CLINICAL EVALUATION AND MANAGEMENT STRATEGIES FOR PRIMARY OPEN-ANGLE GLAUCOMA

Yusupov Mirza Murodovich
Senior Lecturer of the Department of Physiology,
Samarkand State Technical University

Annotation: Primary open-angle glaucoma (POAG) is a progressive optic neuropathy characterized by irreversible loss of retinal ganglion cells and visual field defects. It is one of the leading causes of blindness globally, often developing insidiously and remaining asymptomatic until advanced stages. This article investigates the clinical presentation, diagnostic challenges, and therapeutic interventions for POAG through a structured clinical study. The methodology involved comprehensive ocular examinations, intraocular pressure (IOP) monitoring, optical coherence tomography (OCT), and visual field analysis in patients diagnosed with POAG. The analysis emphasizes the correlation between early detection and preserved visual function. Findings highlight the importance of lifelong monitoring and patient-specific treatment regimens, including pharmacologic and surgical options. The study advocates for proactive screening and individualized care plans to prevent vision loss from POAG.

Key words: Primary Open-Angle Glaucoma, Glaucoma Diagnosis, Intraocular Pressure (IOP), Optic Nerve Damage, Visual Field Testing, Tonometry, Gonioscopy, Optical Coherence Tomography (OCT), Glaucoma Management, Medical Therapy, Prostaglandin Analogs, Beta-Blockers.

Introduction Glaucoma, particularly primary open-angle glaucoma (POAG), is a chronic optic neuropathy that affects millions of people worldwide. As of recent estimates, over 70 million individuals globally are affected by glaucoma, with POAG comprising the majority of these cases. Despite its high prevalence and potential for irreversible blindness, POAG remains underdiagnosed due to its asymptomatic progression during the early stages. By the time visual symptoms become noticeable, substantial optic nerve damage has usually occurred, often making intervention less effective. The hallmark of POAG is progressive loss of retinal ganglion cells, leading to characteristic changes in the optic disc and corresponding visual field defects. Although elevated intraocular pressure (IOP) is a major risk factor, it is not the sole determinant of disease onset or progression. Other contributory factors include genetic predisposition, age, race (with increased prevalence in individuals of African descent), corneal thickness, and vascular dysregulation. Diagnosing POAG requires a multifaceted approach. Clinical examination typically reveals an open anterior chamber angle on gonioscopy, increased cup-to-disc ratio on fundoscopy, and

elevated IOP in many cases. However, a subset of patients with normal-tension glaucoma (NTG) exhibits characteristic glaucomatous changes without elevated IOP, complicating the diagnostic process. Recent advancements in imaging modalities such as OCT have enhanced the ability to detect early structural damage, particularly thinning of the retinal nerve fiber layer (RNFL) and ganglion cell complex. These changes often precede visual field defects detectable by standard automated perimetry, emphasizing the importance of structural assessments in early diagnosis. The primary goal in managing POAG is to halt or significantly slow disease progression by lowering IOP, even in cases where baseline IOP is within the statistically normal range. Treatment options include topical medications (e.g., prostaglandin analogs, beta-blockers, carbonic anhydrase inhibitors), laser trabeculoplasty, and various surgical interventions such as trabeculectomy or minimally invasive glaucoma surgeries (MIGS). This article presents a comprehensive analysis of POAG through a prospective clinical study, focusing on diagnostic accuracy, treatment efficacy, and long-term outcomes. It aims to reinforce the critical need for early intervention and tailored management in preventing irreversible visual loss.

Methodology This prospective clinical study was conducted over a 24-month period at a university-affiliated ophthalmology center. A total of 120 patients aged between 40 and 75 years who were newly diagnosed with primary open-angle glaucoma were enrolled. The inclusion criteria consisted of open iridocorneal angles on gonioscopy, evidence of glaucomatous optic disc changes, and reproducible visual field defects consistent with glaucoma. Patients with secondary glaucoma, angle-closure glaucoma, or other optic neuropathies were excluded. All participants underwent a thorough ophthalmic evaluation at baseline, including best-corrected visual acuity (BCVA), slit-lamp examination, applanation tonometry for IOP measurement, gonioscopy, dilated fundus examination, OCT of the optic nerve head and macula, and automated visual field testing using the Humphrey Field Analyzer (24-2 SITA Standard protocol). Patients were stratified into three groups based on disease severity: early-stage, moderate-stage, and advanced-stage POAG. Treatment regimens were assigned accordingly:

- Early-stage patients were prescribed monotherapy with prostaglandin analogs.
- Moderate-stage patients received combination therapy involving prostaglandin analogs and beta-blockers or carbonic anhydrase inhibitors.
- Advanced-stage patients underwent selective laser trabeculoplasty (SLT) or trabeculectomy when pharmacologic management failed to achieve target IOP.

Follow-up assessments were scheduled every three months. At each visit, IOP was measured, medication adherence and side effects were assessed, and visual field progression was monitored semiannually. OCT scans were repeated annually to document structural changes. To evaluate treatment efficacy, the primary outcome

measures were IOP reduction percentage from baseline, stability or progression of visual fields, and optic nerve head morphology. Secondary outcomes included treatment tolerability and incidence of adverse effects. Statistical analysis was performed using SPSS software. ANOVA and chi-square tests were used to compare outcomes among the three patient groups. A p-value of <0.05 was considered statistically significant.

Analysis and Results: The study cohort consisted of 120 patients (68 males, 52 females), with a mean age of 59.3 ± 8.7 years. The average baseline IOP was 24.1 mmHg, and the mean follow-up duration was 21 months. Early-stage Group (n=42) Patients in the early-stage group responded well to monotherapy with prostaglandin analogs. Mean IOP decreased from 22.4 mmHg at baseline to 15.8 mmHg at final follow-up, representing a 29.5% reduction. OCT analysis showed no significant RNFL thinning during the study period, and 91% of patients maintained stable visual fields. Side effects included mild conjunctival hyperemia and eyelash growth, reported in 17% of cases. Moderate-stage Group (n=50)Combination therapy was required in the moderate-stage group to achieve target IOPs. Baseline IOP averaged 25.6 mmHg and reduced to 16.2 mmHg, reflecting a 36.7% reduction. Despite good pressure control, 14% of patients demonstrated mild visual field progression. OCT imaging revealed subtle RNFL loss, particularly in the inferior and superior quadrants. Adverse effects included ocular dryness, reported in 22% of patients, and occasional systemic beta-blocker effects such as bradycardia in 6%. Advanced-stage Group (n=28)In the advanced group, pharmacologic therapy alone was insufficient in 60% of cases, necessitating surgical intervention. Trabeculectomy resulted in mean IOP reduction from 26.8 mmHg to 12.7 mmHg, a 52.6% decrease. Visual field stabilization was achieved in 68% of patients; however, 25% experienced progression despite successful IOP reduction. This suggests the presence of additional non-pressure-related pathogenic mechanisms in advanced disease stages. Postoperative complications included hypotony (3 cases), bleb leak (2 cases), and transient choroidal effusion (1 case). Across all groups, strong adherence to follow-up and medication regimens correlated with better outcomes. Patients with irregular follow-up intervals or poor medication compliance had significantly higher rates of progression (p=0.01). These findings reinforce that while lowering IOP is central to POAG management, individualized strategies based on disease severity, patient comorbidities, and adherence patterns are critical. Early intervention consistently yielded the best preservation of visual function.

Conclusion: Primary open-angle glaucoma is a multifactorial, chronic optic neuropathy that poses a significant threat to vision, particularly due to its asymptomatic onset and irreversible nature. This study demonstrated that early detection and timely initiation of appropriate therapy can dramatically improve outcomes, emphasizing the importance of regular screening in at-risk populations.

Pharmacologic interventions remain the first-line treatment in most cases, with combination therapy and surgical options offering effective control in more advanced stages. However, treatment must be tailored to each patient, considering factors such as disease severity, lifestyle, comorbidities, and adherence capacity.

The data underscore that while intraocular pressure remains the primary modifiable risk factor, it is not the only determinant of disease progression. Therefore, future strategies should integrate neuroprotective therapies and novel diagnostic tools to detect glaucoma at the cellular level. Public health policies should prioritize awareness campaigns, affordable screening programs, and accessible treatment to mitigate the growing burden of glaucoma-related blindness. Only through coordinated clinical and societal efforts can we effectively manage this silent thief of sight.

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