemade NPWT device with a commercially available device. The mean cost to supply equipment for NPWT was $96.51 per day (U.S. dollars) compared with $4.22 per day for one of the homemade devices. Labor costs were similar. The pain intensity score was lower in the homemade group compared with the NPWT group. The authors concluded that the evidence for the effectiveness of NPWT for reducing surgical site infections and wound dehiscence remains unclear, as does the effect of NPWT on the time to complete healing.


This was a prospective randomized trial involving standard open iliac crest versus reamer-irrigator-aspirator (RIA) autograft. The outcome data included amount of graft, time of harvest, associated surgical cost, and function and pain as measured by the SF-36 and a visual analog scale. Patients were followed for an average of 56.9 weeks. Eighty-six percent of the patients who received iliac crest bone graft (ICBG) united in an average of 22.5 weeks compared with 82.1% of those who received RIA, who healed in an average of 25.8 weeks. There was no difference in donor-site complications. Postoperative follow-up revealed that the RIA patients had significantly lower donor-site pain. The authors concluded that, when compared with autograft obtained from the iliac crest, autograft with use of RIA is similar. Using the RIA technique achieved similar union rates and less donor-site pain. RIA also yields a greater volume of graft compared with ICBG.


Fifty-two children with acute, type-III supracondylar humeral fractures without vascular injury were randomized into the prone-position group (n = 26) and the supine-position group (n = 26) according to computer-generated block randomization. The duration of the procedure and the number of radiation exposures, attempts at closed reduction, and attempts at placing the pins were analyzed. Functional and radiographic outcomes were assessed at a minimum follow-up of one year. There were no significant differences in any of the outcomes between the supine and prone positions. The authors noted that closed displaced fractures with skin puckering are difficult to manipulate with the patient in the prone position and concluded that the supine position may be ideal for closed reduction and pinning for all patterns of type-III supracondylar fractures.