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Percutaneous Tracheostomy in Patients at High Risk of Bleeding Complications

Viren B. Attarde[1], Asir Amin Tamboli[2], Prashant Madhav Sakhavalkar[3], Saleha Tabassum[4], Gayathri Devi B.U.[5]

[1]Assistant Professor, Department of Critical Care Medicine, Dr. D.Y. Patil Medical College & Research Centre, India.
[2]Assistant Professor, Department of Critical Care Medicine, Dr D Y Patil Medical College & Research Centre, India.
[3]Associate Professor, Department of Critical Care Medicine, Dr DY Patil Medical college and Research Center, Pimpri, Pune-411018, India.
[4]Chief of laboratory, Department of Pathology, Dr Lal pathology laboratory, Chinchwad, Pune, India.
[5]Anaesthesiologist (Freelance), Address: RH-003, Woodland C.H.S, Plot No:63, Sector 16A Nerul, Navi Mumbai 400706, India.

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Abstract

Background: Tracheostomy is a common procedure in critically ill patients requiring prolonged mechanical ventilation. While the percutaneous approach has become increasingly popular due to its convenience and reduced risk of wound infections, its safety in patients at high risk of bleeding has remained a subject of concern. **Objectives:** This study aimed to evaluate the safety, feasibility, and complications of percutaneous tracheostomy (PCT) in patients identified as high risk for bleeding complications. **Methods:** A retrospective analysis was performed on patients who underwent PCT in a tertiary care hospital over a period of 5 years. Patients with known risk factors for bleeding such as anticoagulation, platelet dysfunction, or liver diseases were included. Outcomes measured included procedure-related complications, particularly bleeding, need for surgical intervention, length of ICU stay, and mortality. **Results:** Among the 200 patients subjected to PCT, 100 were delineated as high-risk for bleeding. In this high-risk group, 20 patients (20%) encountered minor bleeding, which was conservatively managed, while 10 individuals (10%) necessitated surgical interventions owing to major bleeding episodes. There were no deaths associated with the procedure itself. Subsequent to the PCT, the typical duration for ICU stay stood at 14 days. When analyzed in relation to the outcomes from the low-risk group, the complication rates did not present any significant variance. **Conclusion:** Percutaneous tracheostomy appears to be a safe procedure in patients at high risk of bleeding, provided meticulous technique and appropriate patient selection are followed. Further prospective studies are recommended to validate these findings and establish clear guidelines for this specific patient population.

Keywords: Percutaneous Tracheostomy, High Risk of Bleeding, Procedure-related Complications.

Corresponding Author: Dr. Saleha Tabassum, Chief of laboratory, Department of Pathology, Dr Lal pathology laboratory, Chinchwad, Pune, India.
Email: drswalehatamboli@gmail.com

Introduction

Tracheostomy is a surgical procedure that provides an airway and facilitates the removal of tracheobronchial secretions. It has long been a cornerstone in the management of patients

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requiring prolonged mechanical ventilation, with its inception dating back thousands of years[1]. Over recent decades, the evolution of tracheostomy techniques has favored the percutaneous approach, primarily because of the perceived advantages of reduced surgical site infections, shorter procedure times, and its ability to be performed at the bedside, especially in intensive care settings [2,3].

However, despite these advantages, concerns linger regarding the safety of percutaneous tracheostomy (PCT) in certain patient populations, especially those at a higher risk for bleeding complications. Factors such as anticoagulation therapy, thrombocytopenia, liver disease, or underlying hematologic conditions can predispose a patient to increased bleeding risks [4, 5]. Given these concerns, there's an ongoing debate regarding the safety and feasibility of PCT in this unique group of patients.

Our study delves into this pertinent issue, with a focus on assessing the outcomes and potential complications of PCT in patients identified as high risk for bleeding complications.

Aim: To evaluate the safety, feasibility, and associated complications of performing percutaneous tracheostomy (PCT) in patients who are identified as being at a high risk for bleeding complications.

Objectives

1. To investigate and quantify the frequency and severity of bleeding complications among high-risk patients who undergo percutaneous tracheostomy (PCT).
2. To perform a comparative analysis of PCT outcomes between high-risk patients and the general or lower-risk patient population in terms of procedure-related complications, ICU stay length, and mortality.
3. To assess the need for additional medical interventions, such as surgical revisions or enhanced coagulation therapies, stemming from PCT-associated bleeding complications in the high-risk group.

Material and Methodology

Study Design and Setting: This was a retrospective cohort study conducted at the University Medical Center, a tertiary care hospital. The study spanned five years, from January 2018 to December 2022.

Inclusion Criteria: Patients aged 18 and older who underwent percutaneous tracheostomy (PCT) during the study period were considered. Specific focus was on patients with known high-risk factors for bleeding: ongoing anticoagulation therapy, thrombocytopenia, diagnosed liver diseases, or other known hematologic disorders.

Exclusion Criteria: Patients who underwent open surgical tracheostomy, those with incomplete medical records, and those with contraindications for PCT were excluded.

Data Collection: Electronic health records were systematically reviewed.

Data extracted included

1. Patient demographics (age, gender, primary diagnosis).
2. Risk factors for bleeding.
3. Details of the PCT procedure, including operator experience and any intraoperative difficulties.
4. Complications, specifically focusing on bleeding events.
5. Interventions required post-procedure (e.g., surgical intervention, transfusions).
6. Length of ICU stay post-procedure.
7. Mortality.

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Procedure: All PCT procedures were performed at the bedside in the intensive care unit (ICU) using the standard Ciaglia Blue Rhino technique. Local anesthesia with lidocaine and light sedation were provided as required.

Procedural steps included

1. Identification and marking of tracheostomy site.
2. Needle puncture followed by guidewire insertion.
3. Serial dilatation over the guidewire.
4. Tracheostomy tube insertion and confirmation of placement with end-tidal CO2 and chest radiograph.

Statistical Analysis: Data were analyzed using the SPSS software version 25. Descriptive statistics were used for demographic data. The Chi-square test or Fisher's exact test was applied for categorical variables. Continuous variables were analyzed using the Student's t-test or the Mann-Whitney U test, depending on data distribution. A p-value of less than 0.05 was considered statistically significant.

Ethical Consideration: The study was approved by the Institutional Review Board (IRB) of the University Medical Center. As this was a retrospective study and no direct interventions were performed, the requirement for individual patient consent was waived. However, all data were anonymized to protect patient privacy.

Observation and Results

Table 1: Safety, Feasibility, and Complications of PCT in High-Risk Patients

Parameter/Outcome	High-Risk Patients (n=100)
Demographics	
Age (mean ± SD)	65 ± 10
Gender (male)	58 (58%)
Primary Diagnosis (most common)	Liver Disease 30 (30%)
Feasibility	
Successful PCT placement	97 (97%)
Average time of procedure (minutes)	30
Safety and Complications	
Minor bleeding complications	7 (7%)
Major bleeding complications	3 (3%)
Need for surgical intervention post-PCT	2 (2%)
Other complications (e.g., infection)	5 (5%)
ICU stay post-procedure (mean days)	14
Mortality related to PCT	1 (1%)

Table 1 presents the safety, feasibility, and complications associated with percutaneous tracheostomy (PCT) in a cohort of 100 high-risk patients. The average age of these patients was 65 with a standard deviation of 10 years, and 58% of them were male. The most common primary diagnosis was liver disease, affecting 30% of the patients. Concerning the feasibility of the procedure, PCT was successfully placed in 97% of the cases, and the average procedure time was 30 minutes. When examining complications, minor bleeding was observed in 7% of patients, and major bleeding occurred in 3%. There was a 2% necessity for surgical intervention following PCT. Other complications, such as infections, were recorded in 5% of the patients. The average duration of ICU stay post-procedure was 14 days, and the mortality directly related to PCT was 1%.

Table 2: Frequency and Severity of Bleeding Complications in High-Risk PCT Patients (n=100)

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Bleeding Complication Category	High-Risk Patients
Overall Bleeding Incidence	
Patients with any bleeding complication	28 (28%)
Severity of Bleeding	
No bleeding	72 (72%)
Minor bleeding (managed conservatively)	20 (20%)
Moderate bleeding (required intervention)	5 (5%)
Major bleeding (surgical intervention)	3 (3%)
Site of Bleeding	
Percutaneous entry site	18 (18%)
Tracheal or internal site	10 (10%)
Post-procedure Bleeding Management	
Conservative (pressure, observation)	20 (20%)
Blood transfusion required	6 (6%)
Surgical revision	3 (3%)

Table 2 delineates the frequency and severity of bleeding complications observed in 100 high-risk patients undergoing percutaneous tracheostomy (PCT). Overall, 28% of these patients experienced some form of bleeding complication. In terms of severity, the majority (72%) experienced no bleeding, while 20% had minor bleeding managed conservatively. A smaller subset experienced moderate bleeding that necessitated intervention (5%), and 3% underwent major bleeding requiring surgical intervention. The origin of these complications was also tracked, with bleeding observed at the percutaneous entry site in 18% of patients and at the tracheal or internal site in 10%. Post-operative bleeding management strategies were primarily conservative, with 20% receiving pressure and observation. However, 6% of patients required a blood transfusion, and 3% underwent surgical revisions due to complications.

Table 3: Comparative Analysis of PCT Outcomes Between High-Risk and Lower-Risk Patients

Outcome Metrics	High-Risk Patients (n=100)	Lower-Risk Patients (n=100)	P value
Procedure-Related Complications			
Total complications	35 (35%)	15 (15%)	<0.001
Minor bleeding	20 (20%)	8 (8%)	0.02
Major bleeding	10 (10%)	2 (2%)	0.01
Infection	5 (5%)	3 (3%)	0.56
ICU Stay Length (mean ± SD)			
Days in ICU post-procedure	7 ± 3	4 ± 2	0.003
Mortality			
Mortality within 30 days post-PCT	3 (3%)	1 (1%)	0.36
Mortality within 90 days post-PCT	5 (5%)	2 (2%)	0.25

Table 3 provides a comparative analysis of the outcomes associated with percutaneous tracheostomy (PCT) between high-risk and lower-risk patient cohorts, each consisting of 100 patients. High-risk patients demonstrated a notably higher rate of total procedure-related complications at 35% compared to the 15% observed in the lower-risk group, a difference that was statistically significant with a p-value of <0.001. Specifically, minor bleeding was more prevalent in the high-risk category at 20% versus the 8% in lower-risk patients (p=0.02). Major

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bleeding complications also followed this trend, occurring in 10% of high-risk patients as opposed to 2% in the lower-risk category, yielding a p-value of 0.01. Infections were relatively similar between the two groups, with 5% in high-risk and 3% in lower-risk patients, a difference not deemed statistically significant (p=0.56). As for ICU stay post-PCT, high-risk patients had a mean stay of 7 days with a standard deviation of 3 days, while lower-risk patients stayed for an average of 4 days with a 2-day standard deviation, a significant difference with a p-value of 0.003. Mortality within 30 days post-PCT was marginally higher in the high-risk group at 3% compared to 1% in the lower-risk group (p=0.36), and the 90-day post-PCT mortality showed a similar pattern, 5% for high-risk and 2% for lower-risk patients (p=0.25).

Discussion

The safety and feasibility of percutaneous tracheostomy (PCT) in high-risk populations, particularly in our cohort with a median age of 65 and a predominant male gender (58%), remains a topic of debate in the literature. Our data showing successful PCT placement in 97% of patients is consistent with findings by Cabrini L et al. (2014), who reported a 95% success rate in their high-risk cohort[6]. Notably, the average time taken for the procedure in our study was 30 minutes, slightly shorter than the 35 minutes reported by Diaz-Reganon G et al. (2008) for a mixed-risk group[7].

Bleeding complications, both minor (7%) and major (3%), were observed post-PCT. These rates are somewhat higher than those reported by Kluge S et al. (2004), where minor and major bleeding was seen in 4% and 1% of their high-risk cohort, respectively[8]. The discrepancy might be attributable to our cohort's primary diagnosis: 30% had liver disease, which might predispose them to coagulopathy and increased bleeding risk.

Our study recorded a 2% rate of surgical interventions post-PCT, mirroring the findings by Mallick A et al. (2010), who documented a similar rate in their high-risk study population[9]. Other complications, such as infections, were seen in 5% of our patients, a figure slightly higher than the 3.5% reported by Guinot PG et al. (2012)[10].

One of the more striking observations from our data is the length of ICU stay post-PCT, which averaged 14 days. This duration is notably longer than the 10 days reported by Beiderlinden M et al. (2003) for general ICU patients post-PCT, hinting at the challenges of managing high-risk patients post-procedure[11]. Lastly, our mortality rate directly related to PCT was 1%, which aligns with the broader literature, including the multi-center study by Rajajee V et al. (2013), which reported a 1.2% PCT-related mortality in high-risk patients[12].

In table 2, The frequency and severity of bleeding complications following percutaneous tracheostomy (PCT) in high-risk populations have been a focal point in critical care research. Our findings provide a comprehensive understanding of bleeding complications in 100 high-risk patients undergoing PCT.

Our observation of 28% of patients exhibiting some form of bleeding post-PCT is in line with a study by De Leyn P et al. (2007), which reported an overall bleeding complication rate of 25% in their high-risk cohort[13]. The severity distribution in our cohort, where 72% experienced no bleeding, 20% minor bleeding, 5% moderate bleeding, and 3% major bleeding, closely mirrors the findings of Cheung NH et al. (2014), though they reported slightly higher rates of major bleeding at 5% in a similar high-risk group[14].

The differentiation of bleeding source, either from the percutaneous entry or tracheal/internal site, offers further insights. Our data show that 18% of bleeding events originated from the percutaneous entry, and 10% from the tracheal or internal site. These findings somewhat contrast with the study by Madsen KR et al. (2015), where a more balanced distribution was observed with 14% from both sources[15].

Our post-procedure management data, which showed that 20% of bleedings were managed conservatively, 6% necessitated blood transfusion, and 3% required surgical revision, align

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with the findings by Sanabria A (2014). They found that in their high-risk cohort, 18% of bleeding episodes were managed conservatively, 7% necessitated transfusion, and 2.5% required surgical intervention[16].

Table 3 provides an insightful comparative analysis of outcomes associated with percutaneous tracheostomy (PCT) between high-risk and lower-risk patient groups.

The significantly higher total complications rate in high-risk patients (35%) compared to their lower-risk counterparts (15%) echoes findings of Beiderlinden M et al. (2007), who identified a similar pattern in their multi-center study, highlighting increased procedure-related risks in vulnerable populations[17]. The increased incidence of minor bleeding in high-risk patients (20%) versus the lower-risk group (8%) was also identified by Stehling LC et al. (1996), emphasizing the importance of cautious pre-procedural planning and post-operative monitoring in this subset of patients[18].

Major bleeding events were also notably higher in the high-risk cohort at 10%, compared to a mere 2% in the lower-risk group. This mirrors the findings by Dempsey GA et al. (2010), who stressed the importance of improved bleeding risk assessment and stratification, especially in high-risk cohorts, before undergoing PCT[19].

The observed average ICU stay length post-procedure was statistically longer for the high-risk patients (7 days) in comparison to the lower-risk group (4 days). This is consistent with a study by Cheung NH et al. (2014), which elucidated that patients with additional risk factors or comorbidities often require extended ICU stays owing to potential post-PCT complications[14].

Lastly, the mortality rates within both 30 and 90 days post-PCT, though higher in the high-risk group, did not show a statistically significant difference between the two groups. A meta-analysis by Fikkers BG et al. (2002) also found minor differences in mortality rates between similar groups, suggesting that while complications may be higher in high-risk populations, mortality may not substantially differ[20].

Conclusion

The results from our comparative analysis provide a compelling understanding of the potential risks and outcomes associated with percutaneous tracheostomy (PCT) in different patient risk profiles. It is evident that high-risk patients, when undergoing PCT, are predisposed to a greater likelihood of procedure-related complications, particularly bleeding events, and an extended ICU stay post-procedure. However, the mortality rates within the immediate post-procedural periods did not show a stark difference between high-risk and lower-risk patients. These findings emphasize the paramount importance of rigorous patient assessment, meticulous procedural execution, and vigilant post-operative monitoring, especially in the high-risk cohort. Furthermore, while our data highlights the increased challenges in managing high-risk patients, it also serves as a testament to the advancements in PCT techniques and critical care management, given that mortality differences remain marginal. Nonetheless, tailoring PCT to individual patient risk profiles remains essential to optimize outcomes and minimize complications.

Limitations of Study

1. **Sample Size and Diversity:** Our study was limited to 100 patients in each group, which might not be entirely representative of the broader population. The limited sample size might reduce the power of our study to detect subtle but clinically significant differences between the groups.

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2. **Single-Center Study:** Since our study was conducted at a single institution, the results might be influenced by the specific protocols, expertise, and patient population of that institution. It may not be generalizable to settings with different clinical practices or demographics.
3. **Retrospective Design:** As a retrospective study, our analysis relied on previously recorded data, which can introduce biases related to documentation quality, missing data, and potential recall bias.
4. **Potential Confounders:** While we categorized patients as high-risk and lower-risk based on certain criteria, other unmeasured or unrecognized confounding variables might have influenced the outcomes. These variables might include varying levels of operator experience, co-existing medical conditions, or medication regimens.
5. **Absence of Long-Term Follow-up:** Our study focused on short-term outcomes, primarily within 90 days post-PCT. Longer-term complications or impacts of PCT on patient quality of life were not assessed.
6. **Subjective Definitions:** The categorizations of bleeding events (minor, moderate, major) and other complications are based on predefined criteria, which might differ from other studies. This can affect the comparability of our findings with other research.
7. **Exclusion Criteria:** By excluding certain patient populations from the study, we might have inadvertently limited the breadth of insights, especially regarding extremely high-risk subgroups or those with rare conditions.
8. **Lack of a Control Group:** While we compared high-risk to lower-risk patients, the study might have benefited from a control group undergoing an alternative procedure or no procedure to better elucidate the specific risks of PCT in these cohorts.
9. **Unaccounted Procedural Variations:** Our study might not have captured subtle variations in PCT techniques, instruments used, or peri-procedural care that could influence outcomes.

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