ERECTION MISDIRECTION: PENILE REHABILITATION & TREATMENTS FOR ERECTILE DYSFUNCTION

Gregory Harochaw
Pharmacy Manager
Tache Pharmacy
(204) 233-3469
Nerve Function

- After careful prostatectomy where the erectile nerves are preserved they can be dormant for 12 – 24 months
- With radiation therapy the nerves are in the field of radiation
- They allow the smooth muscle to relax & allow the lacunar spaces to expand & fill with blood
Understanding Penile Rehabilitation

- Until recently the time interval to return erectile function after radical prostatectomy can be up to 2 years.
- This 2 year period might be due to "neuropraxia" or transient cavernosal nerve dysfunction.
- Historically, patients have been encouraged during this period to continue waiting for the return of erectile function without the need for active intervention.

Understanding Penile Rehabilitation

- PO$_2$ Flaccid: 30 – 40mm Hg
- PO$_2$ Erect state: 90 – 100mm Hg
- PO$_2$ Arteriogenic: 65mm Hg
- PO$_2$ Venous leakage: 71mm Hg

- This low PO$_2$ can lead to ↑ collagen synthesis

Understanding Penile Rehabilitation

- Prolonged flaccid state after nerve-sparing radical prostatectomy
  - collagen deposition in the corpus cavernosum
  - lead to tissue hypoxia which can result in damage to the smooth muscle
  - lead to irreversible veno-occlusive disease (venous leakage)

Understanding Penile Rehabilitation

- This is all theoretical as it is difficult to prove how this actually starts and remains a topic of debate
- Formation of fibrotic tissue does form in the corpus cavernosum after a radical prostatectomy

Understanding Penile Rehabilitation

- Several studies have been performed evaluating the effectiveness of artificially induced erection after surgery:
  - PGE$_1$ injections
  - Vacuum devices
  - PDE-5i (Viagra, Cialis & Levitra)
Understanding Penile Rehabilitation

- Montorsi & colleagues evaluated using alprostadil injections at 1 month after bilateral nerve sparing radical prostatectomy
  - Investigators found that a higher rate of recovery of spontaneous erections after 6 months compared to no treatment
  - 67% of men in the study group had return of spontaneous erections sufficient for intercourse at 6 months compared to 20% of men who did not inject
  - 53% of patients who did not receive injections demonstrated venous leakage vs. 17% of patients receiving injection therapy
Understanding Penile Rehabilitation

- 2 flaws in study
  - No placebo group used
  - Definition of “complete recovery” made interpretation of results challenging

- Also using alprostadil itself may lead to prevention of fibrosis in corpus cavernosum
Understanding Penile Rehabilitation

- Mulhall & coworkers followed 132 patients through an 18 month period after they were placed in “rehabilitation” or “no rehabilitation” groups after radical prostatectomy
  - Rehabilitation group took either sildenafil or intracavernosal alprostadil to induce erection 3 times weekly starting within the 1st 4 weeks after surgery
Understanding Penile Rehabilitation

- After 18 months of follow-up
  - 52% of men in the rehabilitation group (RG) reported spontaneous erections
  - 19% of men in the non-rehabilitation group (NRG) reported spontaneous erections
  - Also 64% of men in RG vs. 24% of men in NRG responded to sildenafil after the 18 months and were able to have an erection sufficient for intercourse
Understanding Penile Rehabilitation

- Limitation in this study is that it was a non-randomized study (patients chose if they wanted treatment or not)
- However, the results are in agreement with the Montorsi study suggesting a regimented rehabilitation protocol might improve overall return of erection function after radical prostatectomy
Understanding Penile Rehabilitation

- Gontero & colleagues investigated alprostadil injections at various points after non-nerve-sparing radical prostatectomy
  - 70% of patients receiving injections within 3 months of surgery were able to achieve erections for intercourse vs 40% for people receiving injections after 3 months of surgery

- Summary was that people should receive penile rehabilitation within 3 months of surgery
Understanding Penile Rehabilitation

- Raina & coworkers evaluated daily use of vacuum constriction device (VCD) within 2 months of patients receiving nerve-sparing or non-nerve sparing radical prostatectomy.
- After 9 months of treatment 17% of patients using the device had a return of natural erections sufficient for intercourse vs. 11% of patients in non-treatment group.
Understanding Penile Rehabilitation

- 23% of patients in treatment group reported a \(\downarrow\) in penile length & circumference vs. 60% in non-treatment group
- These findings suggest that fibrotic changes leading to penile shortening and possible venous leakage might be minimized
Understanding Penile Rehabilitation

- Padma-Nathan & colleagues gave either nightly sildenafil treatment or placebo for 36 weeks starting 4 weeks after a nerve-sparing radical prostatectomy.
- After 48 weeks 27% of the treatment group reported erections vs. 4% in placebo group.
- 4% is extremely low & study only involved 76 patients. A larger trial may be required to extrapolate results.
Understanding Penile Rehabilitation

- Raina & coworkers did a study with the use of PDE-5i after an initial protocol of penile rehabilitation using intracavernosal injections or VCD after radical prostatectomy.
- Used sildenafil in dissatisfied patients using a VCD for about 4 months & found after 8 months of combined treatment 77% improvement in rigidity/patient satisfaction & 30% of patients with a return to natural erections.
Montorsi & colleagues used a combination of sildenafil & intracavernous alprostadil injections in patients undergoing nerve-sparing radical prostatectomy.

Patients started on injections within 1 month and sildenafil after 4 months vs. sildenafil alone after 4 months.

82% of men in combined group responded to sildenafil vs. 52% sildenafil-only group.
Conclusion

- Significant fibrotic changes in the corpous cavernosum develop after a prolonged period of penile flaccidity after a radical prostatectomy.
- Exact etiology is unknown although strong evidence suggest hypoxia may induce fibrotic changes.
- Many physicians are using some type of erectogenic treatment after a surgery in an effort to enhance the return of sexual function.
Conclusion

- Limited data shows the possible role of chronic use of PDE-5i post-prostatectomy in enhancing the return of sexual function.
- Patients need to be aware that the preliminary data on the exact benefit imparted on penile rehabilitation & which treatment regimen that is most effective will remain highly controversial until better data becomes available.
Treatment

- Start treatment within 4 months after prostatectomy
- Use of a PDE5i daily or the use of an ED injection 3 times weekly for 6 months
- Use a vacuum pump to help regain length
  - Bring penis to a full erection & hold for 1 minute
  - Repeat up to 4 times over 10 minutes
  - Use on off days if using ED injection
  - Use 5 times/week for 6 months – 1 year if on PDE5i