Appendicitis: When Simple Becomes not so Simple

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Appendicitis: When simple becomes not so simple

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Learning Objectives

- To further understand a contemporary approach in the management of acute appendicitis
- To acknowledge that appendicitis represents a continuum of disease
- To define “simple” versus “complicated” appendicitis
- To understand the importance of diagnostic and therapeutic imaging in appendicitis
- To explore alternative therapeutic strategies in complicated appendicitis based upon outcomes analyses

Appendicitis: When simple becomes not so simple

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Historical Perspectives

- Reginald Fitz (Harvard, 1886)
- Presented “Perforative Inflammation of the Vermiform Appendix with Special Reference to Its Early Diagnosis and Treatment” to the Association of American Physicians
- Conclusively demonstrated that “perityphlitis” began with inflammation of the appendix
- Suggested immediate surgical intervention (3 days or less) for, or to prevent, spreading peritonitis

Fitz RH: Perforative inflammation of the vermiform appendix: With special reference to its early diagnosis and treatment. Trans Assoc Am Physicians 1:107, 1886

“Perforative Inflammation of the Vermiform Appendix with Special Reference to Its Early Diagnosis and Treatment”

Historical Perspectives

- Charles McBurney (1889)
- Greatest contributor to the treatment of appendicitis
- Published the landmark treatise on the surgical treatment of appendicitis before rupture
- Subsequently published (1894) the exposure of the appendix through an incision which now bears his name

McBurney C: Experience with early operative interference in cases of disease of the vermiform appendix. N Y State Med J 500:07, 1889

“The seat of greatest pain... has been very exactly between an inch and a half and two inches from the anterior spinous process of the ilium on a straight line drawn from the process to the umbilicus”
**Introduction**

- Most commonly diagnosed surgical condition of the abdomen
- Approximately 7% of individuals will develop acute appendicitis in their lifetime
- 250,000 cases diagnosed annually in United States
- Accounts for >1 million inpatient hospital days annually
- Cost of >3 billion US dollars per annum

**Anatomical Considerations**

*What’s constant…*
- Three taenia coli converge at the junction of the cecum with the appendix
- Relationship of the appendiceal base to the cecum remains constant

*What’s not constant…*
- Length of the appendix may vary from <1 cm to >30 cm (typically 6-9 cm)
- Position of the appendiceal tip is markedly variable

**Pathophysiology**

**Luminal Obstruction**
- Appendicolith (40%)
- Lymphoid hypertrophy
- Parasites
- Foreign bodies
- Tumors

**Intraluminal Hypertension**
- Ongoing secretion
- Bacterial proliferation
- Appendiceal dilation

**Sympathetic nervous system**
- Vague abdominal pain

**Transmural Inflammation**

**Gangrene/Microperforation**

**Generalized peritonitis**

**Phlegmon/Abcess**

**A Dichotomous Disease**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Simple appendicitis:</th>
<th>“Early” in time course</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Mild periappendiceal inflammation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Nonperforated</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Complicated appendicitis:</th>
<th>“Late” in time course</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Significant periappendiceal inflammation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Phlegmon</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Mass</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Abscess</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The Surgeon’s Dilemma

- Simple appendicitis ——— Simple
- Operate

USA Today
January 19, 2010

- Complicated appendicitis ——— Not so simple

- How do I distinguish complicated appendicitis?
- Do I operate immediately in complicated appendicitis?
- If so, what technique?
- If I don’t operate, what should my expectations be?
- If conservative management is successful, is interval appendectomy necessary?
I want to distinguish simple from complicated appendicitis. I believe that complicated appendicitis may harbor increased risks with acute appendectomy:

- Higher risk of intraoperative complications
- Higher risk of open conversion
- Prolonged operative time
- Higher risk of postoperative complications (abscess formation)

I acknowledge that the total length of hospitalization, antibiotic administration, and cost of treatment will be unchanged if I employ initial nonoperative management.

Horwitz, JR, et al.

- Retrospective review
- 2 year period (1994-1996)
- 56 children with complicated appendicitis
- 34 children underwent initial laparoscopic appendectomy
- 22 children underwent open appendectomy

Results

- No intraoperative complications
- 7/34 (20%) required laparoscopic to open conversion
- 15/27 (56%) total complications in laparoscopic group
- 11/27 (41%) formed postoperative intraabdominal abscess in laparoscopic group
- 2/11 required laparotomy for drainage

Conclusions

- Laparoscopic appendectomy for complicated appendicitis in children is associated with a notable increase in the incidence of postoperative intraabdominal abscess formation
- Early open conversion for complicated appendicitis if identified incidentally (intraoperatively)

Roach JP, et al.

- Retrospective review
- 1106 children undergoing either open or laparoscopic appendectomy
- 5 year study period (2000-2006)
Rouch JF, et al.

- 360 (32%) radiographic, operative, or pathologic evidence of perforation (complicated appendicitis)
- 92/360 (26%) abscess or phlegmon on preoperative imaging
- 60/92 (65%) immediate appendectomy
- 32/92 (35%) conservative treatment with delayed (interval) appendectomy

Conclusions

- Optimal treatment of children who present with greater than 5 days of symptoms and preoperative imaging suggestive of complicated appendicitis is delayed appendectomy
- Initial nonoperative management is safe and effective with no children failing delayed appendectomy and no complications requiring repeat admission

Outcomes for analysis

- Duration of hospital stay
  - Mean duration of hospital stay during first hospitalization
  - Overall duration of hospital stay, including IA and complications
- Duration of antibiotic administration
  - Excluded oral course completed subsequent to discharge
- Complications
  - Overall
    - Specific, including wound infection and abscess formation
- Reoperations
  - Postoperative complications after IA or AA

Simillis C, et al.

A meta-analysis comparing conservative treatment versus acute appendectomy for complicated appendicitis (abscess or phlegmon). Surgery 147:818-29, 2010

- Database search using Medline, EMBASE, Ovid, and Cochrane through June 2, 2008
- 74 total reports identified
- 17 reports evaluated in final meta-analysis
- 1/17 reports was a non-randomized prospective study
- 7/17 reports were pediatric

Results

Table 2

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Outcome</th>
<th>Immediate appendectomy (n=60)</th>
<th>Delayed appendectomy (n=32)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Length of stay (days)</td>
<td>6.0 ± 3.9</td>
<td>8.0 ± 3.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Admission temperature</td>
<td>38.3 ± 0.9</td>
<td>38.3 ± 1.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hospital LOS</td>
<td>9.3 ± 1.3</td>
<td>9.3 ± 1.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Well-defined abscess or phlegmon</td>
<td>31 (52%)</td>
<td>31 (97%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Complications requiring reoperation</td>
<td>6 (10%)</td>
<td>0 (0%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*<p><0.05
Pediatric Subset Analysis

\( n = 7 \)

- No differences in duration of first hospitalization
- CT group had fewer overall complications (OR 0.21; \( P < 0.001 \))
- CT group had fewer wound infections (OR 0.11; \( P = 0.007 \))
- CT group had significantly less abdominal/pelvic abscess formation (OR 0.11; \( P < 0.001 \))

Conclusions

Conservative management of complicated appendicitis is associated with:

- no change in duration of hospital stay
- no change in duration of intravenous antibiotic administration
- decreased overall complication rate
- decreased rate of reoperation

Radiology:
The importance and impact of imaging

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Appendicitis: Imaging Evaluation

- Conventional radiographs – 2 views
- Ultrasound (US)
- Computerized Tomography (CT)

Abdominal Pain Imaging

- Child presents with abdominal pain
- Initial evaluation
  - History
  - Physical exam
  - Laboratory evaluations
  - Imaging

Conventional Radiographs

- Advantages
  - Readily available
  - Quick
  - No patient preparation
  - Little radiation (2 views – 100 mRad)
  - Low cost
Useful findings on conventional radiographs for abdominal pain

- Pneumoperitoneum
- Pneumonia
- Fecalith
- Small bowel obstruction
- Constipation (?)
**Fecalith**

**Appendicitis: Imaging Evaluation**

**Ultrasound**

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**Ultrasound Appendicitis**

- **Advantages**
  - No ionizing radiation (0 mRad)
  - No intravenous contrast
  - Utility lies in a subgroup of children
    - Clinical findings are equivocal
    - To establish diagnosis of appendicitis
    - Aid in the diagnosis of other abdominal and pelvic conditions that may mimic appendicitis

- **Disadvantages**
  - Examination limited by obesity
  - Limited by bowel gas
  - Operator dependent, site dependent
  - Reported accuracy varies widely

---

**Ultrasound Appendicitis**

- **Sensitivity**
  - Reports range from 44%-94%

- **Specificity**
  - Reports range from 47%-95%
**Ultrasound Appendicitis**


- Meta-analysis US based adult and pediatric studies published 1986 and 1994
- Overall **sensitivity** of 85%
- Overall **specificity** of 92%

**Graded Compression Technique**


- Using a high resolution, linear array transducer
- Gentle, gradual pressure applied to anterior abdominal wall to displace and compress normal bowel loops
- Creating a window to McBurney’s point

**Ultrasound for Appendicitis**

- **Criteria**
  - Tubular, blind ending structure
  - Non compressible
  - Diameter (outer wall to outer wall) > 6 mm
  - May also see
    - Fecalith – shadowing structure in lumen
    - Hyperemia of wall
    - Enlarged mesenteric lymph nodes
    - Periappendiceal fat inflammation
    - Phlegmon or abscess

- **False negative diagnosis**
  - Failure to visualize the entire appendix
  - Inability to adequately compress the RLQ
  - Aberrant location of appendix – retrocecal
  - Appendiceal perforation
  - Early inflammation at the distal tip

- **False positive diagnosis**
  - Identify a normal appendix as abnormal
  - Should be 6 mm or less diameter, compressible, no adjacent inflammatory changes
  - Other causes of RLQ inflammation
    - Crohn disease
    - Inflamed Meckel diverticulum
    - Pelvic inflammatory disease

**Graded Compression Technique**

- Longitudinal and horizontal imaging is performed
- Ask the child to point to the site maximal tenderness for reference
- Localize the ascending colon, move inferiorly
- Localize normal compressible terminal ileum
- Cecal tip is 1-2 cm below terminal ileum
**Normal Appendix**

- 4 mm
- Compression

**Acute Appendicitis:**

**Simple, non perforated**

- Echogenic, shadowing fecalith
- Wall hyperemia

**Acute Appendicitis:**

**Simple, non perforated**

- Target Appearance:
  - Fluid filled lumen
  - Echogenic mucosa and submucosa
  - Hypoechoic muscularis

**Complicated Appendicitis**

- Spectrum of gangrenous to perforated appendicitis
  - Loss of echogenic submucosal layer
  - Absent blood flow in thickened wall
  - Lumen may no longer be distended with fluid
  - Periappendiceal or pelvic fluid collection
    - Simple fluid
    - Echogenic, inflammatory mass (phlegmon)
    - Loculated, complex fluid collection (abscess)
      - +/- air bubbles or swirling complex fluid
  - Inflamed periappendiceal fat
Complicated Appendicitis

Appendicitis: Imaging Evaluation

Computerized Tomography

CT Appendicitis

Advantages
• Highly sensitive and specific modality for diagnosis of acute appendicitis
  • Reported sensitivity 87%-100%
  • Reported specificity 89%-98%
• Reduced operator dependence
• Superior contrast sensitivity (air, fat, fluid, bone)
• High anatomic detail
• More useful than US for complicated appendicitis

Disadvantages
• Relatively high radiation dose (1000 mRad)
  • Do it well the first time!
• Younger, thinner patients have less intrabdominal fat to separate the appendix from adjacent bowel
  • Highest diagnostic efficacy found using rectal contrast and IV contrast

Normal appendix on CT
• Can be identified in over 75% of children
• Usually less than 7 mm in diameter
• Lumen may contain contrast or air

CT features of appendicitis
• Distended appendix >7 mm diameter*
• Appendiceal wall thickening and enhancement
• Fecalith
• Circumferential or focal cecal wall thickening*
• Pericecal fat stranding
• Adjacent bowel wall thickening
• Free peritoneal fluid
• Mesenteric lymphadenopathy
• Intraperitoneal phlegmon or abscess

Outside CT No Contrast
Simple or Complicated?

RLQ Ultrasound – Same Day

CT Complicated Appendicitis
After 5 days antibiotics

CT Complicated Appendicitis

Image Guided Pigtail Drain Placement

CT Complicated Appendicitis
Phlegmon
Clinical Scenario

**Patient 1**
- 2 day history of abdominal pain
- Report fever
- Nausea and emesis with anorexia
- Temperature 38.7°C
- Right lower quadrant tenderness
- WBC 16,700
- Segmented neutrophils 83%
- C-reactive protein 21.4

**Patient 2**
- 2 day history of abdominal pain
- Reported fever
- Nausea and emesis with anorexia
- Temperature 39.0°C
- Suprapubic tenderness
- WBC 24,300
- Segmented neutrophils 90%
- C-reactive protein 24.3
**Clinical Scenario**

**Patient 1**
- Conservative management
- PICC
- Dual antibiotic therapy
- Oral diet by HD 2
- Afebrile by HD 3
- WBC 7,500
- Segmented neutrophils 60%
- C-reactive protein 8.2
- Total LOS 5 days
- Interval appendectomy 6-8 weeks

**Patient 2**
- Operative management
- PICC
- Dual antibiotic therapy
- Oral diet by HD 4
- Afebrile by HD 4
- WBC 7,000
- Segmented neutrophils 69%
- C-reactive protein 1.6
- Total LOS 7 days

**Treatment**

Now I’ve decided *not* to operate initially…

How successful is delayed appendectomy?

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**Bufo AJ, et al.**


- Retrospective review
- 87 patients with perforated appendicitis
- 1995-1997
- 46 patients underwent immediate appendectomy
- 41 patients placed on interval appendectomy pathway
- 34/41 successfully bridged to interval appendectomy

---

**Results**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Parameter</th>
<th>Immediate Appendectomy</th>
<th>Interval Appendectomy</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Patients</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>34*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hospital days</td>
<td>6.2 +/- 3.1</td>
<td>4.2 +/- 3.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hospital charges (USD)</td>
<td>11,044 +/- 11,321</td>
<td>6,435 +/- 4,447</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total charges (USD)</td>
<td>12,426 +/- 12,002</td>
<td>7,525 +/- 3,250</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percent complications</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Excludes “failures” of intent to treat (7 patients = 17%)*

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**Conclusions**

- Antibiotic therapy, followed by interval appendectomy, decreases postoperative morbidity in the treatment approach to perforated appendicitis
- Cost savings are realized in the delayed operative management of perforated appendicitis in children
**Treatment**

I can successfully perform an interval appendectomy consistently and safely...

But should I?

---

**Recurrent/Interval Appendicitis**

- Hoffmann J, et al. (1984) 20%
- Eriksson S and Granstram L (1995) 37%
- Friedell M and Perez-Izquierdo (2000) 8%
- Oliak D, et al. (2001) 8%
- Brown CV, et al. (2003) 6%
- Eia SH, et al. (2005) 43%
  + appendicolith 72%
  - appendicolith 26%

---

**Puapong D, et al.**


- Retrospective study
- 12 year period (1992-2004)
- 6,439 children
- 72 (1.1%) initially treated nonoperatively
- 11/72 (15%) underwent interval appendectomy
- 61/72 (85%) underwent observation

---

**Results**

- Mean observation period of 7.5 years (range 2 months to 12 years)
- 5/61 (8%) developed recurrent appendicitis
- All recurrences within 3 years
- 80% of recurrences within 6 months
- Cumulative mean LOS without IA 6.6 days
- Cumulative mean LOS for recurrent appendicitis 9.6 days
- Cumulative mean LOS for IA 8.5 days

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**Conclusions**

- Recurrent appendicitis is rare in pediatric patients following successful nonoperative management
- Low recurrence rate of 8% fails to justify routine interval appendectomy

---

**Suspected Appendicitis**

- Simple Appendicitis
  - If pain improves, discharge
  - IV Antibiotics
  - CT Imaging
  - IV + Oral Contrast
  - Observe
  - Interval Appendectomy
  - Surgery

- Complicated Appendicitis
  - IV Antibiotics
  - Percutaneous/Transrectal Drainage
  - Interval Appendectomy
  - Surgery
Appendicitis: When simple is not so simple

**Summation**

- Appendicitis happens (relatively frequently)
- Beat the perforation
- When in doubt, seek help (*adjunct imaging*)
- Distinguish simple from complicated appendicitis

Appendicitis: When simple is not so simple

**Summation**

- Complicated appendicitis can (*and probably should*) be treated conservatively
- Interval (laparoscopic) appendectomy remains appropriate in the pediatric population (particularly in the presence of a retained appendicolith)
- Prospective randomized trial