Asessing urethral length measurement: comparison between simple catheter technique and 3D transperineal ultrasound

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**CONTEXT**
- Optimal placement of periurethral material plays an important role in treatment efficacy for women stress urinary incontinence (UI) [1].
- Considering individual variations, the assessment of urethral length prior to cystoscope insertion may help determine appropriate site of injection.
- Physicians usually assess urethral length using a Foley catheter. However, the validity of this technique has not been reported.
- Three-dimensional (3D) ultrasound imaging has been suggested to be useful in assessing urethral morphology and identifying site of injection [2].

**AIM OF THE STUDY**
To investigate the agreement between urethral length measured with a catheter compared to 3D transperineal ultrasound.

**PARTICIPANTS**
- 57 women with stress or mixed UI (stress predominance)

**Inclusion criteria**
- Aged 18 years and older
- Reported at least 3 episodes of stress UI during a 3-day bladder diary
- Had an ambulatory 24 hour pad test with a pad weight over 3 g

**Exclusion criteria**
- BMI ≥ 35
- Pelvic organ prolapse (POP-Q grade 2)
- Ongoing treatment for UI
- Presented medical conditions or medications that could have interfered with the assessment

**METHODOLOGY**

**PROCEDURES**
- Women underwent a standardized assessment including a structured interview to collect baseline characteristics and 24h pad test results.
- Two different evaluators assessed the urethral length using the two techniques and were blinded to each others data.

**Urethral length assessment using 3D transperineal ultrasound**
- GE Voluson e8 expert ultrasound system, 4-8 MHz curved array 3D/4D ultrasound transducer
- After asking the patient to empty their bladder, urethral length was calculated from the postero-inferior margin of the pubic symphysis to the bladder neck in sagittal and coronal planes [1] (Fig 1a,b). The mean of the two planes was considered for analysis.

**Urethral length assessment using a Foley Catheter**
- A catheter was introduced to empty the bladder and the balloon was inflated with 10 ml of sterile water.
- The bladder was then filled with 50 ml of sterile water.
- Catheter was gently pulled back until the balloon engaged the bladder neck.
- The physician pinched the catheter at the level of the meatus, removed the deflated catheter and hence, measured with a ruler the distance between her finger (meatus) and the balloon re-inflated (bladder neck) in order to evaluate the urethral length (Fig 2).

**RESULTS**
- Among the 57 women participating in the study, 33 (58%) had stress and 24 (42%) mixed UI.

**Table 1: Participants’ characteristics**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Characteristic</th>
<th>Mean (Range)</th>
<th>SD</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Age (years)</td>
<td>48 (26-71)</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BMI (kg/m²)</td>
<td>27.4 (19-34)</td>
<td>4.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parity</td>
<td>3.6 (0-9)</td>
<td>1.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>24h Pad-Test (g)</td>
<td>71.2 (6.4-46.4)</td>
<td>79.9</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

- ICC for the two methods: 0.90 (CI 0.82-0.94, p<0.001)
- Student t test was not significant (p=0.857)
- Limits of agreement (Bland-Altman method, see Fig 3): [-0.46cm; 0.45cm]
- Mean difference: -0.01 cm, SD 0.23

**Table 2: Urethral length**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Measure</th>
<th>Mean (Range)</th>
<th>SD</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Urethral length with catheter (cm)</td>
<td>3.02 (2.20-3.0)</td>
<td>0.41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Urethral length with 3D transperineal ultrasound (cm)</td>
<td>3.03 (2.31-3.67)</td>
<td>0.34</td>
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</table>

**DISCUSSION**
- High ICC coefficient supports the concordance of the two methods for evaluating urethral length.
- Bland Altman method also demonstrates good agreement with a difference close to zero (-0.01 cm) suggesting no systematic error.
- Some variability may be explained by bladder residual volume.

**CONCLUDING MESSAGE**
Findings of this study provide relevant information for clinical practice to properly determine the site of injection for treating SUI. Measuring urethral length using a Foley catheter is a simple method in agreement with transperineal ultrasound assessment, with small mean bias and clinically acceptable limits of agreement.

**REFERENCES**