PAUWELS’ OSTEOTOMY FOR FEMORAL NECK NON-UNION

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ABSTRACT

During a period of nine years (1982-1991), Pauwels’ osteotomy was performed for 38 cases of femoral neck non-union. 32 led to consolidation with one osteotomy (84%) and 6 failed (3 needed revision (92%), one died and two were lost to follow-up).

The length of follow-up was 2-11 years, the average time of non-union 12 months (ranging from 4 months to 13 years) and the mean patient age 33 years (ranging from 3-58 years).

According to the method of fixation the cases were divided into 3 groups, and the best results were achieved in group III which were treated via a modification of Pauwels’ technique.


INTRODUCTION

Today, in spite of improved methods of treatment, the fractured femoral neck has a higher percentage of non-union (10% to 20%) than any other fracture.1,6,17

The treatment of non-union may be grouped as follows: 1) osteosynthesis, 2) osteotomy, 3) prosthesis replacement, 4) total hip replacement, 5) excisional arthroplasty, and 6) arthrodesis.1,6,17,18

Most authors recommended osteotomy for those types of non-union in which the head is viable and the neck fairly well preserved in children and in adults less than 60 years of age.1,6,17

Historically, two types of osteotomy have been proposed: 1) displacement osteotomy which was first described by Lorenz in 1919 and then used by Hass in 1924 and finally popularized by McMurray, and 2) angulation osteotomy or Schaup osteotomy which was introduced in 1925.1,6,12,16,17

These standard osteotomies have high failure rates because the mechanical situations of different fractures are extremely variable.1,6,17

Pauwels, in 1935, pointed out that different types of non-union need different osteotomies.1,6,17 An x-ray is taken of the hip with the leg in the position that best shows the pseudarthrosis. An exact tracing is made of the hip joint and the pseudarthrosis. The angle formed by the (H) line and the (Ps) line minus 160° (here 45°) shows the size of the wedge to be resected (Fig. 1 a, b, c, d).

MATERIAL AND METHODS

From 1982 to 1991, Pauwels’ osteotomy was performed for 38 femoral neck non-unions. The average age of the cases was 33 (range 3-58) and mean non-union time was 12 months (range 4 months to 13 years).

Fixation

Pauwels used double tension wire bands for osteotomy fixation but for non-union he believed that if there was fibrosis at the non-union site, a fixator is not necessary; otherwise, a fixator is needed.

According to fixation, the patients were divided into three groups.

Group I: Eleven cases (Table I). In this group the osteotomy was fixed by tension wire bands but no fixator was used for the non-union, and a spica cast was applied for 8-12 weeks. 5 cases healed but 6 failed, as 3 needed revision, one died due
Pauwels' Osteotomy for Non-Union

Fig. 1 (A, B, C, D).
A. First sheet; a sketch of the X-ray that best shows the pseudoarthrosis.
B. Second sheet; a drawing of the inferior fragment of the osteotomy.
C. Second sheet placed on first sheet and rotated clockwise until the osteotomy lines of two fragments coincide. The upper fragment is then traced.
D. Operation diagram

Fig. 2 (A, B, C). Influence of the neck/shaft angle on the magnitude of the forces.
Table I. Group I.

<table>
<thead>
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<th>Case No.</th>
<th>Sex</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Side</th>
<th>Cause</th>
<th>Previous Procedure</th>
<th>Fixation of non-union</th>
<th>Duration of follow-up Yrs. + Mo.</th>
<th>Duration of non-union Yrs. + Mo.</th>
<th>Genu valgum</th>
<th>Shortening cm</th>
<th>Necrotic head before osteotomy</th>
<th>Harris hip score</th>
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Fig 3, A. Case 1 (pre-op)  
Fig 4, A. Case 12 (pre-op).

Fig 3, B. Case 1 (2 years 8 months, post op)  
Fig 4, B. Case 12 (2 years 3 months, post op).
Table II. Group II.

<table>
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<th>Case No.</th>
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RESULTS

32 of 38 cases healed with one osteotomy (84%) while 6 failed – one died, two were lost to follow-up and 3 needed revision (92%). Concerning gait and activity by Harris’ criteria, all cases scored 80 to 100 points (Harris’ criteria: R.O.M.=5, pain=44, activity=13, transport=1, gait=33, absence of deformity =4, total=100 points).

Group I had a high failure rate. Group II and group III patients all healed but group III with a short casting time and less genu valgum deformity.
## DISCUSSION

Pauwels, the founder of modern biomechanics, proved in 1940 that 1) pure compressive stress of acceptable magnitude, encourages the formation of bony callus; 2) tense stress retards bone formation, and 3) shearing stress is harmful and prevents the formation of bony callus.  

In the normal neck shaft angle, shearing, tensile, and compressive stresses are all exerted on the femoral neck. In varus positions all forces are increased and in valgus positions decreased (Fig. 2a, b, c).  

According to Pauwels' calculation, in coxa-valga with a neck-shaft angle of 150-155 degrees, compressive forces are high but shearing forces are absent or minimal. Consequently, the specific role of a basic treatment, such as a valgus osteotomy, is to convert shearing and tensile stresses into pure compressive forces.  

Group I had a high failure rate because theoretically the 150 degree angle is obtainable, but is sometimes difficult practically and sometimes impossible; therefore some shearing stress persists. The basic treatment method must eliminate the shearing stress, thus appropriate nailing is the method of choice.  

Some authors believe that degenerative changes develop after 3 to 5 years. In our study, 29 cases had 3 to 11 years of follow-up and no degenerative changes developed.  

Group III had less genu valgus deformity because, as medial displacement of the femoral shaft is the cause of this deformity, in this group the osteotomy was performed with some lateral displacement of the distal fragment and fixed with a buttress T plate.  

In conclusion, Pauwels' osteotomy is not a standard osteotomy; different non-unions need different osteotomies. Schematic the schematic drawings designed. This study shows that non-unions must be fixed closely with A-O lag screws and/or pins and the osteotomy fixed anteriorly by a buttress T plate.

## REFERENCES

Pauwels' Osteotomy for Non-Union