

Innovations in Spinal Hemangioblastoma Management

ABSTRACT

Introduction: Spinal hemangioblastomas are benign, rare neoplasms of spinal cord vasculature. They may occur as solitary lesions or with associated intracranial hemangioblastomas, this association is seen in Von Hippel Lindau syndrome (VHL).

Aims: This literature review serves to highlight various innovative therapeutic modalities used to treat this pathology.

Methods: The articles were obtained through PubMed Central or Google scholar, initially more than 30 articles were selected; however, additional only: clinical trials, retrospective studies, or case series/ reports were selected. This resulted in final analysis of 20 articles.

Results: Surgical resection is carried out with either an: open or microsurgical approach with either an endoscopic or minimally invasive technique. The specific surgical intervention depends on the spread of the neoplasm. Pre-operative angiography is a critical predictor of surgical success. Arterial embolization may also be conducted preoperatively to minimize neoplasm vascularity. Stereotactic radiosurgery often conducted with gamma knife or LINAC, has remarkably improved treatment. Pharmacologic therapies

Keywords: Spine; Hemangioblastoma; oncology; orthopedics- oncology; Von-Hippel Lindau.

1. INTRODUCTION

Several histologically diverse tumors affect the spinal cord, the most common include meningiomas, schwannomas (nerve sheath tumors), astrocytomas and ependymomas. Collectively, these represent more than 75% of primary spinal cord tumors [1]. Spinal hemangioblastoma constitutes 2-3% of spinal tumors [2]. Hemangioblastomas may arise from any central nervous system (CNS) structure. Though benign, they may be associated with a morbidity likely secondary to compression.

Spinal hemangioblastoma is strongly associated with Von-Hippel Lindau Syndrome (VHL). [3]. VHL is a genetic disorder characterized by multiple tumors within the body, including renal cell carcinomas, pheochromocytomas, and CNS hemangioblastomas. Among the latter, spinal hemangioblastomas contribute up to 40% of the overall incidence, with an increasing incidence among the elderly (>60 years of age). Studies have demonstrated that spinal hemangioblastomas in cases of VHL rarely occur

in isolation and are often associated with other hemangioblastomas i.e. within the cerebellum, medulla, pons etc [4]. Presenting symptoms of a spinal hemangioblastoma depend upon tumor location (thoracic, cervical region etc.); however patients usually experience some degree of back pain, limb weakness or paresthesia [5]. Rarely life-threatening subarachnoid hemorrhages may occur.

The diagnosis of spinal hemangioblastoma is usually suspected with a careful history, and confirmed with radio-imaging techniques i.e. CT or MRI (with gadolinium contrast) scans. Imaging may also illustrate the presence of a syrinx, alongside the tumor. Angiography may also be useful in determination of the extent of the tumor's angiogenesis. Total surgical resection which may be carried out with either an **open** or an endoscopic approach is the mainstay of treatment.

1.1 Open Spine Surgery

C. Fenger was the first to attempt open spinal surgery for tumor resection in the late 19th century. However, Eiselsberg then later C. Elsberg (in the 20th century) performed the first successful open surgery for tumor resection. Later, Fred Epstein et al also removed spinal tumors in pediatric patients (2003). [6] The open spinal approach is conventionally done through a large midline incision in the back, microsurgical instrumentation is utilized for complete tumor resection. Intraoperative MRI imaging, and neurophysiological analysis are often used to assist the intraoperative management [6, 7].

1.2 Endoscopic Surgery

Minimally Invasive Spinal Surgery involves a small incision in the back. Most literature indicates that both open and endoscopic methods yield similar results however, minimally invasive surgery is associated with a significantly lower risk of bleeding, thus minimizing scarring and promoting rapid recovery [8].

Depending upon the size of the tumor, spinal surgery may be performed via laminectomy or hemilaminectomy. Hemilaminectomy is preferable intervention as it minimizes risk to the vertebral column and reduces operative blood loss. [9] Some surgeons emphasize pre-operative chemoembolization of vessels minimizing tumor growth. Chemicals such as polyvinyl alcohol (PVA), n-butyl cyanoacrylic acid (NBCA) etc. may be used for chemoembolization [10].

1.3 Stereotactic Radiosurgery

Neuro-oncological advancements have enabled the use of stereotactic radiosurgery for pre-operative reduction of hemangioblastomas. Developed by Horsley & Clarke in the early 1900s, it was not until the latter 20th century that radiosurgery became widely acknowledged as a major treatment modality for CNS tumors. Gamma Knife radiosurgery and Linear Accelerator (LINAC) are the primary modes of administering radiation and shrinking tumors by direct exposure to radiation beams. [11]

2. MATERIALS AND METHODS

The articles for this literature review were obtained through PubMed Central (PMC) or Google Scholar, with the keywords: Spinal Hemangioblastoma; Management of spinal

hemangioblastoma; Minimally Invasive Surgery for spinal hemangioblastoma. Initially more than 30 articles were selected. Further selection criteria included clinical trials, retrospective studies or case series / case reports (from 2000-onwards). Systematic reviews and meta-analysis related articles were excluded from further analysis. After exclusion, findings from 20 original articles have been assessed in this final review.

3. RESULTS

Selected articles are systematically summarized. The articles have been further categorized by treatment modality (Tables 1-4). Table 1 addresses surgical interventions, Table 2 address radio-surgical interventions, Table 3 addresses pharmacologic interventions, and Table 4 addresses chemoembolization and angiography.

4. DISCUSSION

This review analyzes several novel surgical and non-surgical options for managing spinal hemangioblastomas. Surgical measures include open microsurgical procedure, and the newly developed minimally invasive endoscopic operation. Preoperative embolization techniques and intraoperative angiography may help achieve surgical excision. Apart from surgery, radiosurgery and pharmacological agents such as anti-angiogenic Bevacizumab may be clinically useful.

Studies show pre-operative MRI helps in the diagnosis of spinal hemangioblastoma. Baker, K. B et al concluded that spinal MRI with contrast accurately illustrates tumors [32]. Contrast-enhanced MRIs may distinguish intramedullary and extramedullary spinal hemangioblastomas [33]. In addition to neuroimaging, preoperative angiography may play an important role in assessing tumor vascularity. Deng, X., Wang, K et al [34] analyzed 92 patients with hemangioblastoma that underwent 102 spinal surgeries. 13 patients were selected for Digital Subtraction Angiography (DSA) while 15 patients underwent three-dimensional CT Angiography (CTA), preoperatively. Both groups of patients had remarkable feeding vessels to the tumor. However, this technique was directly responsible for at least 1 complication of bilateral lower limb paresis, questioning the procedure's safety.

Table 1.Surgical intervention of spinal Hemangioblastoma

| Sr. No. | Article | Authors | Journal | Year of Publication | Main Findings |
|----------------|--|---|------------------------|----------------------------|--|
| 1. | Surgical Management of Isolated Hemangioblastomas of the Spinal Cord [12] | Chanland Roonprapunt, V. Michelle Silvera et al | Neurosurgery | 2001 | 19 spinal hemangioblastoma cases were reviewed. Each patient underwent spinal MRI & angiography followed by posterior laminectomy. This technique resulted in complete tumor removal. Nearly 70% of patients improved functional status, while the remaining stabilized and did not deteriorate with subsequent follow-up. |
| 2. | Intramedullary hemangioblastomas: timing of surgery, microsurgical technique and follow-up in 23 patients [13] | A. Boström, F-J. Hans et al | European Spine Journal | 2008 | This study reviewed 23 intramedullary hemangioblastoma cases. Most tumors were located within the cervico-thoracic region. Almost 1/3 rd of patients had a VHL diagnosis. Patients underwent microsurgical resection via hemilaminectomy, partial hemilaminectomy or laminectomy. On follow-up, 18/23 patients stabilized with 5 patients demonstrating significant recovery. |
| 3. | Safety and Efficacy of Intradural Extramedullary Spinal Tumor Removal Using a Minimally Invasive Approach [14] | Richard J. Mannion, Adrian M. Nowitzke et al | Operative Neurosurgery | 2011 | In this study, 13 intradural spine tumors were resected via hemilaminectomy with neuronavigation assistance. This minimally invasive surgery resulted in complete tumor resection in 12/13 patients. The operation was well tolerated in most patients. One case had to be converted |

| Sr. No. | Article | Authors | Journal | Year of Publication | Main Findings |
|---------|---|--|---|---------------------|--|
| 4. | Early microsurgical treatment for spinal hemangioblastomas improves outcome in patients with von Hippel–Lindau disease [15] | Ali Harati, Jarno Satopää et al | Surgical Neurology International | 2012 | to an open approach because of tumor location. In this study, 17 patients with hemangioblastomas (cervical, thoracic & lumbar) underwent micro-surgical operations. 11 patients had underlying VHL. Every operation except 1 resulted in complete tumor excision. The majority of patients did not demonstrate post-operative neurologic deficits. |
| 5. | Surgical Outcome of Spinal Cord Hemangioblastomas [16] | Chang Hyun Park, Chang-Hyun Lee et al | Journal of Korean Neurosurgical Society | 2012 | 16 patients with spinal hemangioblastoma were assessed in this study. 10 patients underwent gross total resection while the other 6 underwent partial resection. Every operation involved microsurgical technique. 19% of patients demonstrated statistically significant postoperative improvement. The condition of the remaining either stabilized or worsened. |
| 6. | Intramedullary Hemangioblastomas: Surgical Results in 16 Patients [17] | Andrei F Joaquim, Enrico Ghizoni et al | Neurosurgical Focus | 2015 | In this study, 16 patients with intramedullary hemangioblastoma underwent microsurgical operations. Of the 16 patients, 7 had VHL. Most tumors were localized in the cervical & thoracic spine. Gross resection was achieved in nearly all patients. Post- |

| Sr. No. | Article | Authors | Journal | Year of Publication | Main Findings |
|---------|---|-----------------------------------|-----------------------|---------------------|---|
| 7. | Comparison of Open and Minimally Invasive Surgery for Intradural-Extramedullary Spine Tumors [18] | Albert P Wong, Rishi R Lall et al | Neurosurgical Focus | 2015 | operatively, most patients stabilized. 2 patients demonstrated significant neurologic improvement. One patient rapidly declined clinically. Thus, the authors concluded that post-operative improvement was related to pre-operative status. This retrospective analysis included 45 patients with intradural spinal tumors. They were surgically resected with either an open (18) or a minimally invasive (27) surgery. The minimally invasive surgery resulted in decreased hospital duration, and intraoperative blood loss. Complete excision was more likely achieved with the open technique. In this retrospective study, microsurgical resection was performed on 25 patients with spinal hemangioblastoma. Nearly 2/3 rd of patients had underlying VHL. MRI & intraoperative fluoroscopic angiography aided in mapping the surgical course. Every operation resulted in complete tumor removal. 22 of the patients demonstrated significant clinical improvement at 1 week follow up. In this cohort study, |
| 8. | Diagnosis and microsurgical treatment of spinal hemangioblastoma [19] | Xuezhen Li, Jianzhen Wang et al | Neurological Sciences | 2016 | |
| 9. | Functional | Gautam U. | Operative | 2017 | |

| Sr. No. | Article | Authors | Journal | Year of Publication | Main Findings |
|---------|--|--|-------------------------|---------------------|--|
| | Outcome After Resection of Von Hippel-Lindau Disease-Associated Cauda Equina Hemangioblastomas: An Observational Cohort Study [20] | Mehta, Blake K. Montgomery et al | Neurosurgery | | 15 patients with spinal hemangioblastomas underwent resection via a laminectomy. More than 90% of operations resulted in complete or resection. On follow-up, 83% of patients stabilized, 11% showed significant improvement and the remaining worsened clinically. |
| 10. | Spinal cord hemangioblastomas: significance of intraoperative neurophysiological monitoring for resection and long-term outcome [21] | Sebastian Siller, Andrea Szelényi | Journal of Neurosurgery | 2017 | The authors conducted a retrospective analysis with 24 patients with spinal hemangioblastoma, mostly located in the cervical region. All patients underwent microsurgical tumor resection. Most surgical interventions were accomplished with either hemilaminectomy or laminectomy. 95% of operations resulted in complete tumor resection. Intraoperative neurophysiologic studies monitored neurologic functionality. After long term follow-up, almost 90% of patients demonstrated improvement in tumor grades. Moreover, a relationship between negative intraoperative neurophysiology and poor patient prognosis was observed. |
| 11. | Minimally Invasive Microsurgical Resection of Primary, Intradural | Maja Formo, Charlotte Marie Halvorsen, | Neurosurgery | 2018 | 83 patients with various spinal tumors were treated with minimally invasive |

| Sr. No. | Article | Authors | Journal | Year of Publication | Main Findings |
|---------|--|--|-------------------------|---------------------|--|
| | Spinal Tumors is Feasible and Safe: A Consecutive Series of 83 Patients [22] | Daniel Dahlberg et al | | | surgery, 2 hemangioblastomas were diagnosed. Complete tumor removal was achieved in nearly 90% of operations. 11% of patients had complications (CSF leakage, surgical infections etc.) On follow-up, more than 90% of patients retained the ability to perform daily functions. |
| 12. | Minimally invasive resection of spinal hemangioblastoma : feasibility and clinical results in a series of 18 patients [23] | Marie T. Krüger, Christine Steiert et al | Journal of Neurosurgery | 2019 | In this study 18 patients with 19 hemangioblastomas were assessed. Nearly 90% of patients had VHL. A Minimally invasive surgery was performed on all patients. Pre and post-operative patient status was assessed with the McCormick grading system. Complete excision was achieved in all cases with no complications. Following surgery, tumor grade stabilized or improved in ~95% cases. |

Surgical dissection success is directly related to surgical accessibility. Deng, X et al achieved total tumor resection in 94% of tumors. Nearly 40% cases demonstrated postoperative neurologic improvement. Moreover, long-term follow-up revealed incomplete tumor resection was associated with an unfavorable patient prognosis

($p < 0.05$). Wind, J. J., Lonser, R. R et al [35] assessed demonstrated improved clinical outcomes in patients with VHL that underwent complete surgical excision. Van Velthoven, et al demonstrated improvement or stabilization in all patients in neurological deficits following resection [36].

Table 2. Radiosurgery of spinal Hemangioblastoma

| Sr. No. | Article | Authors | Journal | Year of Publication | Main Findings |
|---------|---|------------------------------------|----------------------------------|---------------------|--|
| 1. | Image-guided linear accelerator-based spinal radiosurgery for | Michael T. Selch, Steve Tenn et al | Surgical Neurology International | 2012 | These authors used a linear accelerator (LINAC), to perform stereotactic radiosurgery to treat spinal |

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|----|--|------------------------------|-------------------------|------|--|
| | hemangioblastoma [24] | | | | hemangioblastomas in 9 patients. Tumors were mostly localized to the cervicothoracic region. 5 patients included had an underlying VHL diagnosis. Tumor radiation intensity was set around 12 Gy. On follow-up, tumor growth stabilized in ~90% of patients. No patients experienced complications of radiotherapy. |
| 2. | Image-guided stereotactic radiosurgery for treatment of spinal hemangioblastoma [25] | James Pan, Allen L. Ho et al | Journal of Neurosurgery | 2017 | These authors used Cyber Knife to treat 46 spinal hemangioblastomas in 28 patients . Almost 50% of patients had underlying VHL. A radiation dose between 15-35 Gy was used. Tumor stabilization or regression was achieved in >90% patients. Furthermore, no patients suffered from complications. |

Table 3. Pharmacological intervention of spinal Hemangioblastoma

| Sr. No. | Article | Authors | Journal | Year of Publication | Main Findings |
|---------|---|----------------------------|---------------------------------|---------------------|--|
| 1. | Bevacizumab for the treatment of surgically unresectable cervical cord hemangioblastoma: a case report [26] | Ayman I Omar | Journal of Medical Case Reports | 2012 | This case-report involved treatment of a cervical hemangioblastoma with the VEGF inhibitor Bevacizumab . The lesion was deemed unfit for surgical excision. Post-treatment MRI scans demonstrated tumor regression, with an accompanying improvement in neurophysiological status. |
| 2. | Antiangiogenic Treatment for Multiple CNS Hemangioblastomas [27] | Riklin C, Seystahl K et al | Onkologie | 2012 | This study included 2 patients with hemangioblastomas treated with Bevacizumab . The radiology of both patients improved post treatment. |

Table 4. Chemoembolization and intraoperative angiography in management of spinal Hemangioblastoma

| Sr. No. | Article | Authors | Journal | Year of Publication | Main Findings |
|---------|---|-----------------------|--------------------|---------------------|--|
| 1. | Surgical Technique of Temporary Arterial Occlusion in | Aaron J.Clark, Daniel | World Neurosurgery | 2010 | The authors carried out a retrospective analysis of 20 spinal |

| Sr. No. | Article | Authors | Journal | Year of Publication | Main Findings |
|---------|---|---------------------------|----------------------------------|---------------------|--|
| | the Operative Management of Spinal Hemangioblastomas [28] | C.Lu et al | | | hemangioblastoma cases. At least 11 patients had VHL. Every tumor was completely excised with a laminectomy approach. Prior to surgery, 6 patients underwent preoperative angiography . Five patients subsequently underwent chemoembolization. Follow-up demonstrated stabilization in 13 patients, improvement in 5 patients, and worsening in 2 patients. In 5 patients' temporary arterial occlusion was achieved with an aneurysm clip , to differentiate vessels supplying the tumor from those supplying the normal cord. Surgeons used angiography with Indocyanine green dye in 7 patients with spinal hemangioblastoma preoperatively. The vascularity of the tumor was well visualized in all except 2 patients. Total resection was achieved in 6 patients while 1 patient underwent partial removal. Post-operative complications were not observed in any patient. |
| 2. | Application of intraoperative indocyanine green videoangiography for resection of spinal cord hemangioblastoma: Advantages and limitations [29] | Shuyu Hao, Dezhi Li et al | Journal of Clinical Neuroscience | 2013 | Surgeons used angiography with Indocyanine green dye in 7 patients with spinal hemangioblastoma preoperatively. The vascularity of the tumor was well visualized in all except 2 patients. Total resection was achieved in 6 patients while 1 patient underwent partial removal. Post-operative complications were not observed in any patient. |
| 3. | Role of Preoperative Embolization of Intramedullary Hemangioblastoma [30] | G Saliou, L Giammattei | Neurochirurgie | 2017 | This study involved Seven patients with hemangioblastoma of which 6 had underlying VHL. Pre-surgical embolization was achieved with histoacryl glue agent . 1 patient developed vertebrobasilar infarction/cerebellar dysfunction. Following embolization, complete |

| Sr. No. | Article | Authors | Journal | Year of Publication | Main Findings |
|---------|--|--|---------|---------------------|---|
| 4. | Surgical Treatment of Vascular Intramedullary Spinal Cord Lesions [31] | George M Ghobrial, Jason Liounakos et al | Cureus | 2018 | resection was achieved in 6/7 cases. Due to complications, the authors emphasized that chemoembolization should not be used ubiquitously but should be restricted to certain cases only. Thirty-six patients with intramedullary spinal tumors were isolated, of which 20 were diagnosed with spinal hemangioblastomas . Prior to surgical resection, angiography and chemoembolization was performed in several cases. Microsurgical laminectomy was performed on all patients. On follow-up none of the patients developed further neurologic deficits. Thus, the authors concluded that preoperative angiography & embolization were safe in the management of spinal vascular lesions. |

Stereotactic radiosurgery has demonstrated efficacy in treating hemangioblastoma. Chang, S. D et al showed the effectiveness of LINAC radiotherapy on tumor regression to be slightly more than 70%. [37] Some studies depict a cure rate as high as 90% on initial evaluation. [35].

Several authors stress the need for advanced follow-up in patients with a single spinal hemangioblastoma. Genetic analysis of VHL disease should be carried out in cases of hemangioblastoma. Moreover, patients with VHL should undergo annual MRI or ultrasonography to detect insidious intracranial (cerebellar or supratentorial tumors), retinal (hemangioblastomas) spinal or abdominal (renal cell carcinoma, pheochromocytomas etc.) masses. [38].

5. CONCLUSION

Spinal hemangioblastomas may occur sporadically or in association with Von Hippel Lindau syndrome. Management has improved tremendously in the past 20 years. Minimally invasive surgical therapy accompanied by preoperative angiography and/or chemoembolization, generally results in uncomplicated total or subtotal resection of these vascular tumors. Moreover, radiosurgical methods such as gamma knife radiosurgery & LINAC have demonstrated positive results. Chemotherapy with anti-VEGF agents may become a more common treatment modality. Collectively, the literature demonstrates promising data that results in not only decreased mortality rates, but also improved quality of life for patients with spinal hemangioblastomas.

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COMPETING INTERESTS

Authors have declared that no competing interests exist.

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