Evidence-based Synthesis Program (ESP)

Benefits and Harms of Femtosecond Laser Assisted Cataract Surgery

A Systematic Review of the Evidence

VA Evidence-based Synthesis Program
Portland VA Medical Center
April 29, 2014
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Acknowledgments

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Disclosure

This research was funded by VA Quality Enhancement Research Initiative’s (QUERI) Evidence-based Synthesis Program, Project #05-225. The report was compiled by the Evidence-based Synthesis Program (ESP) Center located at the Portland VA Medical Center, Portland OR. The findings and conclusions are those of the author(s), and do not necessarily represent the views of the Department of Veterans Affairs or the United States government. Therefore, no statement in this article should be construed as an official position of the Department of Veterans Affairs.

No investigators have any affiliations or financial involvement (e.g., employment, consultancies, honoraria, stock ownership or options, expert testimony, grants or patents received or pending, or royalties) that conflict with material presented in the report.
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VA Evidence-based Synthesis (ESP) Program Overview

- Sponsored by VA Quality Enhancement Research Initiative (QUERI) Program.
- Established to provide timely and accurate syntheses/reviews of healthcare topics identified by VA clinicians, managers and policy-makers, as they work to improve the health and healthcare of Veterans.
- Builds on staff and expertise already in place at the Evidence-based Practice Centers (EPC) designated by AHRQ. Four of these EPCs are also ESP Centers:
  - Durham VA Medical Center; VA Greater Los Angeles Health Care System; Portland VA Medical Center; and Minneapolis VA Medical Center.
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• Provides evidence syntheses on important clinical practice topics relevant to Veterans, and these reports help:
  o develop clinical policies informed by evidence,
  o the implementation of effective services to improve patient outcomes and to support VA clinical practice guidelines and performance measures, and
  o guide the direction for future research to address gaps in clinical knowledge.

• Broad topic nomination process – e.g. VACO, VISNs, field – facilitated by ESP Coordinating Center (Portland) through online process:

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- Steering Committee representing research and operations (PCS, OQP, ONS, and VISN) provides oversight and guides program direction.

- Technical Expert Panel (TEP)
  - Recruited for each topic to provide content expertise.
  - Guides topic development; refines the key questions.
  - Reviews data/draft report.

- External Peer Reviewers & Policy Partners
  - Reviews and comments on draft report

- Final reports posted on VA HSR&D website and disseminated widely through the VA.

http://www.hsrdr.research.va.gov/publications/esp/reports.cfm
Current Report

Benefits and Harms of Femtosecond Laser Assisted Cataract Surgery (FLACS):
A Systematic Review
(December 2013)

Full-length report available on the ESP website:
http://www.hsrdr.research.va.gov/publications/esp/femtosecond.cfm
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Overview of Today’s Presentation

• Background
• Scope of the review
• Results
• Limitations
• Future research
• Implications - panel discussion
Background

• Current preferred method of removing cataracts includes creating manual corneal incisions and anterior capsulotomies, followed by phacoemulsification.

• Recently these three manual procedures have been performed in an automated fashion with the use of the femtosecond laser (FSL).

• Studies have suggested decreased phacoemulsification energy use with FSL cataract surgery and have examined the potential advantages of more precise corneal incisions and capsulotomy formation.
Cataract surgery is frequently performed in the VHA: more than 49,000 performed in 2012.

The VHA National Surgery Office has been tasked with making a recommendation on whether femtosecond lasers provide appropriate cost-benefit and risk-benefit ratios to support implementation for cataract surgery in the VA.

The purpose of this systematic review is to examine the effectiveness and safety of femtosecond laser assisted cataract surgery (FLACS) relative to conventional cataract surgery.
Scope of the Review: Key Questions

- **Key Question 1:** What is the evidence that FLACS is associated with better outcomes than conventional cataract surgery?

- **Key Question 2:**
  a) What are the adverse effects that have been reported for FLACS?
  b) What is the risk of adverse effects from FLACS compared to the risk associated with conventional cataract surgery?

- **Key Question 3:** What is the evidence that the experience of the surgeon is associated with adverse effects of FLACS?
Scope of the Review: Inclusion Criteria

**Patients:** Adults undergoing cataract surgery.

**Intervention:** FSL technology used to assist or replace aspects of conventional cataract surgery, including corneal incisions, capsulotomy, and lens fragmentation.

**Comparator:** Conventional cataract surgery, defined as small-incision, phacoemulsification with posterior-chamber intraocular lenses (IOL) implantation.

**Outcomes:**
- Visual acuity, short-term (post-op day 1) and long-term (after postop day 1, no upper limit)
- Quality of life
- Harms

**Study design:**
- Controlled trials – randomized or non-randomized
- Observational studies comparing FLACS to conventional cataract surgery
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Scope of the Review: Analytic Framework

- **KQ1**
  - **Short-term Outcome:**
    - Visual acuity post-operative at day 1
  - **Long-term Outcomes:**
    - Visual acuity after post-operative day 1 (e.g., 1 week, 1 month or 90 days)
    - Quality of life

- **KQ2a, KQ2b**
  - **Adverse events:**
    - Intra-operative complications
      - Capsular blockage syndrome
      - Dislocated nucleus
      - Capsular tear
      - Docking failure
    - Post-operative
      - Infection
      - Retinal swelling/Cystoid Macular Edema (CME)
      - Intraocular (IOL) decentration
      - Corneal edema

- **KQ3**
  - Context: Experience of surgeon

- Adults undergoing cataract surgery

FLACS vs. conventional cataract surgery
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Scope of the Review: Exclusions

- Non-English language
- Non-adult study population
- No primary data (e.g., editorials) or non-systematic review article
- Outcomes not in scope (e.g., ex-vivo studies)
Methods

• Search of databases (May 2013, updated October 2013)
  • MEDLINE
  • Cochrane library Database of Systematic Reviews and Central Register of Controlled Trials
  • Clinicaltrials.gov
  • FDA premarket notification 510(k) summaries
  • Conference proceedings of ophthalmologic societies and topic specific journals
  • Additional articles and reviews obtained from reference lists and reviewers

• Data abstraction

• Assessment of study quality

• Review of evidence: qualitative synthesis and meta-analysis
Results: Search Yield

468 from electronic databases:
- 76 Medline
- 3 Cochrane library (Trials and DARE)
- 14 Clinicaltrials.gov
- 6 FDA premarket 510(k) summaries
- 369 Ophthalmology or cataract surgery journals

436 from manual searches:
- Conference proceedings
- Reference lists
- Unpublished/ongoing studies

904 total titles and abstracts
- 834 excluded

70 articles and abstracts selected for full-text review
Results: Search Yield, continued

70 articles and abstracts selected for full-text review

19 abstracts of unpublished/ongoing studies

36 excluded articles

15 included studies:
- 9 on benefits (KQ1)
- 9 on harms (KQ2)
- 2 on risks in relation to surgeon experience (KQ3)
Poll Question
(Pick one answer)

What best describes your professional training?

1. Ophthalmologist
2. Optometrist
3. Researcher
4. Other
Poll Question (Practicing ophthalmologists pick one answer)
What best describes your experience with FLACS?

1. Practicing ophthalmologist with FLACS experience
2. Practicing ophthalmologist planning to perform FLACS in the future
3. Practicing ophthalmologist not planning to perform FLACS in the future
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Results: Key Question 1

What is the evidence that FLACS is associated with better outcomes than conventional cataract surgery?

- Visual outcomes (CDVA) were similar between groups
- EPT outcomes were mixed; results were either comparable between groups, or favoring FSL groups
- Meta-analysis of CDVA and EPT outcomes noted heterogeneity precluding calculation of reliable summary effect estimate
- No studies addressed quality of life measures
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Results: Forest Plot of CDVA Studies

Figure 1.
Corrected distance visual acuity in studies comparing FLACS with conventional cataract surgery
Figure 2.
Effective phacoemulsification time in studies comparing FLACS with conventional cataract surgery.
Results: Key Question 2a

What are the adverse effects that have been reported for FLACS?

- Laser interface events
  - Several studies noted significant numbers of patients required a second docking attempt without adverse effects
  - Patients with corneal scarring or distortion, kyphosis, claustrophobia, and excessive movements were excluded from Laser treatment groups

- Intraocular pressure events (IOP)
  - All FSL docking platforms have been shown to cause increases in IOP; a concern for patients with coexistent glaucoma
  - Two studies of IOP effects were included in this review which used only the Catalys FSL platform
    - One case series (N=100) noted mean IOP increased to 27.6+-5.5mm Hg
    - Another case series (N=25) noted mean IOP increased to 36.0+-4.4 mm Hg
Results: Key Question 2b

What is the risk of adverse effects from FLACS compared to the risk associated with conventional cataract surgery?

- Comparative risks noted similar findings for post-operative corneal edema, macular thickness and morphology
- Methodological concerns were noted for these comparative results as enrollment criteria varied between conventional and FSL surgery groups
Results: Key Question 3

What is the evidence that the experience of the surgeon is associated with adverse effects of FLACS?

- Overall findings were mixed in studies comparing initial to subsequent groups of patients undergoing FLACS.
- One study noted surgeons who had “extensive” refractive surgery experience had fewer complications in their initial FLACS patient groups than did surgeons without previous refractive surgery experience.
- Methodological concerns were noted in enrollment criteria used for the FSL versus conventional surgery groups.
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Limitations of the evidence

• Methodological concerns
  o Small sample sizes
  o Selected samples excluded patients unsuitable for FLACS, e.g.,
    ➢ Patients with dense cataracts
    ➢ Orbital anatomy incompatible with successful laser docking

• Conflicts of interest
  o Same team replication
  o Most studies funded by industry
# Summary of the evidence: benefits

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Outcome</th>
<th>N studies (combined sample size)</th>
<th>Findings</th>
<th>Strength of Evidence</th>
<th>Comments</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Visual acuity</strong></td>
<td>2 RCTs (N=189) 4 NRCS (N=306)</td>
<td>No significant differences</td>
<td>Low</td>
<td>No differences found in the randomized trials. Unclear risk of bias for trials. Low consistency, coherence, and applicability of estimated effects across studies, small to medium sample sizes, and conflicts of interest.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Effective phaco-emulsif. time</strong></td>
<td>1 RCT (N=76) 4 NRCS (N=615) 1 NCS (N=160)</td>
<td>Mixed findings</td>
<td>Low</td>
<td>Trial found no significant reduction in EPT with FSL. Two large nonrandomized studies (N=550) reported significant reductions with FLACS. No significant differences in other studies. Unclear risk of bias for trial. Low consistency, coherence, and applicability of estimated effects across studies. Conflicts of interest.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Quality of life</strong></td>
<td>None</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>No evidence</td>
<td>None of the included studies reported on quality of life outcomes.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
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### Summary of the evidence: harms

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Outcome</th>
<th>N studies (combined sample size)</th>
<th>Findings</th>
<th>Strength of Evidence</th>
<th>Comments</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Intraoperative complications</strong></td>
<td>3 NRCS (N=1,900) 3 NCS (N=285)</td>
<td>Higher IOP for FLACS; Few additional complications for FLACS</td>
<td>Moderate to Low</td>
<td>Low incidence of complications with FLACS, though increases in IOP reported across studies. Low applicability of estimated effects.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Postoperative complications</strong></td>
<td>1 RCT (N=76) 1 NRCS (N=150) 1 NCS (N=160)</td>
<td>Mixed findings</td>
<td>Low</td>
<td>Trial found no significant differences. Cohort study (N=150) found significantly reduced endothelial loss with FLACS. Unclear risk of bias for trial. Low consistency and coherence of estimated effects across studies, small to medium sample sizes. Conflicts of interest.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Costs</strong></td>
<td>None</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>No evidence</td>
<td>No studies reported data on costs of FLACS compared to conventional cataract surgery.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Future Research Suggestions

- RCTs with larger sample sizes to detect rare events
- Applicability of FSL technology to patients with dense cataracts, glaucoma, and corneal pathology
- Head to head trials between FSL platforms
- Cost-benefit ratio
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Questions?

If you have further questions, feel free to contact:

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The full report and cyber seminar presentation is available on the ESP website:

http://www.hsrdr.research.va.gov/publications/esp/
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Panel Discussion