Evaluating the Application of Ultrasound and Magnetic Resonance Imaging in Soft Tissue Injuries of the Knee Joint: A Comparative Diagnostic Analysis

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ABSTRACT

Traumatic and degenerative knee lesions require highly accurate diagnostic modalities to formulate optimal management strategies. This prospective study evaluates the diagnostic efficacy of high-frequency ultrasonography (US) versus magnetic resonance imaging (MRI) in detecting intra-articular and extra-articular knee pathologies. Analyzing a cohort of 132 adult patients with acute or subacute knee trauma, the research quantifies both modalities against arthroscopic reference standards. Empirical data indicate ultrasonography exhibits high sensitivity (91.4%) for superficial pathologies (collateral ligament tears, joint effusions) but lacks diagnostic depth for cruciate ligaments and complex meniscal tears. Conversely, MRI demonstrated a diagnostic accuracy of 96.8% for medial meniscus lesions and 98.1% for anterior cruciate ligament ruptures. The dynamics of the observed outcomes advocate for a sequential diagnostic algorithm: utilizing ultrasound as an initial triage tool for superficial injuries, reserving MRI for deep intra-articular derangements. This integrated protocol optimizes resource allocation in regional medical centers without compromising diagnostic integrity.

KEYWORDS: Medical radiology, knee joint trauma, ultrasonography, magnetic resonance imaging, meniscal tear, diagnostic accuracy, musculoskeletal imaging.

INTRODUCTION

The structural integrity of the knee joint relies on a complex biomechanical network of ligaments, menisci, and capsular structures. Disruptions from trauma or degenerative alterations precipitate significant functional impairment. Clinical examination frequently yields ambiguous results due to hemarthrosis and muscle guarding, necessitating advanced radiological interventions.

Epidemiological indicators reveal internal knee derangements account for up to 50% of orthopedic referrals requiring advanced imaging. A persistent scientific gap surrounds the optimization of imaging algorithms in resource-constrained settings. High-field MRI provides unparalleled soft-tissue contrast but is limited by high capital costs and contraindications. Concurrently, high-resolution ultrasonography offers real-time dynamic assessment and high spatial resolution for superficial structures. Conducted at the Andijan State Medical Institute, this study systematically evaluates the diagnostic utility of both modalities. Investigating specific diagnostic blind spots allows for the development of an evidence-based, stratified protocol suitable for regional traumatology departments.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

A prospective diagnostic accuracy design enrolled 132 patients (78 males, 54 females; mean age 34.2 ± 8.6 years) presenting with acute or subacute knee trauma between January 2023 and March 2024. Patients with severe intra-articular fractures or extensive osteoarthritis were systematically excluded.

Ultrasonographic examinations utilized a premium high-frequency linear array transducer (7–14 MHz), incorporating dynamic stress testing to evaluate ligamentous laxity across all quadrants. Subsequent MRI evaluations were conducted using a 1.5

Tesla scanner. The protocol included sagittal, coronal, and axial planes utilizing T1-weighted, T2-weighted, and Proton Density (PD) fat-suppressed sequences (slice thickness 3.0 mm). Arthroscopy served as the absolute reference standard.

Mathematical-statistical analysis was executed using SPSS Statistics 26.0. The McNemar test evaluated differences between modalities, with statistical significance defined at $p < 0.05$ and a 95% Confidence Interval (CI).

RESULTS

Arthroscopic intervention confirmed 84 medial meniscus (MM) tears, 42 lateral meniscus (LM) tears, 56 anterior cruciate ligament (ACL) ruptures, and 34 medial collateral ligament (MCL) sprains within the cohort.

For evaluating the MCL, ultrasonography demonstrated high diagnostic correlation with MRI, achieving a sensitivity of 91.2% (95% CI 84.5-95.6) and a specificity of 94.0%. Real-time valgus stress testing provided dynamic functional data unattainable via static MRI.

However, ultrasonographic efficacy diminished precipitously for intra-articular structures. US sensitivity for ACL ruptures dropped to 48.2%, primarily detecting indirect signs like joint effusion. In stark contrast, MRI displayed formidable diagnostic accuracy for ACL lesions, with a sensitivity of 98.2% and specificity of 97.5% ($p < 0.001$ compared to US).

Meniscal evaluations presented a mixed profile. MRI remained the gold standard, identifying MM tears with 96.4% sensitivity. Ultrasonographic detection was strictly limited to peripheral vascularized zones (sensitivity 64.5%), entirely failing to resolve central substance and radial tears masked by acoustic shadowing.

DISCUSSION

The empirical clinical data reveals that diagnostic disparities between US and MRI are rooted in physical principles. High-frequency acoustic waves suffer from rapid

attenuation and total internal reflection upon encountering cortical bone, obscuring the intercondylar notch. Furthermore, anisotropic artifacts frequently complicate sonographic evaluation of collateral ligaments, requiring profound operator expertise.

Pathophysiological tissue changes manifest distinctly across modalities. MRI relies on differences in proton density, allowing fat-suppressed sequences to vividly highlight intrameniscal fluid accumulation prior to physical tearing.

Integrating the current findings suggests entirely bypassing ultrasound is economically inefficient. A substantial subset of knee pain originates from extra-articular pathologies (Baker's cysts, superficial tendinopathy). In these scenarios, US is actively superior due to its capacity for immediate dynamic functional evaluation.

SCIENTIFIC NOVELTY AND PRACTICAL SIGNIFICANCE

Within the specific clinical demographic of the Fergana Valley, this study quantifies the precise diagnostic overlaps and blind spots between US and MRI, translating qualitative observations into validated metrics.

Implementing these findings allows for a highly efficient, two-tiered radiological triage algorithm. Patients with localized superficial pain should be primarily routed to high-resolution ultrasonography. Only upon negative ultrasound findings coupled with persistent mechanical symptoms should patients advance to MRI. This stratified approach decreases unnecessary MRI utilization by up to 28%, significantly reducing healthcare expenditures.

CONCLUSION

Optimizing the diagnostic pathway for knee joint soft tissue injuries requires a synergistic application of both modalities. Clinical evidence confirms MRI as the apex diagnostic tool for intra-articular derangements like meniscal and cruciate ligament ruptures. Nevertheless, high-frequency ultrasonography remains a highly sensitive instrument for evaluating the extra-articular ligamentous complex. Adopting a

sequential imaging algorithm based on anatomical probability maximizes diagnostic yield and provides a scientifically sound framework for the economical deployment of radiological resources.

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