SOUTH AFRICAN EXPERIENCE WITH
CROSS- LINKED ULTRAHIGH MOLECULAR WEIGHT
POLYETHYLENE IN TOTAL HIP ARTHROPLASTY

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A thesis submitted to the Faculty of Health Sciences,
University of the Witwatersrand
In fulfillment of the requirements for the degree
of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

Johannesburg
2009
DECLARATION

I, Josip Nenad Cakic declare that this thesis is my own work. It is being submitted for degree of Doctor of Philosophy in the University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg.

It has not been submitted before for any degree or examination at this or any other University.

____________________

day of ________________, 2009.
DEDICATION

In Memory of my father

Josip Cakic, Sr.

1932 – 1999

to

Jasmine and my boys for their patience and support when I needed it most
PUBLICATIONS AND PRESENTATIONS ARISING FROM THIS STUDY

PUBLICATION:

Clinical experience with gamma irradiation-crosslinked polyethylene
- A 14 to 20 year follow-up report


PRESENTATIONS:


Crosslinked high density polyethylene in South Africa 16 – 23 year follow up


Cross-linked High Density Polyethylene Update 16 – 23 years follow up


Cross-linking of polyethylene cups in South Africa


Gamma cross-linked polyethylene old vs. new

South African Arthroplasty Society Meeting, Drakensberg, 12 – 17 April 2005
THESIS SUMMARY

SOUTH AFRICAN EXPERIENCE WITH CROSS- LINKED ULTRAHIGH MOLECULAR WEIGHT POLYETHYLENE IN TOTAL HIP ARTHROPLASTY

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Degree: Doctor of Philosophy, PhD

Keywords: ultra-high molecular weight polyethylene
total hip replacement
cross-linking
Total hip replacement (THR) is an effective method of treatment for patients with hip disability. The procedure is capable of providing long-term functional improvement with excellent control of pain and restoration of function. Sir J Charnley developed a concept of low friction arthroplasty, which was based on use of ultra-high molecular weight polyethylene acetabular and stainless steel femoral components. The components were attached to bone with the use of polymethylmethacrylate (PMMA) bone cement. This concept has been very successful, and is considered the gold standard of THR.

Aseptic loosening of the prosthetic components remains the single most important reason for failure of THRs. Wear to the ultra high molecular weight polyethylene (UHMWPE) acetabular cup is a well-known cause of osteolysis and aseptic loosening of the components. Thus, substantial improvement to the wear resistance of UHMWPE could extend the clinical life span of total hip replacements. In an attempt to reduce polyethylene wear and subsequent osteolysis, a method was developed in the early seventies in South Africa to improve polyethylene quality by means of gamma ray cross-linking. The acetabular cup was irradiated with 100 Kilogray in an acetylene environment, which was used as a cross-linking gas material, resulting in improvement of UHMWPE wear resistance.

Influenced by the world trend and with the advent of a ceramic bearing surface, the Project of cross-linking was, to a certain extent, forgotten. Patients followed up in the late 1990s, showed minimal or total absence of wear after 15 years or longer.
Based on my preliminary studies, and anticipating the world trend of acceptance of cross-link UHMWPE, the aim of this research is to consolidate the results from the largest long term group of patients with acetylene cross-link UHMWPE, to study polyethylene gamma irradiated in the presence of a cross-linking acetylene gas and the effects of it, in vitro, using a hip simulator. I was planning to communicate with as many patients as possible from the group operated on from 1977 until 1983 in whom cross-link UHMWPE was used. This group of over thousand patients represents the largest group of patients with cross-linked UHMWPE acetabular components in the world, with the longest clinical follow up of over 20 years on average.

The first part of the research is a retrospective study:
The goal was to contact as many patients as possible who were operated on during the period 1977 to 1983 when cross-linked polyethylene was used. To qualified for the study each patient had to have an early postoperative and the latest follow up radiograph.

The radiological study consisted of the radiological measurement of wear. For this purpose the Hip Analysis Suite program was used. This is a software program designed by Dr John M. Martell from the University of Chicago, which is widely used and internationally accepted for that purpose. Image analysis offers significant improvements in reproducibility and accuracy when compared to manual analysis.
The final results were compared with results of polyethylene wear in patients in whom conventional UHMWPE was used. For this comparison only patients with acetabular components made from the same UHMWPE material and from the same supplier were used. The conventional UHMWPE is a component of the gold standard of hip replacement surgery. World-wide published follow up studies of 15 years and longer using conventional UHMWPE were compared to the cross-link UHMWPE group.

If revision surgery was indicated for whatever reason in patients in with cross-linked UHMWPE acetabular components, the retrieved prosthesis was analyzed. The analysis consisted of examination of the articular surface of the cross-linked acetabular component for micro wear phenomena using a Scanning Electron Microscope (SEM). In order to perform an objective analysis of the retrieved components, two independent laboratories were used, namely:

Peterson Tribology Laboratory, Loma Linda University, California, and
Biomechanical Laboratory, Faculty of Engineering, University of Pretoria.

The analyses were possible thanks to collaboration with Dr Ian Clark from Peterson Tribology Laboratory and Dr NDL Burger in charge of the Biomechanical Laboratory at the Department of Engineering, University of Pretoria.
Concurrent with retrospective radiological analysis and SEM analysis of the retrievals, a prospective study of the new chemically cross-linked cups was also performed.

In the majority of patients with total hip replacement, walking is the activity that contributes most to wear. An average person takes around 5000 steps per day, which extrapolates to 1.8 million steps per year for a lower extremity, or 0.9 million steps per hip joint. The hip simulator was used to simulate the average annual cycles of walking, where one million cycles will correspond to one year of normal average walking per hip joint.

In hip joint simulation, appropriate load was used at constant value to simulate average body weight. Similarly, for objectivity and independency, part of the analysis was performed under the supervision of Dr Stephen Li in the Tribology Laboratory, Sarasota, Florida. By using independent Institutions I hoped to achieve the highest possible level of expertise and objectivity.
The contribution of South Africa to the method of cross-linking is important. This is a cheap and effective way to improve the quality of the polyethylene with minimal increase in the cost of the final implant. I believe that the South African method has proved itself to transform UHMWPE into a material with a highly acceptable level of reliability, and it is important to scientifically consolidate the available data for access to everyone.

Figure 1: Pretoria Hip design by prof C Grobbelaar
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I would like to thank the following colleagues for their support, that made this study possible:

- Prof. F.A. Weber for his teaching and guidance, and for providing me with his clinical data
- Prof. C. Grobbelaar for allowing me to use his clinical data
- Prof. B. Sweet and Prof. C.M. Schnitzler for guidance and objective criticism that helped me to finish this thesis
- Prof. D. Burger for his help with biomechanical work, assistance and guidance
- Dr B. Wium for his help with work on histological specimens
- Dr G. Liknitzky for his help with statistical analysis
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(From: Muratoglu et al., The Journal of Arthroplasty, 2001, Vol. 16 No. 2:149-160.)

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28-X = liners with a 28-mm inner diameter and elevated cross-linked polyethylene,
32-0 = liners with a 32-mm inner diameter and nominally cross-linked polyethylene,
32-X = liners with a 32-mm inner diameter and elevated cross-linked polyethylene.


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(From: Muratoglu et al., The Journal of Arthroplasty, 2001, Vol. 16 No. 2:149-160.)

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