Editorial Commentary: Irreparable Rotator Cuff Tears Might Be Surgically Treatable After All

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Abstract: It appears that implantation of a biodegradable subacromial spacer improves the function for patients with massive irreparable rotator cuff tears. In this issue of Arthroscopy, an interesting article dealing with the treatment of massive irreparable rotator cuff tears is published.

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Deranlot, Werthel, Herisson, Nourissat, Zbili, Vigan and Bruchou in their paper entitled “Arthroscopic Subacromial Spacer Implantation in Patients With Massive Irreparable Rotator Cuff Tears: Clinical and Radiographic Results of 39 Retrospectives Cases” report encouraging results after an average follow-up of almost 3 years.

The authors conclude that “arthroscopic implantation of a subacromial spacer for irreparable rotator cuff tear leads to significant improvement in shoulder function at a minimum of one-year postoperatively.”

We all know that the treatment of massive tears is a challenge and the results do not correspond to what we would like them to be. One possibility is to insert a revered shoulder prosthesis; however, that would involve a substantial risk for complications in the long term. A better option appears to be to try to repair the lesion or use implants other than shoulder arthroplasty. Therefore, I encourage Deranlot et al. to follow their patients and report the long-term results as well.

Another option that has been reported about recently is the use of a fascia lata graft, but only as a technical report. In a clinical comparative study with a 2-year follow-up, the use of an extracellular matrix augmentation resulted in better results than repair without augmentation.

My personal reflection is that the study by Deranlot et al. is interesting and a contribution to knowledge of the treatment of a difficult and challenging condition, but certainly not the only option. Other authors need to follow their example and report short- and long-term results after the use of spacer implants and other methods for treating massive irreparable rotator cuff tears.

References


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