



## Hematological markers of periprosthetic joint infection after revision total hip arthroplasty

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### Abstract

Analysis of clinical and laboratory tests is essential for monitoring the course of infectious complications after total hip arthroplasty (THA). **The objective** was to assess the reliability of differences in hematological parameters in patients with periprosthetic joint infection (PJI) for monitoring the infectious process. **Material and methods** Patients with acute (lasting 21.8 days on average) and chronic (lasting for 26.3 months on average) PJI were screened for hematological parameters on admission and during treatment in order to control the course of the purulent-inflammatory process. **Results** Preoperative parameters demonstrated mild anemia in patients with acute PJI, and the hemoglobin concentration was normal in patients with chronic PJI. Patients of both groups showed normal total leukocyte count. ESR and C-reactive protein levels were many times higher than the threshold values. The C-reactive protein level was more than 2 times higher in patients with acute PJI than that in patients with a chronic infection. The ratio of ESR / C-reactive protein was normally greater than 5 units, from 3 to 4.5 in chronic PJI and from 1.5 to 2.3 in acute PJI. Discussion Examination of pre- and postoperative clinically significant parameters is practical for identification of the criteria to assess the risk of chronic PJI. **Conclusion** Patients with acute PJI need no additional clinical and laboratory examination, integral laboratory parameters can be employed for accurate assessment of the extent of inflammation in a purulent wound.

**Keywords:** hip joint, revision total hip arthroplasty, blood, periprosthetic joint infection

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## INTRODUCTION

Prosthetic joint infection (PJI) following total joint replacement surgery is a serious complication that negatively impacts patients' lives and is financially burdensome for healthcare providers. This is associated with high relapse rates and a significant risk of mortality among elderly patients [1, 2]. Lack of efficacy of the PJI treatment can be caused by limited data on the period of formation of an irreversible bacterial attachment to the endoprosthetic surface [3]. Effectiveness of treatment using different therapies remains low with failure of 24-75 % treated for PJI [4-6]. There is a wide range of infection diagnostic tools to mitigate the impact of disease. A clinical and laboratory diagnostic algorithm would facilitate the optimal treatment option for the patient and lower risk of recurrence [7-10].

New clinical and laboratory criteria for diagnosing PJI was discussed at the 2nd International Consensus Meeting on Musculoskeletal Infection (Philadelphia, 2018) [11-15]. Clinical recommendations of the Ministry of Health of the Russian Federation on "Prevention of infections in the area of surgical intervention" indicate the need for clinical (complaints, anamnesis, physical examination), hematological (leukocyte level, ESR, CRP),

cytological (leukocyte level, neutrophils), microbiological and radiological (radiography, fistulography and CT, if needed) examinations [16]. Clinical and biochemical blood tests are performed for severity of the purulent process. Anemia, hypoproteinemia, thrombocytosis and hyperfibrinogenemia are the most characteristic signs of PJI [17]. Alterations in D-dimer, lipopolysaccharide-binding protein and presepsin (sCD14-ST) were noted in addition to the classic changes in acute phase proteins (interleukin-1, interleukin-6) [18-23].

The combination of ESR (> 30 mm/h) and CRP (> 10 mg/l) was the most sensitive diagnostic criterion indicating infection in 90-100 %, as reported earlier [24-26]. The diagnostic role of the parameters was not so high with low grade infection [27, 28]. We thought it was necessary to evaluate these data for different types of PJI (acute and chronic) with comparison of a large amount of literature data on the diagnosis of PJI including acute-phase hematological parameters. The objective was to assess the reliability of differences in hematological parameters of patients with PJI of the hip for monitoring the infectious process.

## MATERIAL AND METHODS

Hematology blood tests of patients with PJI of the hip treated between 2005 and 2020 by one surgical team at the Federal State Budgetary Institution "National Medical Research Ilizarov Center for Trauma and Orthopaedics" Ministry of Health of the Russian Federation were analyzed. Exclusion criteria included inconsistency with the age group and incomplete data in the medical record, malignant and decompensated chronic diseases. Inclusion criteria included age, diagnosis, duration and severity of the disease. The disease was diagnosed based on physical examination and laboratory testing. Informed consent was given prior to inclusion in this study by all patients. The study received a favourable opinion from the relevant research ethics committee of the Federal State Budgetary Institution "Ilizarov National Medical Research Centre for Traumatology and Orthopaedics" Russian Ministry of Health.

The mean age of the patients was  $54.7 \pm 12.7$  years (Me, 56; 95 % CI 52.7 to 56.8; IQR 46-65), with 36 % (n = 53) of patients aged 60 years and over, with males of 56 % (n = 82). On admission, 71 % (n = 105) of patients were diagnosed with a fistulous form of PJI, 9 % (n = 13) had open wounds and 20 % (n = 29) had swelling and hyperemia of the postoperative suture. Infection was observed in 78 % (n = 114) after primary joint replacement and in 22 % (n = 33) after revision surgery. Absolute signs of PJI were diagnosed in 114 (77.5 %) patients with the presence of a fistulous tract communicating with the joint cavity and/or with a pathogen strain with the same phenotype isolated from two biological samples. Relative signs were identified in 33 (22.5 %) patients with an average IMC score of  $5.96 \pm 2.70$  (range, 2 to 14); Me, 6.0; 95 % CI 5.0 to 6.9; MQR 2.1-3.5, as mentioned in protocol of the 2<sup>nd</sup> International Consensus Meeting on Musculoskeletal Infection. Based on the nature of the infectious process, patients were divided into 2 groups. Group 1 (n = 28;

19 %) included patients with acute PJI (mean infectious period of 21.8 days; Me, 22; 95 % CI from 19.7 to 24.0; IQR 17-27.5). Group 2 included patients with chronic PJI (n = 119 or 81 %, respectively) (mean infectious period of 26.3 months, Me, 13; 95 % CI 20.5 to 32.3; IQR 8-35).

Data on isolated gram-positive (44 and 55 %) and gram-negative (7 and 10 %) bacteria are presented in Table 1 for comparison between the groups. Nearly every third (29 %) case of acute PJI was caused by methicillin-resistant strains of epidermal staphylococcus, and microbial associations (p = 0.04) and strains of methicillin-resistant staphylococci MRSE (p = 0.03) were common for acute cases as compared to chronic PJI.

The American Society of Anaesthesiologists physical status classification was used to assess a patient's overall health. Severe comorbidities were recorded in 56 % (n = 82) and 7 % of patients had no prior documented comorbidity. Hematological parameters of the patients were examined on admission and during treatment in order to monitor the dynamics of the disease. The equipment employed for the study included Hitachi/BM 902 automated analyzer (Japan, registration No. 2000/564 Ministry of Health of the Russian Federation); the Beckman automated Paragon protein chemistry analyzer (USA, registration no. 2005/282); Stat Fax spectrophotometer (registration no. 2004/1258). The reference intervals were referred to as normal ranges by clinical laboratories. Nonparametric statistical methods were used to process the data; significant differences were assessed in the groups using the Wilcoxon test. The samples were checked for normal distribution; differences were considered statistically significant at p < 0.05. Statistical processing was based on electronic database generated with Microsoft Excel integrated module AtteStat 1.0.

Table 1

Microbiological characteristics of patients with acute and chronic PJI of the hip joint

Evaluation criteria	Characteristics of patients with PJI (n = 147)		Statistical significance (p)
	Acute PJI (n = 28)	Chronic PJI (n = 119)	
Type of PJI			
Average manifestation of infection	21.8 (13-28) days	26.3 (1-204) months	–
Gram-positive bacteria	43 % (n = 12)	55 % (n = 66)	P = 0.23
Gram-negative bacteria	7 % (n = 2)	10 % (n = 12)	P = 0.64
Microbial associations	46 % (n = 13)	27 % (n = 32)	P = 0.04*
No growth detected	4 % (n = 1)	8 % (n = 9)	P = 0.46
MRSA	7 % (n = 2)	12 % (n = 14)	P = 0.48
MRSE	29 % (n = 8)	13 % (n = 15)	P = 0.03*
ESBL	7 % (n = 2)	3 % (n = 4)	P = 0.36
<i>P. aeruginosa</i>	11 % (n = 3)	10 % (n = 12)	P = 0.92

Note: statistically significant differences in the level of polymicrobial infection (p = 0.04) and MRSE strains (p = 0.03) were identified in the groups.

## RESULTS

Clinically significant parameters of inflammation and postoperative blood loss were the most informative laboratory tests. Table 2 included hemoglobin and total leukocyte count, ESR and C-reactive protein; other hematological parameters were within the reference values and are not reported.

Preoperative measurements showed mild anemia in patients with acute PJI (hemoglobin Me 118 g/L, IQR 105-121) and normal hemoglobin values in patients with chronic PJI (hemoglobin Me 136.5 g/L, IQR 101-156). Patients of both groups had normal leukocyte count. ESR (average  $61.5 \pm 29.7$  mm/h calculated using the Westergren method) and CRP (average  $24.3 \pm 23.5$  mg/l) showed much higher values

than the ESR and CRP threshold. C-reactive protein level was more than twice higher in patients with a short period of infection than in patients with a chronic infectious process.

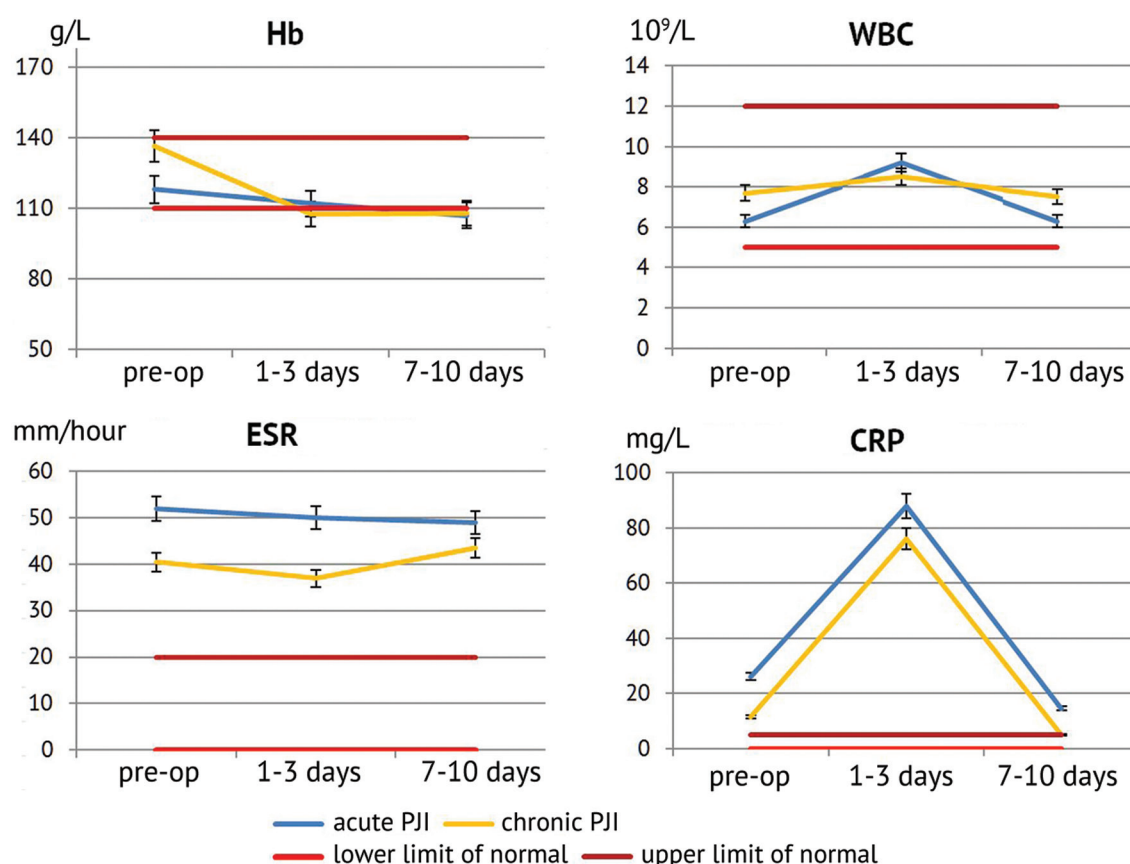
Hemoglobin values were comparable in both groups and, as expected, below the preoperative level; they remained at the lower limit of normal at 7-10 postoperative days. Total leukocyte count was within the reference range in patients of both groups increasing insignificantly at 1-3 days of surgery. ESR and C-reactive protein levels were significantly higher than normal throughout the observation period and were statistically higher in patients with a chronic course of the inflammatory process than in patients with acute infection.

Table 2

Preoperative laboratory blood test performed in patients with PJI of the hip

Description	Acute PJI (n = 28)	Chronic PJI (n = 119)
Hb, g/L	Me 118 IQR (105-121)	Me 136.5 IQR (101-156)
WBC, $10^9/L$	Me 6,3 IQR (6.2-7.2)	Me 7.7 IQR (6.2-8.8)
ESR, mm/h	<b>Me 52*#</b> IQR (48-61)	Me 40.5* IQR (19.5-79.5)
CRP, mg/L	<b>Me 26*#</b> IQR (10-64)	Me 11.5* IQR (6-18)
ESR/CRP, units	<b>Me 2.03*#</b> IQR (1.5-2.3)	<b>Me 3.6*</b> IQR (3.0-4.5)

Note: \*parameters having statistically significant differences with reference values at a significance level of  $p < 0.05$ ; #, parameters having statistically significant differences between groups at a significance level of  $p < 0.05$ .



**Fig. 1** Hematological parameters of patients of group 1 and group 2 measured preoperatively and at different time points: Hb, hemoglobin; WBC, white blood cells; ESR, erythrocyte sedimentation rate; CRP, C-reactive protein

## DISCUSSION

Complete resolution of the acute inflammatory process and total repair is the optimal way to address complications in the form of PJI after total hip replacement. Chronic PJI represents a huge challenge for physicians. Analysis of clinically significant pre- and postoperative parameters may help surgeons to make an appropriate choice of criteria for assessing the risk of chronic PJI. Preoperative and dynamic observations of major clinically significant hematological tests in patients with acute (mean infectious period of 21.8 days) and chronic (duration on average 26.3 months) PJI showed a high ESR level, one of the nonspecific markers of inflammation. The ESR values were several times higher than the reference range and amounted to 520 % in group 1 and 405 % in group 2. Similar findings were recorded for C-reactive protein, another nonspecific marker of the inflammatory response. C-reactive protein level was higher than the reference range in patients of both groups. However, the differences between the groups were more significant. The average values were 2.3 times higher in patients with acute inflammation than those in patients with chronic inflammation. A close relationship between hemoglobin and the activity level of the inflammatory process was reported [29, 30]. Although a decreased hemoglobin level is a most common cause of chronic inflammation, the patients showed some signs of anemia in the acute period. There might be no association between local clinical manifestations of purulent surgical disease and a WBC count [31]. The WBC count was within normal range preoperatively and increased early post-surgery and at 7-10 days in patients of both groups.

It is known that leukocytes are the main line of defense against bacterial agents and one of the main criteria for assessing the degree of a purulent-inflammatory process, and the studied hematological parameters do not allow a differential assessment between acute and chronic inflammatory processes during revision hip arthroplasty. Leukocytes represent the body's initial line of defense against bacterial agents and one of the main criteria for assessing the degree of an inflammatory process. The hematological parameters explored do not allow a differential assessment between acute and chronic inflammation during revision THA. This opportunity is often provided by the use of integral laboratory indicators, and some researchers propose interesting mathematical models that make it possible to more accurately assess the degree of inflammation in a purulent wound [32, 33, 34]. The opportunity is often provided by integrated laboratory parameters, and some researchers report interesting mathematical models for more accurate assessment of the extent of inflammation in a purulent wound [32, 33, 34]. In our series, ESR/C-reactive protein ratio was used for the calculations. A normal ratio has been calculated as greater than 5 units, chronic PJI is characterized by a ratio ranging from 3 to 4.5 units and acute PJI has a range from 1.5 to 2.3. The use of the ESR/C-reactive protein ratio, leukocyte counts including the body resistance index, the leukocyte to ESR ratio index, the blood leukocyte shift index [5-7] requires no additional economic costs, giving advantages in predicting risks and potential indirect economic benefits.

## CONCLUSION

The combination of clinical and laboratory parameters of PJI after primary THA has a high diagnostic value. However, the importance of clinical and laboratory methods is significantly reduced in the presence of low-virulent pathogens. Effectiveness of debridement prior to revision arthroplasty of large joints or timely detection of the latent phase of PJI remains an essential issue. Our findings have shown a unidirectional change in hematological parameters of patients with acute and chronic PJI during the first 10 days of revision arthroplasty. The dynamics

in parameters was characterized the body's stereotypical reaction to surgery in both groups. Laboratory diagnostic methods of standard preoperative procedures allowed no prediction on the transition of the clinical form of acute PJI to the chronic stage. The strategy for improved outcomes of revision arthroplasty should focus on improved diagnostic algorithms for a comprehensive examination of patients prior to revision surgery to facilitate timely identification or elimination of latent PJI and adjustment of treatment plan if needed.

**Conflict of interest** None declared.

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 Matveeva E.L., Gasanova A.G., Spirikina E.S. – collection and processing of material.  
 Gasanova A.G., Spirikina E.S. – statistical processing.  
 Matveeva E.L., Luneva S.N. – writing text.  
 Ermakov A.M., Matveeva E.L., Luneva S.N., Gasanova A.G., Spirikina E.S. – editing.