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Periprosthetic fracture following anterior approach or dislocation after posterior approach : which one is the lesser evil?

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- 1 **Which one is the lesser evil? – Periprosthetic Fracture following Anterior**
- 2 **Approach or Dislocation after Posterior Approach?**

3 **Abstract**

4 **Introduction:**

5 The most common approaches in total hip arthroplasty (THA) have different complication profiles;  
6 anterior-approach (AA-THA) has an increased risk of periprosthetic fractures (PPF); posterior-  
7 approach (PA-THA) is associated with higher dislocation risk. However, the relative severity of  
8 one versus the other is unknown. This study aims to compare outcome of patients who suffered  
9 PPF after AA-THA with those that sustained dislocation after PA-THA.

10

11 **Methods:**

12 This is a retrospective, single-center, multi-surgeon, consecutive case-series of primary THA  
13 patients. In a cohort of 9,867 patients who underwent THA, 79 fulfilled the approach-specific,  
14 post-operative complication criteria, of which 44 were PPF after AA-THA and 35 with dislocation  
15 after PA-THA (age 67.9 years (range: 38.0-88.1), 58.2% women). Outcome included  
16 complication- and revision- rates, and patient-reported outcomes including Oxford Hip Score  
17 (OHS).

18

19 **Results:**

20 At 5.8 years follow-up (range: 2.0-18.5), reoperation was more common in the dislocation after  
21 PA-THA group (23/35 vs. 20/44;  $p=0.072$ ). Change of surgical approach occurred in 15/20 of  
22 patients with PPF after AA-THA, but none in those with dislocation after PA-THA. Following re-  
23 operation, complication rate was greater in the PPF group (9/20 vs. 4/23;  $p=0.049$ ). At latest  
24 follow-up, OHS were superior in the PPF after AA-THA group [42.6 (range:25.0-48.0) vs. 36.6  
25 (range: 21.0-47.0);  $p=0.006$ ].

26

27 **Conclusion:**

28 Dislocation following PA-THA is more likely to require revision. However, PPF following AA-  
29 THA requires more often a different surgical approach and is at higher risk of complications.  
30 Despite the increased surgical burden post-operative PROMs are better in the peri-prosthetic  
31 fracture group, especially in cases not requiring reoperation.

32

33 **Level of evidence:** III, case-control study

34

35 **Key words:** Total hip arthroplasty, anterior approach, peri-prosthetic fracture, posterior approach,  
36 dislocation, outcome, complications

## 37 **Introduction**

38 The three most common approaches [posterior (PA), lateral, and anterior (AA)] for total hip  
39 arthroplasty (THA), have well-documented advantages and disadvantages[1-3]. AA has recently  
40 gained popularity [4-6], because it is an inter-nervous and inter-muscular approach [2, 7], offering  
41 advantages such as enhanced recovery, decreased postoperative pain, and decreased dislocation  
42 rates [8, 9]. Despite these presumed advantages, several studies have failed to show a distinct  
43 advantage of AA over PA on the long term [1, 3, 10, 11].

44  
45 Opponents of AA have reported higher rates of complications associated with AA [12-15], because  
46 it is associated with technical difficulties, mainly on the femoral side [16], where soft tissues may  
47 impede access, increasing risk of component mal-positioning and periprosthetic fractures [17],  
48 described in 1-3% of primary cases [18, 19]. However, AA-THA in supine position has been  
49 shown to lead to superior reconstruction and component orientation accuracy [20, 21].  
50 Traditionally, PA is associated with a higher dislocation risk compared to AA [1]. Whilst this risk,  
51 ranging between 1-3% [22], has decreased over the years with the use of higher femoral head sizes  
52 [23] and posterior capsular repair [24, 25], recent studies still favour AA over PA in terms of  
53 stability [26-29].

54  
55 Little is known which of these types of complications, dislocation associated with PA-THA or  
56 peri-prosthetic fracture associated with AA-THA, has greater impact on outcome. Generally,  
57 comparative studies on THA approaches remain inconclusive, partially because the impact of these  
58 complications is not studied extensively in an approach-specific pattern [1, 30]. The goal of this  
59 study was to compare medium-term clinical outcome (using objective and subjective measures) of

60 patients who sustained a dislocation following PA-THA and patients that suffered a peri-prosthetic  
61 fracture after AA-THA. Outcome measures included complication-, reoperation- rates, and  
62 patient-reported outcome measures (PROMs). We hypothesized patients who sustained a peri-  
63 prosthetic fracture following AA-THA would have a higher likelihood to need a subsequent  
64 reoperation and thus exhibit inferior PROMs at follow-up.

## 65 **Methods**

### 66 *Study design*

67 This is a retrospective, single-center, multi-surgeon, consecutive case-series of primary THA  
68 patients who experienced either dislocation after PA-THA or peri-prosthetic fracture after AA-  
69 THA at a large, academic, tertiary care center (The Ottawa Hospital, Ottawa, Ontario, Canada).

70 The study was approved by the Institutional Review Board.

71

72 An a-priori sample size calculation was performed in SPSS v28 (IBM Corp, New York, United  
73 States). Previous studies have shown a mean Oxford Hip Score (OHS) of  $29 \pm 8$  among patients  
74 who sustained a peri-prosthetic fracture rate [31], and a mean OHS of 35 among patients who were  
75 revised for a THA dislocation [32]. Based on this data, a minimum of 28 cases per group was  
76 needed to achieve sufficient power ( $1-\beta=0.95$ ,  $\alpha=0.05$ ).

77

### 78 *Study population*

79 We enquired the institute's database to identify consecutive patients who were treated with primary  
80 THA and sustained either a dislocation or a periprosthetic after THA between January 1<sup>st</sup>, 2002,  
81 and December 31<sup>st</sup>, 2020 (dislocations), and between January 1<sup>st</sup>, 2014, and December 31<sup>st</sup>, 2020  
82 (peri-prosthetic fractures), with a minimum follow-up of 2 years. Patients with dislocation after  
83 PA-THA were excluded if they underwent bipolar hemiarthroplasty or hip resurfacing arthroplasty  
84 (n=20), in case of missing data on dislocations or approach (n=8), if dislocation was secondary to  
85 fracture or infection (n=2) or if the first dislocation was more than 5 years after surgery and  
86 therefore might have been related other causes than the approach (i.e. polyethylene wear) (n=10).  
87 Patients with peri-prosthetic fracture after AA-THA were excluded if they sustained intra-

88 operative calcar cracks (n=3); acetabular fracture (n=2); fractures occurred due to high-energy  
89 trauma; or fractures occurring more than 90 days post-operatively (n=5). Application of these  
90 criteria left 79 patients for inclusion: 35 patients with a dislocation after PA-THA and 44 patients  
91 with a peri-prosthetic fracture after AA-THA (**Figure 1**). Peri-prosthetic fractures were graded as  
92 per Vancouver classification [33]: there were 14 Vancouver-A (16.3%), 15 Vancouver-B1  
93 (20.0%), 11 Vancouver-B2 (13.8%) and 4 Vancouver-B3 (5.0%) peri-prosthetic fractures. Peri-  
94 prosthetic fractures took place on average 15 days (range: 0-60 days) following primary THA.  
95 Dislocations occurred on average 196 days post-operatively (range: 6-1,435 days) ( $p<0.001$ ).  
96 Length of follow-up was determined from the date of surgery to the last clinical review or time of  
97 death [34].

98  
99 The cohort's mean age was 67.9 years (range: 38.0-88.1). There were 46 women (58.2%) and 33  
100 men (41.8%), with a mean BMI of 27.8 kg/m<sup>2</sup> (range: 18.0-50.0). Most patients were ASA  
101 (American Society of Anesthesiologists) grade 2 (31.6%) or 3 (58.2%). There were no differences  
102 between both groups in age ( $p=0.961$ ), sex ( $p=0.862$ ), BMI ( $p=0.294$ ) or ASA-grade ( $p=0.523$ ).  
103 Follow-up was longer in patients with a dislocation after PA-THA compared to patients with a  
104 peri-prosthetic fracture after AA-THA [9.4 years (range: 2.0-18.5) vs. 4.1 years (range: 2.0-7.3);  
105  $p<0.001$ ] (**Table 1**).

106

### 107 *Surgical technique*

108 AA-THAs were performed with patients positioned supine on a standard operating table (n=8) [7]  
109 or using a positioning table (n=36) [2]. AA-THA patients were allowed weight-bearing as tolerated  
110 post-operatively with anterior hip precautions. Institutional experience with AA-THA has



111 previously been reported [35, 36]. All PA were performed with patient in a lateral decubitus  
112 position [37, 38]. External rotators and posterior capsule were taken down and repaired after the  
113 procedure in a standard fashion. Gluteus maximus tendon was not released in any of the cases.  
114 PA-THA patients were allowed weight-bearing as tolerated with posterior hip precautions during  
115 the first 6 weeks. All patients were assessed by physiotherapy before hospital discharge. Routine,  
116 30-day deep venous thrombosis (DVT) prophylaxis was used in all cases. Patients were reviewed  
117 clinically at 2-weeks, 6-weeks, 6-months, 12-months, and annually thereafter.

118  
119 Most used primary acetabular implants were G7<sup>®</sup> (Zimmer-Biomet, Warsaw, Indiana, United  
120 States) (n=48) and Trident<sup>®</sup> cup (Stryker, Kalamazoo, Michigan, United States) (n=6). Most used  
121 femoral stems were Microplasty<sup>®</sup> (Zimmer-Biomet) (n=39), Taperloc<sup>®</sup> Complete (Zimmer-  
122 Biomet) (n=6) and Profemur<sup>®</sup> TL stem (Microport, Shanghai, China) (n=5). Articulating bearing  
123 surface was metal-on-polyethylene. Most stems were uncemented (n=76; 96.2%). There was no  
124 difference in use of cemented implants between both groups (p=0.427). The majority were 32-mm  
125 (43.0%) and 36-mm (50.6%) heads, with no difference between cohorts (p=0.303). No dual-  
126 mobility components were used.

127

### 128 ***Outcome measurements***

129 Outcome measures included surgical-related intraoperative and postoperative complications, and  
130 reoperations. The Clavien-Dindo classification was used to grade complications [39]. Grade 1  
131 complications needed no treatment, grade 2 complications required pharmacologic treatment,  
132 grade 3 complications included dislocation, infection, fracture or aseptic loosening. Grade 4

133 complication were potentially life-threatening complications such as pulmonary embolism, and  
134 grade 5 complications resulted in death.

135 Patient-reported outcome measures (PROMs) were obtained at minimum 12 months  
136 postoperatively for all patients. These included the Oxford Hip Score (OHS) [40] (0-48; worse to  
137 best) and EuroQoL Five Dimensions Questionnaire [41] (-0.594 to 1.000; worse to best).

138

### 139 *Statistical analysis*

140 Statistical analysis was performed using SPSS v28 (IBM). Normal distribution of data was tested  
141 with the Kolmogorov-Smirnov test and Q-Q plots, showing no normal distribution of data. A Mann  
142 Whitney-U test or a Kruskal-Wallis test was used to compare continuous variables, and Chi Square  
143 test to compare categorical variables. Survival data was obtained by Kaplan-Meier analysis [42].  
144 A p-value of <0.05 was considered to indicate statistical significance.

## 145 **Results**

### 146 *Complications & reoperations*

147 No patients deceased in the first year of follow-up, the 5-year mortality rate was 4.5% in the peri-  
148 prosthetic fracture group and 8.6% in the dislocation group (p=0.465).

149 Twenty periprosthetic fractures (45.5%) and 23 dislocations (65.7%) required subsequent surgical  
150 treatment (p=0.072), the rest were treated non-operatively. Peri-prosthetic fractures that were  
151 treated non-operatively were either Vancouver-AG (n=11), Vancouver-AL (n=1) or Vancouver-  
152 B1 [Intra-operative calcar crack (n=3) or cortical perforation (n=2), minimally/non-displaced  
153 fracture at early follow-up (n=7)] (**Figure 2**). Fractures treated surgically were Vancouver-AG  
154 (n=2), Vancouver-B1 (n=3), Vancouver-B2 (n=11) or Vancouver-B3 (n=4). Majority of  
155 reoperations in both groups were revision THA, including stem and/or cup revision (17/20 vs.  
156 11/23; p=0.022). Two patients with a Vancouver-A peri-prosthetic fracture were treated with a  
157 head-liner exchange to enhance stability (**Figure 3**).

158

159 Whilst all revisions of PA-THA dislocations were done through the same approach, peri-prosthetic  
160 fractures of AA-THA could only be revised in 25.0% of cases through an anterior approach (n=5),  
161 5.0% through a lateral (n=1) and 70.0% was revised through a posterior approach (n=14). Patients  
162 with a peri-prosthetic fracture after AA-THA that needed a reoperation more often developed  
163 Dindo-Clavien grade 3 complication after revision (9/20 vs. 4/23; p=0.049). The majority of these  
164 were infection (8/21 vs. 1/23; p=0.007) (**Figure 4**). A different approach was used in cases of an  
165 infection post-revision of peri-prosthetic fracture, treated with revision of implants (n=6/8), the  
166 same approach was used in cases where only a head-liner exchange was used as treatment (n=2/8),

167 Nine patients of the peri-prosthetic fracture group required a second reoperation (20.5%) compared  
168 to four in the dislocation group (11.4%) ( $p=0.051$ ) (**Figure 4**). There was no difference in  
169 complication rate between both groups in cases of a second reintervention ( $p=0.333$ ) (**Table 2**).  
170 For endpoint implant revision, a survival of 64.3% among peri-prosthetic fracture following AA-  
171 THA vs. 65.6% among dislocation following PA-THA was found at 5-year follow-up using  
172 Kaplan-Meier (log rank  $p=0.104$ ) (**Figure 5**).

173

#### 174 *Patient-reported outcome measures*

175 Among alive patients at follow-up, PROM scores could be obtained for 82% of patients. Patients  
176 who sustained peri-prosthetic fracture after AA-THA had higher final PROMs than those who  
177 sustained dislocation after PA-THA. Mean post-operative OHS at latest follow-up was 42.6  
178 (range: 25.0-48.0) among patients with peri-prosthetic fracture, compared to 36.6 (range: 21.0-  
179 47.0) among those with a dislocation ( $p=0.006$ ); and EQ5D was also higher [0.746 (range: 0.102-  
180 1.000) vs. 0.697 (range: 0.424-1.000);  $p=0.194$ ].

181 Peri-prosthetic fractures treated non-operatively had highest OHS scores compared to dislocations  
182 treated conservatively [42.0 (range: 25.0-48.0) vs. 37.3 (range: 27.0-47.0);  $p=0.056$ ]. Similarly,  
183 peri-prosthetic fractures treated surgically had higher final OHS scores [43.0 (range: 25.0-48.0)  
184 vs. 32.0 (range: 21.0-43.0);  $p=0.115$ ].

185 Highest OHS scores were found in patients with Vancouver-A/B1 [mean 43.9 (range: 25.0-48.0)],  
186 compared to patients with Vancouver-B2/3 [mean: 39.7 (range: 25.-48.0)] and dislocation patients  
187 [mean: 36.6 (range: 21.0-47.0)] ( $p=0.010$ ) (**Figure 6**).

## 188 **Discussion**

189 The optimum approach for THA is a matter of continuous debate and is likely surgeon- and patient-  
190 dependent. By extracting data from a large, multi-surgeon, database at a single academic tertiary  
191 institution, we were able to compare medium to long term outcome of patients who sustained a  
192 dislocation after PA-THA versus those who sustained a peri-prosthetic fracture after AA-THA.  
193 Both complications were associated with significant patient burden. The complication rate  
194 following revision surgery was higher in patients with a peri-prosthetic fracture. Whilst the overall  
195 surgical burden in patients with dislocations following PA-THA was lower, PROM scores of these  
196 patients at final follow-up were worse. Patients with a peri-prosthetic fracture managed non-  
197 operatively, as expected had best PROMs, equivalent to non-complicated, primary THAs. These  
198 results emphasize that THA instability has a significant impact on patient' satisfaction, in line with  
199 previous studies [30, 32], that should not be undermined, even when further surgery is not required  
200 or when surgery performed is relatively minor (head-liner exchange).

201

202 In this study, whilst dislocations led more often to a reoperation, the complication rate following  
203 revision surgery was much higher in the peri-prosthetic fracture group, primarily due to the  
204 increased infection rate. A large proportion of patients with a periprosthetic fracture after AA-  
205 THA (76%) underwent revision through a different approach, whilst patients with a dislocation  
206 after PA-THA were always be operated through the same approach. Although posterior approach  
207 is an easier extensile approach to address femoral peri-prosthetic fractures, some authors have  
208 suggested that complex revisions can also be safely conducted through an (extensile) anterior  
209 approach [43-45]. Particularly femoral revisions can be quite challenging through an anterior  
210 approach due to the proximity of neurovascular structures supplying the quadriceps [46, 47], and

211 femoral revisions through AA-THA are most likely associated with a significant additional  
212 learning curve [48]. Most infections occurred when approach was changed, but whether these  
213 complications could have been avoided by using the same approach is unsure, because the cause  
214 of an infection is multifactorial [49]. The larger femoral exposure that is often needed to reduce a  
215 peri-prosthetic fracture, as well as the subsequent increased length of the procedure, and the  
216 traumatized tissues as part of the fracture, likely contribute to the increased risk of complications,  
217 such as infection [50].

218

219 Previous studies have highlighted the burden of THA instability, being associated with a higher  
220 mortality rate, and significant functional and financial consequences [51], especially in setting of  
221 recurrent instability [32]. The cause of instability is multi-factorial [52], and some of the factors  
222 may remain present and affect outcome, even when instability has been resolved. Furthermore,  
223 some patients may have ongoing micro-instability or fear of further instability and movement,  
224 which may influence PROMs [53]. PROM scores of dislocations in this cohort were comparable  
225 to previous studies in patients with instability following THA [32, 54]. PROMs were inferior  
226 amongst patients that required revision for instability (OHS: 32), compared to patients treated non-  
227 operatively (OHS:37). It has been previously shown that most patients that dislocate following  
228 posterior approach are more likely to require re-operation, contrary to those that have had an index  
229 anterior approach[30]. PROMs of patients with a peri-prosthetic fracture following AA-THA were  
230 significantly better compared to those with a dislocation at final follow-up. When peri-prosthetic  
231 fractures following AA-THA were treated conservatively, for example in cases of Vancouver-  
232 A/B1 fractures, PROMs scores were superior compared to all other sub-groups. It is reasonable to  
233 assume that when a peri-prosthetic fracture heals without the need of a second intervention, the

234 patient has a good chance of returning to high function on the medium- to long-term [55]. PROM  
235 scores of these patients would eventually be equivalent to patients without complications after  
236 THA. Patients with a peri-prosthetic fracture treated surgically, very often through a different  
237 approach at the time of revision, eventually had similar PROM scores to patients with a dislocation,  
238 showing that a dual-approach strategy for peri-prosthetic fracture following AA-THA does not  
239 compromise final outcome. Such findings should be part of the decision algorithm and shared  
240 decision making in patients presenting with the approach-specific complications studied here  
241 within.

242

243 This study is not without limitations. First, this is a retrospective study and thus suffers from  
244 associated biases. There was a significant difference in follow-up between both groups, which was  
245 in part due to the evolution in approach use in our unit. Previous research has shown that PROM  
246 scores don't significantly change after 12 or 24 months post-operatively [56], and therefore this  
247 should not have affected the differences in PROM scores. Secondly, although data was extracted  
248 from a large database, overall number of patients with complications were small, which created  
249 small comparison groups for this study. Although PROM scores could be retrieved for 80% of the  
250 included patients that were alive at latest follow-up, studies in larger cohorts should be conducted  
251 to confirm our findings. Third, although there was no difference in ASA grades between groups,  
252 it is possible that patients with periprosthetic fractures had certain comorbidities that predisposed  
253 them to the development of an infection. Fourth, although peri-prosthetic fractures following a  
254 THA are often contributed to factors related to the surgery that led to failure of fixation and a  
255 subsequent peri-prosthetic fracture, it is not unlikely that some of these fractures were of pure  
256 traumatic origin. The same may account for some of the dislocations. Although all charts were

257 retrospectively reviewed, and cases of high energy trauma were excluded, complications following  
258 a trauma are associated with additional implications on the surrounding soft tissues. If some of  
259 traumatic complications were included, these may have influenced the results.

260

261 Despite these limitations, this data is valuable in that it is the first to compare the impact of  
262 complications frequently associated with popular THA approaches. These findings are to be  
263 considered in the decision-making process of which approach is appropriate and when discussing  
264 relative risks/benefits prior to THA. Future research should be conducted to identify whether, and  
265 if so which, patients may benefit from one approach over the other. High-risk patients for femoral  
266 complications (e.g., those with high BMI, secondary osteoarthritis or abnormal anatomy) may  
267 benefit more from an easier extensile approach, such as the posterior approach, especially amongst  
268 surgeons that are not experienced with AA. Whether certain high-risk patients for dislocations  
269 (e.g., stiff or fused spines) may benefit from an anterior approach compared to other approaches is  
270 also a matter of future research.

271

## 272 **Conclusion**

273 Dislocation following PA-THA is more likely to require revision. However, periprosthetic fracture  
274 following AA-THA is likely to require different surgical approach and is 3x more likely to be  
275 associated with additional complications, such as an infection. Despite the increased surgical  
276 burden, post-operative PROMs are better in peri-prosthetic fracture after AA-THA, especially in  
277 cases not requiring revision of implants, which was associated with worse function.



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