



Advanced Management of Mediastinitis Post Cardiac Surgery

Essay
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SUMMARY

Median sternotomy is the conventional incision in open heart surgery. One of its most serious complication is sternal wound infection and dehiscence, when this complication occurs, there is significant morbidity and mortality rate which exceeds 20%.

There are different methods of classifying types of sternal wound infection and dehiscence but they are all about whether it is superficial infection affecting the skin and subcutaneous tissue or deep wound infection affecting the sternum and mediastinum.

Many studies have been carried out to identify risk factors which can be categorized as medical causes such as obesity, COPD, DM and operative causes such as surgical technique, antiseptic preparations, antibiotic and the use of internal mammary arteries .

Early diagnosis and proper treatment is the key point in this serious problem. It depends mainly on high index of suspicion and daily examination. Although there are some investigations which might help in the diagnosis, but they are far less evident than clinical diagnosis.

As the sternal wound infection is a major complication many studies were done to find methods of prophylaxis concerned mainly with aseptic conditions, antibiotic prophylaxis, optimizing conditions of wound healing and the surgical technique especially those concerned with rigid bone fixation.

Surgical treatment is mandatory in most cases with early aggressive debridement in all cases, where some claims that open treatment and late closure is successful, while most surgeons adopt the theory that primary muscle or omental flap may achieve earlier and better results.

Recently, reconstruction using variable tissue flaps to obliterate dead space and provide immediate coverage of the thoracic contents, showed very high success rate. The omentum, pectoralis major, rectus abdominis and latissimus dorsi muscle have been the most commonly used tissue flaps.

Lastly, The vacuum assisted closure provides a variable and effective adjunctive method to treat postoperative wound infection after cardiac surgery and is a good option as a first line therapy followed by closure with wires or plates or combined with muscles and omental flaps.

The post operative care is an important issue not to be neglected as these patients are usually high risk patients and has been debilitated from this complications. It has an important role in preventing morbidities afterwards.

List of contents

01	Introduction	01
02	Aim of the work	04
03	Anatomy and development	05
04	Classifications of mediastinitis	10
05	Risk factors	18
06	Diagnosis	26
07	Management	39
08	Summary	117
09	References	119

List of Figures

01	Anterior surface of sternum and costal cartilages	06
02	Posterior surface of sternum and costal cartilages	07
03	Bimanual alternating chest compressions are used for diagnosing sternal stability	29
04	Sternal dehiscence	34
05	Axial CT images of Sternal Dehiscence	35
06	CT showing sternal nonunion	36
07	MRI scan shows mediastinal abscess	38
08	A visual comparison of wire	43
09	Collagen sponges	45
10	The effect of HBO therapy on sternal wound	55
11	The preoperative view of the defect in the exposed sternum and the wires are visible	55
12	The neurovascular anatomy of the pectoralis major myocutaneous flap	63
13	Split pectoral muscle flap for sternal wound coverage	67
14	The intraoperative view of the pectoralis major muscle flap	67
15	Intraoperative view after unilateral advancement of pectoralis major flap	67
16	Postoperative view after 12 th months	68
17	Vascular supply of rectus abdominis muscle and its sheath	69
18	Paramedian incision for harvesting rectus abdominis muscle	70
19	Coverage of sternal wound by rectus abdominis muscle	71
20	Surgical technique for of Pectoralis major–rectus abdominis bipediced muscle flap	72
21	Diagrammatic presentation of surgical technique of latissimus dorsi muscle flap	76
22	Preparation and transposition of the latissimus dorsi muscle flap	77
23	Arcs of rotation of latissimus dorsi flaps	78

24	Schematic representation of the extended V-Y latissimus dorsi design and operative procedure	79
25	Surgical Technique of the “ V-Y” advancement flap in obese female patient	82
26	Elevation of the breast musculo- cutaneous flap	85
27	Surgical technique for Elevation of the breast musculo- cutaneous flap	85
28	A schematic diagram of 2 perforator flaps	87
29	Dual blood supply of the omentum	89
30	The arc of rotation of the omentum	90
31	Intraoperative demonstration of omental flap technique	91
32	How to lengthen omental flaps for cephalad defects	92
33	Repair with omentum and skin graft	93
34	New prosthetic bone	98
35	Model of transverse sternal fixation with synthetic locking	100
36	View of transverse application of titanium plates with temporary sternal wires	100
37	Stainless steel reconstruction plates are tailored and secured vertically to each side of the sternum	101
38	A transmanubrial dynamic compression plate	101
39	The sponges	105
40	The vaccum	105
41	Infected sternal wound	105
42	Granulation tissue in sternal wound	105
43	Management algorithm for deep sternal wound infections	108
44	Algorithm for management of infected sternotomy wound using VAC and followed with plating	110
45	Shows a wound infection and dehiscence and its management by VAC followed by sternal plating	111

List of tables

01	Pairolero classification of chest wall defects and infections	11
02	El Oakley and Wright classifications of mediastinitis	13
03	Jones classification of sternal wound infection	16

Introduction

Mediastinitis is a life-threatening condition with an extremely high mortality rate if recognized late or treated improperly. Although long recognized as a complication of certain infectious diseases, most cases of mediastinitis are associated with cardiac surgery. This complication affects approximately 1-2% of these patients. Although small in proportional terms, the actual number of patients affected by mediastinitis is substantial. This significantly increases mortality and cost. After 10 years of evolution, the optimal therapy for mediastinitis is more clearly understood (*Abboud et al., 2004*).

Risk factors for the development of mediastinitis postoperatively include the use of pedicled Bilateral Internal Mammary Artery (BITA) as conduits for Coronary Artery Bypass Grafting surgery (CABG), this risk is even higher among patients with diabetes, other risk factors include emergency surgery, external cardiac compression (conventional cardiopulmonary resuscitation), Obesity (>20% of ideal body weight), postoperative shock, especially when multiple blood transfusions are required, prolonged bypass and operating room time, reoperation and reexploration following initial surgery, sternal wound dehiscence, and surgical technical factors (e.g. excessive use of electrocautery, bone wax, paramedian sternotomy) (*Braxton et al., 2000*).

Most mediastinitis cases occur after cardiac surgery and indicate gram-positive cocci, with *Staphylococcus aureus* and *Staphylococcus epidermidis* accounting for 70-80% of cases. Mixed gram-positive and gram-negative infections account for approximately 40% of cases. Isolated gram-negative infections are rare causes (*De Paulis et al., 2005*).

The origin of infection following open heart operations is not known in most patients. Some believe that the process begins as an isolated area of sternal osteomyelitis that eventually leads to sternal separation. Others hold that sternal instability is the inciting event, and bacteria then migrate into deeper tissues. Inadequate mediastinal drainage in the operating room may also contribute to the development of a deeper chest infection. The patient's own skin flora and the bacteria in the local surgical environment are possible sources of infection because some bacterial contamination of surgical wounds is inevitable, host risk factors are likely critical in promoting an active infection (*El Oakley and Wright, 1996*).

The infection of surgical wounds of sternotomies should be considered as Superficial if only the skin and subcutaneous tissues are involved, Deep when the infection reaches the sternum but doesn't involve it, and Organ/ Space when sternal osteomyelitis or mediastinitis occurs. This classification enables a better comparison of related research (*Fowler et al., 2005*).

Approximately two thirds of patients present within 14 days following surgery. Although a delay of months is occasionally observed. The Typical postoperative Patient presents with sternal pain that has increased since surgery, drainage from the wound site, an audible click due to sternal nonunion, progressive redness over a variable period and leukocytosis (*Gardlund et al., 2002*).

The first step in treating mediastinitis is to assess the degree of sternal stability and classify the infection by type. Sternal preservation is a primary goal of treatment for a deep wound infection such as mediastinitis if surgery is performed early, before the sternum

deteriorates. Operative exploration includes reopening the previous sternotomy and debridement of necrotic and infected tissue. The sternum is separated from the ventricle, coronary grafts and the aorta carefully not to cause bleeding. Cultures are sent to direct antibiotic therapy (*Friberg et al., 2005*).

Wound closure is usually delayed until reasonable control of infection is achieved; however, some surgeons perform closure with muscle flaps at the initial debridement with good results. Delayed closure is usually accomplished with muscle flaps (pectoralis, rectus), omental flaps, and recently is aided by vacuum-assisted closure, great care should be taken to exclude active infection before rewiring the sternum in cases of sternal nonunion (*Haas et al., 2005*).

When the infection is under control, the surgeon (usually a plastic surgeon) will use muscle and skin flaps to close the incision by secondary intention. The bone may be approximated, depending on the degree of sternal resection required. The surgeon may use a technique known as the Robicsek procedure to give the weakened sternum additional support (*Milano et al., 2007*).

In vacuum-assisted closure the wound is debrided, and polyurethane foam is applied. An evacuation tube, vacuum pump, and transparent drape complete the dressing. Negative pressure is applied to the wound to drain fluid, inhibit bacterial colonization, stimulate tissue granulation, and reduce the frequency of dressing changes. Delayed primary closure may occur, or the wound may be prepared for secondary closure with flaps (*Omran et al., 2007*).

Anatomy and Development

The Sternum and its Joints:

The sternum is an elongated, flat bone that lies in the anterior midline. The manubrium upper border is marked on either side by a notch for articulation with the clavicle. Centrally, the widest portion of the manubrium is marked by bilateral indentations for articulation of the first costal cartilage, at the lower limits, demifacet for articulation of the upper half of the second costal cartilage. The lower margin of the manubrium articulates with the body of the sternum. The body or longest portion of the sternum articulates with the manubrium to form an angle, called sternal angle. The outer border of this angle is readily palpable. It is sufficiently flexible to allow movement of the body on the more stable manubrium during respiratory movements. Lateral margins of the body articulate with costal cartilages two to seven. The body ends at about the level of the tenth to eleventh thoracic vertebrae, where it forms a cartilaginous joint with the xiphoid process. The xiphoid is a cartilaginous process that is usually ossified by middle age (*Carlson, 1999*).

Ribs and Their Joints:

The size and shape of the thorax are largely determined by the ribs and costal cartilages (*Van De Graaff, 2002*). The upper seven pairs of ribs articulate direct with the sternum by way of costal cartilages and are therefore called true vertebrosteral ribs. In contrast, the lower five pairs are called false ribs because they do not articulate with the sternum at all. Of the false ribs, three pairs (the eighth, ninth and tenth) are called vertebrocostal because their associated cartilages articulate with the costal margin. The remaining pairs

(eleven and twelve) terminate in cartilaginous tips, ending muscles of the abdominal wall. Because their only articulation vertebrae, they are called vertebral ribs. The fused cartilages of ribs seven to ten course diagonally upward to the lower end of the sternum to form the infrasternal angle (*McMinn et al., 1995*).

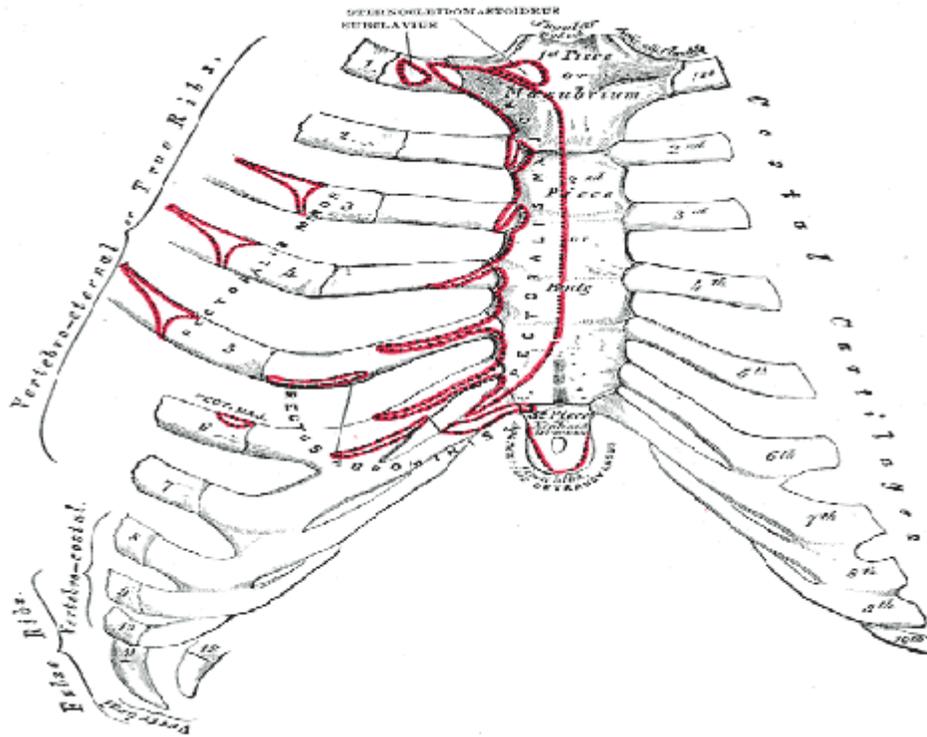


Fig. 1: Anterior surface of sternum and costal cartilages (*McMinn et al., 1995*)

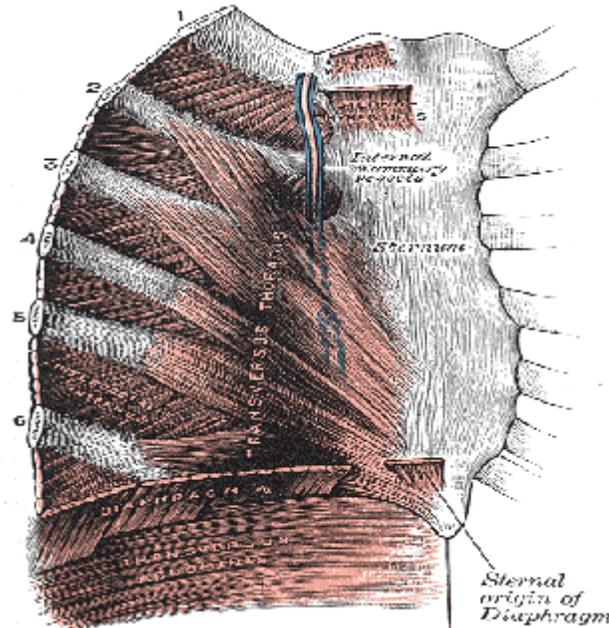


Fig. 2: Posterior surface of sternum and costal cartilages, showing Transversus thoracis (*McMinn et al., 1995*)

Complications of Sternal Wound Incisions

1. Complicated Healing:

- a. Hypertrophic scar and keloid:** Midline incisions have tendency to form raised, red hypertrophic scars (where the lumpy scar tissue exceeds the margin of the scar) are common in patients of African descent. There is no known way of avoiding these unsightly scars, apart from attempting to minimize the length of the sternotomy incision, or considering submammary incisions.
- b. Sternal wires sinus:** sometimes patients complain of prominent sternal wires or infected wire with sinus tract to the skin. This is commonest in very thin patients. If sternum is stable, sternal wires may be removed. This should be done under general anaesthetic with appropriate

monitoring; even a simple removal of sternal wires can turn into an unexpected resternotomy. If the patient is unhappy with 1 or 2 wires , these can be removed through stab incisions (*Chikwe et al., 2006*).

2. Failure of Healing:

- a. **Mediastinal dehiscence:** Median sternotomy wound breakdown in the absence of clinical or microbiological evidence of infection
- b. **Infection:** Mediastinal wound infection Clinical or microbiological evidence of infected presternal tissue and sternal osteomyelitis, with or without mediastinal sepsis and with or without unstable sternum (*Mills and Bryson, 2006*).

➤ *Sternal Wound Infection and Dehiscence:*

A number of patients suffer problems with delayed or impaired wound healing, wound dehiscence and infection. Recent work suggests that infection rates are about 1.9% (*Mills and Bryson, 2006*).

Sternal wound dehiscence and infection is a serious complication that carries significant consequences for the patient and for service provision. Some cases require further surgery, including repeated debridement and major surgical reconstruction. There is almost invariably considerable increase in the length of hospital stay, and the incidence of further complications is high (*Kappstein et al., 1992*).

Patients who develop sternal wound infection have an inpatient mortality of 14% (normally about 2%), a three fold increase in mortality over the first 4 years after surgery and a significantly higher short term and long-term