

Surgical management of chronic angle-closure glaucoma

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Abstract

Chronic angle-closure glaucoma is a major cause of blindness, particularly in Asia. The goals of management are to prevent both progression of anatomic angle-closure and progression of glaucomatous optic neuropathy, the latter by controlling intraocular pressure. Laser iridotomy to eliminate pupillary block is the definitive initial treatment and laser peripheral iridoplasty is the second-line treatment to eliminate any residual appositional angle-closure.

Topical medications are used if the intraocular pressure remains uncontrolled. If the target pressure is not reached with maximally tolerated medications, surgery is indicated. Options include trabeculectomy with or without lens extraction, lens extraction alone, combined phacoemulsification and non-penetrating deep sclerectomy, goniosynechialysis with or without lens extraction, cyclodestructive procedures, and glaucoma drainage implants.

Recently, lens extraction has been actively studied and appears to be promising as an effective treatment, since it reverses the anatomical predisposition to angle-closure. More work needs to be done to define its role in the management of chronic angle-closure glaucoma.

Introduction

Angle-closure refers to the apposition or adhesion of the peripheral iris to the pigmented trabecular meshwork, blocking aqueous access to the filtering meshwork. Blockage can be temporary (appositional) or permanent (synechial), and can be complete or partial. A sufficient proportion of the drainage surface of the trabecular meshwork must be blocked before the intraocular pressure (IOP) begins to rise. A persistently raised IOP can result in irreversible optic nerve head cupping and visual field loss, depending on the susceptibility of the individual's optic nerve to the damaging effect of pressure.

Angle-closure glaucoma can be subdivided into acute and chronic types. The acute form is symptomatic and results from the sudden appositional closure of the angle leading to a dramatic rise in IOP. Chronic angle-closure glaucoma (CACG) refers to an eye in which portions of the anterior chamber angle are closed permanently by peripheral anterior synechiae (PAS). Glaucomatous damage is present and the disease is asymptomatic, at least in its early stages. Eyes with progressive PAS formation may eventually develop acute angle-closure when pupillary block results in sudden closure of the remaining portions of the angle unaffected by PAS. However, many patients develop gradual angle-closure, PAS, elevated IOP, and glaucomatous damage in the absence of symptoms. CACG may also develop following an acute angle-closure attack.

The management of CACG is to prevent progression of angle-closure and glaucomatous optic neuropathy by

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controlling IOP. Laser iridotomy and laser peripheral iridoplasty are definitive treatments in the initial stages of management, and act by eliminating pupil block and appositional angle-closure, respectively. Topical medications are then used if the IOP remains uncontrolled. If the target IOP is not reached with maximally tolerated medications, surgery needs to be considered. Surgical options include lens extraction alone, trabeculectomy with or without lens extraction, combined phacoemulsification and non-penetrating deep sclerectomy, goniosynechialysis with or without lens extraction, cyclodestructive procedures, and glaucoma drainage implants.

Trabeculectomy

Trabeculectomy is effective for CACG (**Figure 1**).^{1,2} However, trabeculectomy for CACG is associated with a higher risk of filtration failure, shallow anterior chamber, and malignant glaucoma than for primary open-angle glaucoma (POAG).^{3,4} As the incidence of CACG increases with age, many patients with CACG have co-existing cataract. Trabeculectomy increases the rate of cataract progression, and a significant proportion of patients will need cataract extraction after trabeculectomy.⁵⁻⁹ Furthermore, future cataract extraction may result in loss of the functioning filter.^{8,10-20} It has been reported that 30% to 100% of previously functioning blebs may require antiglaucoma medications to control IOP after cataract extraction.⁸ Trabeculectomy alone is, therefore, not the ideal surgical option for medically uncontrolled CACG.

Trabeculectomy is associated with various complications, both early and late, including bleb leaks and bleb-related infections. These risks are further increased by use of adjunctive antimetabolites.

Lens extraction for chronic angle-closure glaucoma

Lens position and thickness both play important roles in the etiology of angle-closure glaucoma.²¹⁻²⁴ Lens extraction significantly increases anterior chamber depth and width of the drainage angle.²⁵ Both traditional extracapsular cataract extraction^{6,26,27} and phacoemulsification²⁸⁻³² have been reported to lower IOP in CACG. Removal of a large cataractous lens from an eye with a crowded anterior segment may improve aqueous outflow.³³ It has also been postulated that during phacoemulsification, the irrigating fluid flushes cellular debris from the trabecular meshwork, decreasing resistance to aqueous outflow.³⁴ One study suggested that the IOP-lowering effect of lens extraction may be less pronounced in patients with CACG with PAS covering three-quarters or more of the angle.³⁵ Lens extraction alone may therefore have a role in improving IOP control in CACG, especially in patients with less extensive PAS and when the IOP is not severely out of control. No randomized controlled trials have compared the efficacy and safety of lens extraction to other glaucoma surgeries in CACG.³⁶ Two randomized controlled trials are currently being undertaken

by the authors to investigate the effects of lens extraction in CACG with and without cataract. IOP control, surgical complications, and additional interventions for IOP control are important outcome measures in these studies.

Combined lens extraction and trabeculectomy

Trabeculectomy for CACG is often combined with cataract extraction and intraocular lens (IOL) implantation. Since cataract extraction alone widens the angle and lowers IOP in CACG, trabeculectomy combined with cataract extraction has a greater IOP-lowering effect in CACG than in POAG.³⁷ However, there are no published data documenting the additional IOP-lowering effect of combined phacotrabeculectomy over trabeculectomy alone in CACG. Combined surgery also improves patients' visual acuity and quality of life, and has the added advantage of reducing the risk of anterior chamber shallowing or flattening. These authors therefore recommend combined phacotrabeculectomy for patients with CACG with some degree of cataract, especially when the IOP is not well controlled with maximally tolerated medications.

Combined phacoemulsification and non-penetrating filtering procedures

Non-penetrating glaucoma-filtering procedures have increasingly gained acceptance during the past few decades, and are known for their safety and low risk profiles.³⁸⁻⁴⁰ Combined phacoemulsification and non-penetrating deep sclerectomy has been shown to reduce IOP and the number of antiglaucoma medications used for CACG.⁴¹ However, there is currently only one retrospective study mentioning this procedure's role in CACG and further studies are needed to compare the IOP-lowering effect with that of trabeculectomy.

Goniosynechialysis with or without lens extraction

Goniosynechialysis is a surgical technique performed to strip the PAS from the trabecular surface in the angle, so that aqueous can have renewed access to the trabecular meshwork. In eyes with minimal PAS, trabeculectomy is preferred because trabecular function in these eyes is expected to be poor and a fistula procedure would be more appropriate. On the other hand, there may be spikes of raised IOP during and after the goniosynechialysis procedure, leading to loss of vision. Goniosynechialysis is more suitable for eyes with minimal to moderate degree of neuronal damage.

In the past, ophthalmologists have tried to sweep open closed angles without direct visualization. This often failed because accurate instrument placement could not be achieved. In 1984, Campbell and Vela introduced a technique using direct intraoperative visualization of the angle and anterior chamber deepening with viscoelastic agents.⁴² Visualization has been further improved with the use of

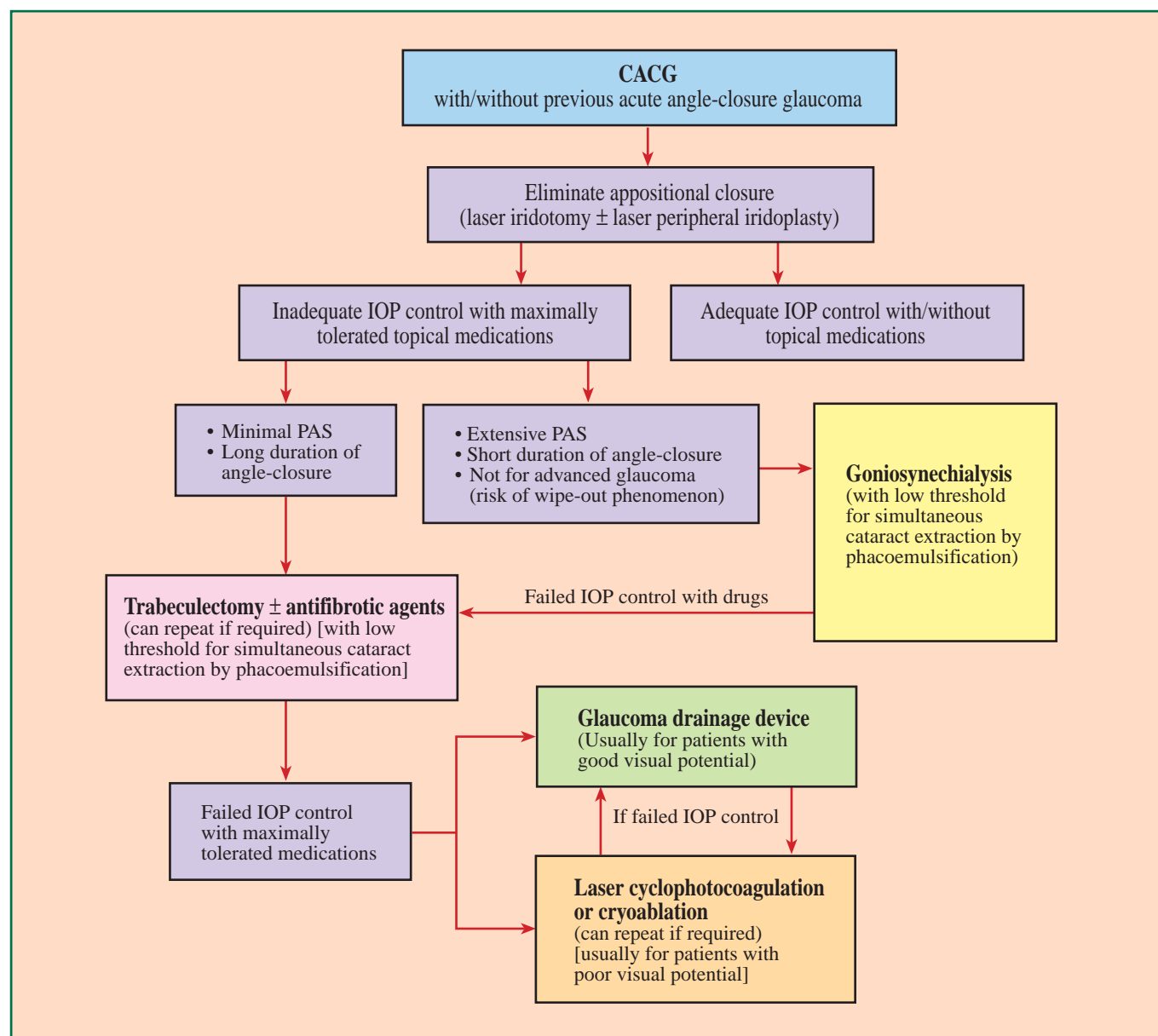


Figure 1. One approach to the management of chronic angle-closure glaucoma.

Abbreviations: CACG = chronic angle-closure glaucoma; IOP = intraocular pressure; PAS = peripheral anterior synechiae.

the Swan-Jacob lens. This specially designed lens has a handle attached to a small diameter prism so that it will not obstruct the spatula from entering the anterior chamber at the limbus. When PAS has been present for less than 1 year, the overall success rate in terms of IOP control is approximately 80%.^{43,44} Irreversible damage to the trabecular meshwork may occur in areas of synechial closure, with proliferation of iris or fibrous tissue into the intertrabecular space. For goniosynechialysis to be effective, it must be performed before there is irreversible histological change in the trabecular meshwork. The mechanisms causing the angle-closure should also be eliminated by performing peripheral iridotomy, laser peripheral iridoplasty,⁴⁵⁻⁴⁷ or lens extraction,^{48,49} either alone or in combination, to minimize the possibility of recurrent closure. Tanihara and Nagata reported success with goniosynechialysis followed by argon laser peripheral iridoplasty.⁴⁵ Lai et al

reported 5 patients with an 80% success rate using limited goniosynechialysis followed by diode laser peripheral iridoplasty.⁴⁶

Lens extraction has the advantages of noticeable visual improvement after surgery; furthermore, removal of the lens increases the anterior chamber depth and widens the angle, and may decrease the possibility of recurrent angle-closure. However, lens extraction alone could not open a PAS; goniosynechialysis strips open the PAS. Combining goniosynechialysis with lens extraction has a greater IOP-lowering effect than goniosynechialysis alone.^{43,47-49} In the study by Teekhasaene and Ritch, 12 patients who had uncontrolled IOP after initial goniosynechialysis alone had IOPs less than 20 mm Hg without medication after combined phacoemulsification and goniosynechialysis, and the mean extent of PAS was reduced from 310° to 60°. Teekhasaene

and Ritch have reported success with phacoemulsification combined with goniosynechialysis,⁴⁸ and Lai et al were successful with combined phacoemulsification and limited goniosynechialysis, followed by diode laser peripheral iridoplasty, for CACG.⁴⁷ These authors demonstrated with ultrasound biomicroscopy that lens removal for CACG would only deepen the peripheral anterior chamber, without opening up the angle, while gonio-synechialysis opened up the angle and allowed aqueous access to the trabecular meshwork. Nevertheless, both lens extraction and goniosynechialysis performed alone have been shown to lower the IOP, although the mechanisms are uncertain and may or may not be common to both procedures.

The most common complication of goniosynechialysis is intraoperative hemorrhage.⁴³ Other complications include IOP elevation on the first postoperative day,^{47,48} iridodialysis, cyclodialysis, and lens damage.⁴³

Cyclodestructive procedures

Transscleral diode laser cyclophotocoagulation (TSCPC) using the G-probe is used to treat different types of glaucoma.⁵⁰ The semiconductor diode laser emits light of wavelength 810 nm, near the infrared spectrum. The light is transmitted through the sclera and absorbed by melanin. The success rates for cyclodestruction vary among the different types of procedures and glaucomas. Diode TSCPC has been reported to be effective for controlling IOP to <21 mm Hg in 70% to 81% of children and adults with refractory glaucoma.⁵¹ However, there has been no large-scale study of its efficacy for the treatment of CACG. In a recent study, adjunctive diode TSCPC was effective in lowering IOP in 4 patients with CACG that was uncontrolled despite a glaucoma aqueous tube shunt and multiple medications.⁵² In the study by Lai et al, diode TSCPC appeared to be an effective and safe primary surgical treatment for medically uncontrolled CACG, with an IOP-lowering effect persisting for up to 2 years.⁵³

The efficacy and relative safety, the portability of the equipment, the ease of learning, and the short duration required for performing this technique make diode TSCPC a potential primary or secondary surgical procedure for the future treatment of CACG. However, TSCPC is associated with some common complications, including uveitis and pupillary distortion, which may precipitate further PAS formation, and some rare but potentially serious complications, including conjunctival burns, hyphema, chronic hypotony, cystoid macular edema, retinal detachment, phthisis bulbi, and scleral perforations.^{51,54-61}

Glaucoma drainage implants

There is a wide variety of glaucoma drainage devices, ranging from the early Molteno implant to the currently popular valve-equipped variety such as the Ahmed implant.⁶² As implantation of a glaucoma drainage device is technically more difficult than trabeculectomy⁶³⁻⁶⁸ and potentially serious complications can occur,⁶⁹⁻⁸⁰ the use of a glaucoma

implant for CACG has been mainly confined to those patients for whom one or more previous filtering procedures have failed. Amongst the studies that included CACG, the proportion of patients with CACG ranged from 1.7% to 9.0%. Aside from the small number of patients, another major problem with these studies is that only 2 published the results of the subgroup with CACG. One had only a single non-Asian patient with angle-closure glaucoma who had no light perception at 6 months,⁸¹ while the other included 10 patients of unspecified race, 7 of whom had successful surgery.⁸² A more recent randomized study evaluated non-valved tube shunt surgery against trabeculectomy for patients with glaucoma who had previously failed trabeculectomy and/or cataract extraction with IOL implantation.⁸³⁻⁸⁵ In this study, there were 18 eyes with CACG, with 7 randomized to the implant group and 11 to the trabeculectomy group.⁸³ Although this study did not provide a subgroup analysis for patients with CACG, the 1-year results found a higher success rate in the implant group than in the trabeculectomy group.⁸⁴ These results suggest a possible expanded role for the use of implants in eyes that have had previous ocular surgery.

Conclusions

The best surgical strategy for medically uncontrolled CACG is not yet clearly defined. There is a lack of high-quality clinical data from randomized controlled trials to compare different surgical modalities. In the absence of comparative data, the choice of surgical treatment often depends on the surgeon's expertise and preference.

For CACG with recent synechial angle-closure, combined phacoemulsification and goniosynechialysis may be a logical approach. However, in the presence of substantial visual field defects and/or advanced cupping, signifying a long duration of angle-closure, irreversible structural changes in the trabecular meshwork are expected, and goniosynechialysis may not be effective for these patients. Trabeculectomy, with or without combined lens extraction, may be considered for medically uncontrolled and long-standing CACG. Combined phacoemulsification and non-penetrating deep sclerectomy is an option, but more work needs to be done. Currently, glaucoma implants and cyclodestruction are reserved for patients with CACG who have failed previous filtering operations. The choice between glaucoma implants and cyclodestruction usually depends on the patient's visual prognosis, with cyclodestruction being reserved for those patients with poorer visual prognosis because of the destructive nature of the procedure.

None of the conventional glaucoma procedures appear to be ideal for CACG. Since lens extraction reverses the anatomical predisposition to angle-closure, this procedure holds promise as an effective primary treatment for CACG, especially in the early stages of the disease. Data from ongoing randomized controlled trials may help define a role for lens extraction in the surgical management of CACG in the future.

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