

Traditional Uvulectomy in Lokoja, Nigeria and its Associated Complications

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ABSTRACT---- *The aim of this case report is to highlight some of the throat complications following traditional uvulectomy. In most parts of Africa, traditional uvulectomy has been a common practice for the traditional Surgeons to remove the uvula as a means of preventing throat infections and other disorders. We present this case of a 29-year-old Nigerian lady presenting with severe pharyngitis, progressive dysphagia and odynophagia 5th day post traditional uvulectomy. On examination of her throat, she showed complete absence of the uvula, palatal ulceration and purulent discharge. The case presentation is to show that otolaryngological emergencies due to this archaic practice are still ongoing despite the public awareness programmes carried out in time past. In the practice of otolaryngology the world over, uvulectomy is a rare surgical procedure except when indicated as an adjunct to other palatal procedures. It may therefore mean that either our programmes are not effective or that the people have not understood them and so we must find a way to further educate our people on how to go about treating throat disorders.*

Keywords--- traditional, uvulectomy, associated, complications

1. INTRODUCTION

Traditional uvulectomy is a surgical procedure which involves the resection of a portion of the uvula as a treatment option for pharyngeal symptoms by traditional Surgeons. These traditional surgeons are usually barbers by profession and only practice surgery on a part-time basis. Most of their patients do well but some have to be rushed to the hospital with severe post-operative bleeding or infections [1]. In the practice of Otolaryngology, the procedure is rare the world over, except when carried out as an adjunct to other palatal procedures such as uvulopalatopharyngoplasty [2].

The removal of the uvula has been shown to be a common practice among traditional Surgeons in sub-Saharan Africa, the Maghreb and in Israel [3]. In northern part of Nigeria the practice is commonest among the Hausa ethnic group and practitioners believed that uvulectomy can protect the patient from various infections of the throat [4]. Some of the serious complications of the procedure have long been emphasised. They include obstructive sleep apnoea with snoring caused by palatal stenosis [5], post-operative haemorrhage [6], local infections (bacterial, fungal or viral) [7], clavicular fracture [8] and even massive bleeding in a pregnant woman with intrauterine fetal death due to severe anaemia post traditional uvulectomy has been reported [9].

Thirty-three years before now, Ijaduola GT [1] had shown that the uvula could be removed for minor pharyngeal lesions, and that uvulectomy is a common procedure for "throat problems" in Nigeria.

2. CASE REPORT

We report the case of a 29-year-old Nigerian lady with severe pharyngitis, progressive dysphagia and odynophagia of five days duration. Patient had traditional uvulectomy in a Barber's workshop after which she developed severe throat pain, progressive dysphagia, odynophagia and fever. On examination of her throat, she showed complete absence of the uvula, palatal ulceration and purulent discharge from the operation site (figure 1) below.

Patient was admitted to the female surgical ward and managed on intravenous antibiotics, fluids, and analgesics. She was discharge home 4 days later after all the symptoms have subsided with throat findings as shown in figure 2 below.

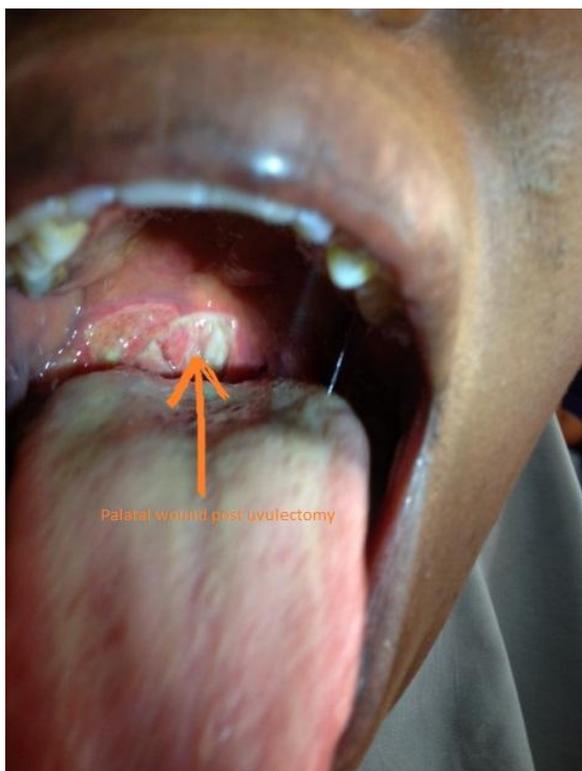


Figure 1

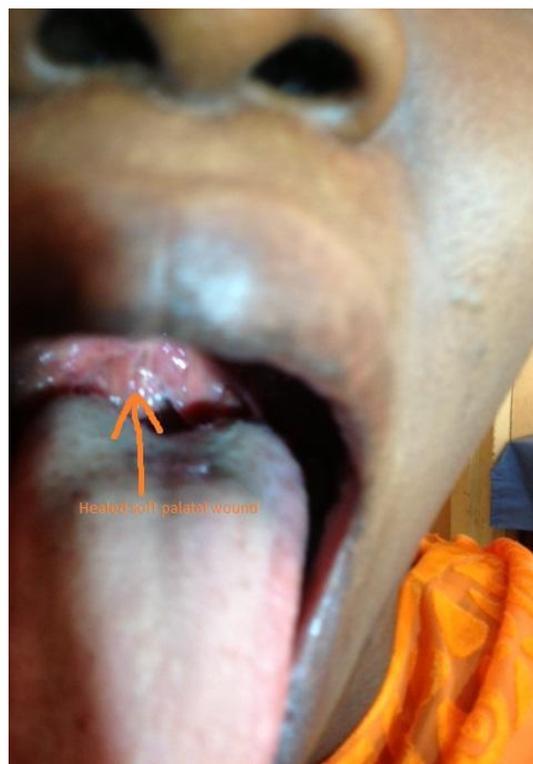


Figure 2.

Our diagnosis of acute severe pharyngitis secondary to traditional uvulectomy was made.

3. DISCUSSION

Traditional uvulectomy is one of the harmful surgical procedures carried out by our traditional Surgeons and the practice is as old as mankind. These traditional surgeons are usually barbers by profession and only practice surgery on a part-time basis. Most of their patients do well but some have to be rushed to the hospital with severe post-operative bleeding or infections [1].

In Otolaryngology practice all over the world, this procedure is rare and unnecessary especially in this era of antibiotics. As most patients with uvulitis, pharyngitis and tonsillitis do well on conventional antibiotic treatment and hence uvulectomy is rarely necessary. However, in few occasions the uvula may be removed in addition to other palatal procedures such as uvulopalatopharyngoplasty [2]. This is not so with our Traditional Surgeons who tend to remove the uvula anytime someone complained to them of throat problems. From their own point of view, all throat disorders are believed to be caused by a diseased uvula and hence uvulectomy will cure the patient's problems and also protect them from future ones [4]. Several authors have reported several complications of this procedure, such as obstructive sleep apnoea with snoring [5], post-operative haemorrhage [6], local infections [7], clavicular fracture [8], intrauterine fetal death due to severe anaemia [9] etc.

4. CONCLUSION

Our report had shown that the practice of traditional uvulectomy is still ongoing and that previous health programs have not yielded the desired results. We must find a way of further educating our people so as to put an end to this harmful cultural practice in order to avoid its morbidity and mortality.

5. REFERENCES

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