Are falling rates of tonsillectomies causing increased rates of tonsil related morbidity?

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INTRODUCTION

The number of tonsillectomies performed in the NHS is falling:

- In 1994-95 77,600 tonsillectomies were performed in the UK. By 2009 this dropped by 37% to 49,000.
- The UK has the lowest tonsillectomy rate in Europe

At the same time, we are seeing increasing rates of tonsil related morbidity:

- In 2000-01, there were 30,942 tonsil-related admissions for emergency medical treatment. By 2008-09, the figure had risen to 43,641, an increase of over 41% in 8 years.
- In 2000 there were 6,352 UK hospital admissions for treatment of quinsy. This increased to 7,683 in 2008-09, a rise of over 20% (11,865 hospital bed days).

The social and economic impact of tonsillitis is significant:

- Overall, 35m days are lost from school or work each year due to sore throats in the UK.
- GP consultations for sore throat cost around £60m per year.

As tonsillectomy rates continue to fall, the hospital admission rate for tonsillitis and its complications may rise

The aim of this study was to determine if the introduction of the non-essential surgical procedures policy has led to an increase in the number of hospital admissions for tonsillitis and its recognised complications.

METHOD

- Patients admitted to a district general hospital between 1/10/12 - 31/12/12 and 1/10/10 - 31/12/10 for acute tonsillitis were identified using clinical coding statistics
- Clinical notes were used to establish diagnosis of tonsillitis and/or quinsy, course of treatment, length of stay and cohort demographics
- Comparisons were drawn from the two periods of study, however statistical tests were not carried out due to small study population.

RESULTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Male: Female</td>
<td>22:15</td>
<td>45:38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of patients</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>83</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Paediatric</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>61</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adult</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ave Age (years):</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Paediatric</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adult</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ave length of stay:</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Paediatric</td>
<td>0.5 days</td>
<td>0.4 days</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adult</td>
<td>1.8 days</td>
<td>1.7 days</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rate of Quinsy</td>
<td>3%</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rate of IV antibiotics</td>
<td>37.8%</td>
<td>26.5%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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- In the 3 month period of 2010 there were 37 patients admitted to hospital for treatment of tonsillitis. 24 of these patients were paediatric, and were not seen by the ENT team.
- Overall 8% of this group had a quinsy and 16% went on to have a tonsillectomy after discharge.
- In the same 3 month period of 2012 there were 83 patients admitted to hospital for treatment of tonsillitis. 61 of these patients were paediatric, and were not seen by the ENT team.
- Overall 0% of this group had a quinsy and 1.2% went on to have a tonsillectomy after discharge (at time of study).

CONCLUSION

- The number of patients admitted to hospital with tonsillitis more than doubled over the same three month period from 2010 to 2012.
- There was no evidence of increased tonsil related morbidity such as quinsy.
- Average length of stay was comparable over both periods of time.
- A prospective national study comparing current tonsillectomy trends and tonsil related morbidity rates may enable further clarification.

REFERENCES

- Andrew McCombe. ENT UK. UK ‘doing too few tonsil operations’. BBC News. 2011

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