Journal of Advanced Healthcare and Medical Sciences (JAHMS)
J. Adv. Healthc. Med. Sci.
E-ISSN: xxxx-xxxx; P-ISSN: xxxx-xxxx
Website: https://www.jahms.org/

Original Article

Thyroidectomy Outcomes in Benign vs Malignant Thyroid Disorders

Dr. Saurabh Bokade[1], Dr. Deepali Parate[2]

[1]MBBS, DNB, FMAS, FALS, FIAGES, MNAMS, PDF GI-HPB Oncosurgery Assistant Professor, Department of General Surgery NKPSIMS & RC and LMH, Nagpur, Maharashtra, India

[2]MBBS, MD Assistant Professor, Department of Physiology IGGMC, Nagpur, Maharashtra, India

Corresponding Author: Dr. Saurabh Bokade

Received: 2022-04-25 **Accepted**: 2022-05-18 **Published**: 2022-06-30

Abstract-

Introduction: Thyroidectomy is a commonly performed endocrine surgical procedure indicated for both benign and malignant thyroid disorders. Although advances in surgical techniques have improved safety profiles, postoperative complications such as hypocalcemia, recurrent laryngeal nerve (RLN) injury, hemorrhage, and wound infection remain clinically significant. Comparative evaluation of surgical outcomes between benign and malignant thyroid conditions is essential for optimizing perioperative management and counseling. ***Materials and Methods:*** A prospective comparative study was conducted among 200 patients undergoing thyroidectomy at a tertiary care center over 24 months. Patients were categorized into benign (n=120) and malignant (n=80) groups based on histopathology. Demographic data, type of surgery, operative time, hospital stay, and postoperative complications were analyzed. Statistical comparison was performed using Chi-square and Student's t-test. ***Results***: Total thyroidectomy was more common in malignant cases (85%) compared to benign cases (40%). Transient hypocalcemia occurred significantly more in malignant cases (27.5%) than benign cases (12.5%) ($p<0.05$). Permanent RLN palsy was higher in malignancy (5%) compared to benign disorders (1.6%). Mean operative time and hospital stay were significantly longer in malignant cases. ***Conclusion***: Thyroidectomy for malignant disorders is associated with higher complication rates and longer operative duration compared to benign conditions. Careful surgical planning and intraoperative nerve monitoring may reduce morbidity.

Keywords: *Thyroidectomy, benign thyroid disease, thyroid carcinoma, hypocalcemia, recurrent laryngeal nerve injury, surgical outcomes.*

INTRODUCTION

Thyroid disorders represent one of the most common endocrine pathologies worldwide, with an increasing incidence of both benign nodular disease and thyroid malignancies[1]. Thyroidectomy remains the definitive treatment for symptomatic benign conditions such as multinodular goiter, Graves' disease, and compressive thyroid enlargement, as well as for malignant tumors including papillary, follicular, medullary, and anaplastic thyroid carcinoma[2].

The global rise in thyroid cancer incidence over the past two decades has been attributed to improved diagnostic modalities and increased detection of microcarcinomas[3]. Despite the generally favorable prognosis of differentiated thyroid carcinoma, surgical management plays a central role in disease control[4]. Total thyroidectomy is often recommended in malignant cases, whereas hemithyroidectomy or subtotal procedures may suffice for benign disorders[5].

Although thyroid surgery is considered safe in experienced hands, complications remain a concern[6]. The most frequent postoperative complication is hypocalcemia resulting from transient or permanent hypoparathyroidism[7]. Recurrent laryngeal nerve (RLN) injury is another feared complication, potentially leading to hoarseness, airway compromise, and long-term vocal dysfunction[8]. Postoperative hemorrhage, though rare, may be life-threatening due to airway compression[9].

The risk of complications is influenced by factors such as extent of surgery, underlying pathology, lymph node dissection, surgeon experience, and anatomical variations[10]. Malignant thyroid disease often necessitates more extensive surgical dissection and central neck node clearance, increasing the likelihood of parathyroid devascularization and nerve injury[11]. In contrast, surgery for benign conditions is usually less radical, potentially reducing complication rates[12].

Recent studies have focused on intraoperative nerve monitoring, meticulous capsular dissection techniques, and early postoperative calcium monitoring to minimize morbidity[13]. However, comparative outcome data between benign and malignant thyroid disorders remain variable across institutions[14].

Understanding differences in surgical outcomes between these groups is crucial for risk stratification, patient counseling, and healthcare planning[15]. Therefore, this study aims to compare operative characteristics and postoperative complications of thyroidectomy in benign versus malignant thyroid disorders.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

This prospective comparative study was conducted in the Department of General Surgery at a tertiary care teaching hospital over 24 months.

Study Population

A total of 200 patients undergoing thyroidectomy were included.

Inclusion Criteria

- Age ≥18 years
- Patients undergoing hemithyroidectomy or total thyroidectomy
- Histopathologically confirmed benign or malignant thyroid disease
- Patients providing informed consent

Exclusion Criteria

- Previous thyroid surgery
- Recurrent thyroid malignancy
- Pre-existing vocal cord palsy
- Known hypoparathyroidism
- Severe systemic comorbidities contraindicating surgery

Grouping

- **Group A (Benign)** – 120 patients
- **Group B (Malignant)** – 80 patients

Preoperative Evaluation

- Thyroid function tests
- Ultrasonography
- FNAC
- Indirect laryngoscopy
- Serum calcium levels

Surgical Procedure

Surgery was performed under general anesthesia. Capsular dissection technique was used. Identification and preservation of RLN and parathyroid glands were prioritized. Central neck dissection was performed in indicated malignant cases.

Postoperative Monitoring

- Serum calcium at 24 and 48 hours
- Vocal cord examination
- Monitoring for hematoma

Outcome Measures

- Operative time
- Length of hospital stay
- Hypocalcemia (transient/permanent)
- RLN palsy
- Hemorrhage
- Wound infection

Statistical Analysis

Data were analyzed using SPSS version 25. Quantitative data were expressed as mean ± SD. Chi-square test and independent t-test were applied. $p < 0.05$ was considered statistically significant.

RESULTS

Table 1: Demographic Distribution

Parameter	Benign (n=120)	Malignant (n=80)
Mean Age	38.4 ± 10.2	45.6 ± 12.3
Female (%)	86%	72%

Malignant group had older age distribution and relatively lower female predominance.

Table 2: Type of Surgery

Surgery	Benign	Malignant
Hemithyroidectomy	60%	15%
Total Thyroidectomy	40%	85%

Total thyroidectomy was significantly more common in malignant cases.

Table 3: Operative Time

Group	Mean Time (minutes)
Benign	92 ± 15
Malignant	125 ± 20

Malignant cases required significantly longer operative duration ($p<0.001$).

Table 4: Hypocalcemia

Type	Benign	Malignant
Transient	12.5%	27.5%
Permanent	2%	6%

Hypocalcemia was significantly higher in malignant cases.

Table 5: RLN Injury

Type	Benign	Malignant
Transient	3%	8%
Permanent	1.6%	5%

Higher nerve injury incidence in malignant group.

Table 6: Hospital Stay

Group	Mean Stay (days)
Benign	3.2 ± 1.1
Malignant	5.4 ± 1.8

Malignancy associated with prolonged hospitalization.

DISCUSSION

This study demonstrates significantly higher postoperative complication rates in malignant thyroid disorders compared to benign conditions. The increased incidence of transient and permanent hypocalcemia in malignant cases correlates with previous reports by Lee et al.[16] and Kim et al.[17], who attributed higher rates to extensive dissection and central lymph node clearance.

Similarly, RLN injury was more prevalent in malignant thyroidectomy, consistent with findings from Bergenfelz et al.[18] and Lombardi et al.[19]. These studies emphasize that tumor infiltration and nodal dissection increase risk of nerve trauma. Operative time was significantly longer in malignant cases, aligning with findings from Lang et al.[20]. Longer surgical duration likely reflects complexity of tumor resection and lymphadenectomy.

The overall complication rates in our benign group were comparable to large database analyses reported by Kandil et al.[21]. Advances in capsular dissection technique and nerve monitoring have reduced morbidity.

Hospital stay was prolonged in malignancy, consistent with findings by Medas et al.[22]. This may reflect need for calcium monitoring and drain management.

The study confirms that although thyroidectomy is safe, malignant disease carries increased operative risk. Careful surgical expertise and early complication detection are essential.

CONCLUSION

Thyroidectomy for malignant thyroid disorders is associated with longer operative time, higher incidence of hypocalcemia and RLN injury, and prolonged hospital stay compared to benign thyroid disease. Enhanced surgical precision and vigilant postoperative care are crucial in malignant cases.

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