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Robert E. Kelly Jr.

Robert J. Obermeyer

Ann Kuhn

Frazier W. Frantz

Mohammad F. Obeid

Old Dominion University

See next page for additional authors

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Use of an Optical Scanning Device to Monitor the Progress of Noninvasive Treatments for Chest Wall Deformity: A Pilot Study

Robert E. Kelly Jr., M.D.1,2,3, Robert J. Obermeyer, M.D.1,2, M. Ann Kuhn, M.D.1,2, Frazier W. Frantz, M.D.1,2, Mohammad F. Obeid3, Nahom Kidane3, Frederic D. McKenzie2,3

1Department of Surgery and Pediatrics, Children’s Hospital of The King’s Daughters, 2Department of Surgery and Pediatrics, Eastern Virginia Medical School, 3Department of Modeling and Simulation Engineering, Batten College of Engineering and Technology, Old Dominion University

Background: The nonsurgical treatment of chest wall deformity by a vacuum bell or external brace is gradual, with correction taking place over months. Monitoring the progress of nonsurgical treatment of chest wall deformity has relied on the ancient methods of measuring the depth of the excavatum and the protrusion of the carinatum. Patients, who are often adolescent, may become discouraged and abandon treatment. Methods: Optical scanning was utilized before and after the intervention to assess the effectiveness of treatment. The device measured the change in chest shape at each visit. In this pilot study, patients were included if they were willing to undergo scanning before and after treatment. Both surgical and nonsurgical treatment results were assessed. Results: Scanning was successful in 7 patients. Optical scanning allowed a visually clear, precise assessment of treatment, whether by operation, vacuum bell (for pectus excavatum), or external compression brace (for pectus carinatum). Millimeter-scale differences were identified and presented graphically to patients and families. Conclusion: Optical scanning with the digital subtraction of images obtained months apart allows a comparison of chest shape before and after treatment. For nonsurgical, gradual methods, this allows the patient to more easily appreciate progress. We speculate that this will increase adherence to these methods in adolescent patients.

Key words: 1. Imaging 2. Funnel chest 3. Pectus carinatum

Introduction

Recently, vacuum bell therapy for pectus excavatum and external brace treatment for pectus carinatum have gained acceptance as nonsurgical treatments of chest wall deformity. It has proven difficult to monitor the progress of treatment. External measurements of the chest can be made using ruler or caliper devices, but these give a limited picture of the entire chest shape. Computed tomography scanning, which gives a good 3-dimensional (3D) picture with reconstruction, subjects the patient to ionizing radiation. Magnetic resonance imaging is expensive and time-consuming. We sought a noninvasive way to follow the progress of treatment and to provide positive reinforcement to adolescent patients who...
Methods

An optical scanner was developed from a Kinect device by the engineering department at Old Dominion University (Fig. 1). The equipment was verified to measure distances from the probe accurately, and its ability to produce a 3D image was confirmed [1,2]. Measurements of accuracy and precision were made, and were found to be more than sufficient for use in a biological system [3-7]. The scanner was used on both male and female patients without breast development, obtaining images in the supine position, with a consistent position relative to the scanner. A total of 7 adolescent male patients, aged 9 to 18 years, were studied. The scanner utilized visible light, not ionizing radiation. It was used in the examination room of our clinic.

Patients were scanned before, during, and after treatment. Photographs were taken at the beginning and end of treatment. Measurements were taken with a dowel and ruler for the excavatum patients. A color map, using the colors that make up visible
light, was used to indicate where the chest had changed in shape. This image, which demonstrated treatment progress, was then shown to patients and parents to encourage adherence to the treatment regimen. Formal patient satisfaction surveys were not utilized.

This study was approved by the Institutional Review Board of the Eastern Virginia Medical School (IRB approval no., #14-10-EX-0214-CHKD).

Results

The device was utilized successfully in all patients. A male patient who underwent the Nuss procedure for the surgical treatment of pectus excavatum was studied. This patient, who was 18 years old at the time of the operation, had a Haller index of 5.7 and a correction index of 34%. He showed a clinically
normal chest. In scans taken 1 week apart (before and after the operation), the chest wall was seen to be elevated by almost 2 cm (Fig. 2).

Vacuum bell treatment: A vacuum bell was applied twice daily by the patient or the patient’s parents, starting at 20 minutes each time and increasing to 2 hours twice daily (Figs. 3–7).

Pectus carinatum is routinely treated with an external brace (Figs. 8–10).

**Discussion**

This technique produced images that were well-received by patients and their families. The positive feedback of an objective demonstration of improvement is especially valuable for the vacuum bell and brace treatments, which change the chest shape slowly. A daily exam in the mirror performed by the patient may not make the same impression on young patients, who are impatient for results.

We scanned the patients in the supine position, which is a reproducible position. Changes in the anterior chest due to spine flexion or rotation were minimized. Breast protrusion in adolescent patients with developing breast tissue is a technical challenge that remains unresolved.

In conclusion, optical scanning offers a low-risk, practical, immediate, inexpensive, and well-accepted way to follow nonsurgical treatment of chest wall deformity.

**Conflict of interest**

No potential conflict of interest relevant to this article was reported. Drs. Kelly and Obermeyer are consultants for Zimmer-Biomet Inc., USA.

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