

A retrospective evaluation of rectal irrigation in the treatment of disorders of faecal continence.

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OBJECTIVES: The aim of this study was, firstly, to evaluate the efficacy and acceptability of rectal irrigation in the treatment of patients with disorders of faecal continence that have not responded to other treatment modalities. Secondly, to see if standard anorectal physiology measures can identify patients who might have successful treatment with rectal irrigation.

PATIENTS AND METHODS: All patients who had been treated with rectal irrigation, between 1998 and 2000, were sent a postal questionnaire. Patients were asked to quantify their symptoms (before and after rectal irrigation) using a visual analogue scale to determine the efficacy of rectal irrigation. An increase of 10 (10 mm) in this score was regarded as successful treatment and incontinence scores obtained. The acceptability of rectal irrigation was determined using a Quality of Life questionnaire. Data regarding presenting symptoms, previous therapies, pretreatment anorectal physiology measurements were obtained from a retrospective case note and database review.

RESULTS: Completed questionnaires were obtained from 48 (52%) of 92 patients, 39 patients had had previous medical and/or surgical treatment before trying rectal irrigation. At the time of the questionnaire 44 of 48 patients were still using rectal irrigation. Using the linear analogue scores 24 of 48 (50%) reported an improvement in their symptoms using rectal irrigation. Most patients found the treatment acceptable. Incontinence scores and anorectal physiology measures did not predict those patients who responded successfully to rectal irrigation.

CONCLUSION: Rectal irrigation can offer symptomatic improvement to patients with faecal evacuatory disorders where other therapies have failed. Most patients find the treatment acceptable. Standard anorectal physiology measures and incontinence scores do not predict those patients likely to have successful treatment.