Technical note

Conversion of total shoulder arthroplasty to reverse shoulder arthroplasty made possible by custom humeral adapter

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Abstract

Reverse shoulder arthroplasty (RSA) is increasingly being used to revise anatomical total shoulder arthroplasty cases. This procedure’s high complication rate has been reduced by the availability of modular shoulder systems, which allows the humeral component to be preserved during the conversion. This case report describes the revision of an anatomical shoulder implant inserted in 1998. Polyethylene wear and the resulting metal-on-metal contact had caused metallosis. Since the existing humeral implant was not compatible with standard conversion products, the manufacturer provided a custom humeral adapter that allowed the humeral stem to be preserved. This approach greatly simplified the surgical procedure and resulted in good anatomical and clinical outcomes after 9 months of follow-up.

1. Introduction

An increasing number of anatomical total shoulder arthroplasty (TSA) cases are being revised by reverse shoulder arthroplasty (RSA). The results are quite satisfactory but complications occur in up to one-third of cases [1–3], partly because the humeral component needs to be removed. Recent studies [4–7] have highlighted the advantages of modular implant systems that allow conversion of an anatomical TSA to a RSA, while preserving the well-fixed humeral implant and even the metal-backed glenoid component. This case report describes the revision of an anatomical total shoulder implant inserted in 1998 that was not compatible with current conversion kits. A custom humeral adapter simplified the reverse arthroplasty conversion by allowing us to keep the humeral stem.

2. Case report

A 71-year-old male patient in good general health consulted us for pain in the left shoulder and cramping that had started a few months earlier. TSA (Aequalis®, Tornier, Montbonnot, France) had been performed by one of the authors in 1998. This implant consisted of a cemented modular stem with spacer, humeral head and metal-backed glenoid component. The outcome had been highly satisfactory for 15 years, with a Constant score of 75 recorded in 2010. Clinical examination found a flexible shoulder with subscapularis (SS) insufficiency. The Constant score had dropped to 30. Radiographs revealed significant polyethylene wear with minimal osteolysis at the base of the humeral stem and near the expansion screws on the glenoid component (Fig. 1). The implants were well fixed and no radiolucent lines were visible. CT scans confirmed severe polyethylene wear (Fig. 2) and showed that implant inclination was normal. However metal-related artefacts made it difficult to evaluate the glenoid bone stock. The SS was in mediocre condition with grade 2+/3 fatty infiltration. The upper and posterior rotator cuff muscles were in excellent condition. The fact that the polyethylene insert was completely worn out 16 years after the initial surgery led us to fear metallosis due to metal-on-metal contact. The indication for arthroplasty revision was made. The surgical decision algorithm was based on the condition of the SS and glenoid observed intraoperatively. If the SS was considered functional, arthroplasty would only be performed at the humerus and the glenoid would be reconstructed with an iliac crest autograft if necessary. If not, the problem would much more complex because a reverse arthroplasty would have to be performed. This would require changing the humeral stem and providing solid glenoid baseplate fixation, which may require reconstruction with a tricortical iliac crest graft. For the latter case, the original implant’s manufacturer (Tornier) could provide us with a custom humeral adapter (Fig. 3) that would considerably simplify the reverse arthroplasty conversion procedure by allowing the humeral stem to be preserved after the humeral head and spacer.
were removed. This decision would be made in the context of a
risk-benefit assessment for the patient. French laws make the sur-
gon and manufacturer responsible for the outcome when custom
implants are used. Approval from the French National Agency for
Medicines and Health Products Safety (ANSM) was not required.

The surgical procedure was performed in 2014 using a deltopec-
toral approach. After extensive periglenoid arthrolysis, the axillary
nerve was identified and multiple samples collected for microbiol-
yology testing. After the humeral head and spacer were removed, we
found that the polyethylene insert was almost completely gone.
Severe metallosis was present in the soft tissues particularly in the
SS, which was non-functional; this was brought on by significant
wear on the posterior side of the metal-backed glenoid component
where it contacted the humeral head (Fig. 4). The glenoid bone stock
was very good, except for limited osteolysis around the expansion

screws. Based on these findings, we decided to convert the implant
to a reverse shoulder configuration using the humeral adapter. The
glenoid bone was not reconstructed because the defect created by
osteolysis around the screws could be used for the baseplate peg.
Overall, the procedure was fairly simple and lasted 135 minutes.
Excellent baseplate fixation was achieved and the joint was easily
reduced. Use of a 36-mm glenosphere and 6-mm insert resulted in
no significant arm lengthening. Microbiology testing was nega-
tive; metallosis of the soft tissues was confirmed by the anatomic
pathology group.

The postoperative course was uneventful with limited blood
loss (2 g decrease in haemoglobin). The shoulder’s appearance on
radiographs was satisfactory (Fig. 5). Using Orthoview software, the
increase in arm length was determined to be 2 cm using the supe-
rior end of the glenoid and a fixed marker on the humeral implant
tuberosity reattachment holes as landmarks. The clinical outcome
was good: Constant score of 70 and active forward flexion of 150°
(Fig. 6) after 9 months follow-up.

3. Discussion

In most cases, the decision to revise a hemiarthroplasty or
anatomical TSA by converting it to RSA is related to a non-function-
lar rotator cuff in elderly patients or instability. The humeral implant
is typically well fixed, independent of whether it is cemented or
lengthening in a set of 14 patients who had five different types of implants; the authors felt the postoperative outcome was not affects by the lengthening. This lengthening is slightly greater than the average lengthening of 1.6 cm reported by Lädermann et al. after primary RSA [8]. In a radiographic simulation study, Teschner et al. [9] estimated that lengthening would be 1.1 to 3.3 cm after conversion, depending on implant type. The metaphyseal modularity offered by some manufacturers could prevent this lengthening by lowering the humeral insert. But the deep intra-osseous recess needed for this modular component adds to the complexity of the surgery and there are potential complications related to the additional metal interface. Arm lengthening could make conversion impossible unless the humeral implant is removed due to excessive tension on the soft tissues. This was found in nearly 25% of the 29 patients evaluated by Kany et al. [7], particularly when the stem was implanted too high. To limit arm lengthening, the smallest glenosphere provided by the manufacturer (typically 36 mm in diameter) and the thinnest possible insert should be used.

Preservation of the humeral stem is not guaranteed and depends on if the reverse arthroplasty implants can be reduced intraoperatively. If reduction is impossible, the implant must be removed, the humeral cut made again and the soft tissues released by lowering the humeral component. When preparing for a revision procedure, the surgeon must keep the possibility of having to perform a humeral osteotomy to extract the implant in mind and must make sure to have long humeral stems available.

If a modular shoulder was implanted before conversion systems were conceived, a custom adapter is an elegant solution for preserving the humeral stem if the manufacturer agrees to make one. The surgeon and manufacturer are entirely responsible for the outcome of this procedure and approval of the ANSM is not necessary in France. If a stemless shoulder arthroplasty or shoulder resurfacing had been performed initially, there would be no challenges surrounding conversion and the humeral stem.

**Disclosure of interest**

J. Matsoukis, F. Billuart, K. Houssam and F. Dujardin declare that they have no conflicts of interest concerning this article. G. Walsh receives royalties from Tornier Inc. for patents filed related to shoulder implants.

**References**


