The Role of the Pterional Approach in the Surgical Treatment of Olfactory Groove Meningiomas: A 20-year Experience

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Abstract

Background Olfactory groove meningiomas remain surgically challenging. The common microsurgical approaches suffer from late exposure of the neurovascular structures. Conversely, the pterional approach has the advantage of early dissection of the posterior neurovascular complex.

Methods We reviewed the records of patients treated for olfactory groove meningioma in our department between 1991 and 2010. A total of 61 patients underwent removal of olfactory groove meningiomas via the pterional approach. These included 58 primary and 3 recurrent tumors. Mean overall follow-up time was 122 months.

Results Early exposure and dissection of the internal carotid artery, middle cerebral artery, anterior cerebral artery, and optic nerve was feasible in all cases. Complete tumor removal was achieved in 60 patients. Morbidity and mortality rates were 26% and 1.6% respectively. Postoperative complications included epileptic seizures (five patients) and cerebrospinal fluid (CSF) leak (two patients). During follow-up, we recorded three tumor recurrences.

Conclusions The pterional approach appears to be an excellent solution for the treatment of olfactory groove meningiomas. Its foremost advantage is early visualization of the posterior neurovascular complex. Moreover, it allows frontal sinus preservation and timely tumor devascularization and avoids excessive brain retraction. The pterional view is familiar to most neurosurgeons and therefore the transition to this technique is fairly straightforward.

Keywords
► pterional approach
► olfactory groove meningiomas
► surgical treatment
► meningioma removal

Introduction

Olfactory groove meningiomas comprise 4.5 to 18% of all intracranial meningiomas.1,2 They commonly present with anosmia, urinary incontinence, visual deficits, seizures, and mental status changes. These symptoms, however, are nonspecific and usually appear late, when the tumor has already reached a significant size.3 Moreover, their proximity to important neurovascular structures such as the optic nerves, the internal carotid artery, and the anterior cerebral artery, as well as the potential invasion of the frontal skull base, makes their complete removal troublesome.4

The variability of the proposed approaches reflects the surgical challenge the neurosurgeon has to face when treating olfactory groove meningiomas; from the historical bifrontal craniotomies with bilateral partial lobectomy proposed by Cushing and Dandy in 1938 to the current state-of-the-art...
microsurgical and endoscopical approaches, there is a con-
tinuing debate as to the optimal treatment strategy of such
lesions.5–7 Among this sizeable array of surgical approaches,
the most commonly used nowadays are the subfrontal ap-
proach, the interhemispheric approach, the supraorbital key-
hole approach, and the pterional approach.4,6,8–10 Other
surgical corridors such as the crano-orbitozygomatic and
the transbasal, as well as the various endoscopical techniques,
have passionate advocates and undeniable advantages; their
application, however, is rather limited.11–13

In this study we present our 19-year experience with the
pterional craniotomy for the surgical treatment of olfactory
groove meningiomas in a series of 61 patients and discuss its
potential advantages over the other commonly used micro-
surgical approaches.

Patients and Methods

In a retrospective study, we reviewed the medical charts,
neuroimaging data, and follow-up data of patients treated
microsurgically for olfactory groove meningioma in our de-
partment between January 1991 and October 2010. In this
time period, a total of 61 patients (21 men and 40 women) 20
to 80 years old (mean: 60 years) underwent microsurgical
removal of their olfactory groove meningiomas via the pter-
ional approach. These included 58 primary and 3 recurrent
tumors (operated primarily at another institution). Tumor
size varied from small (up to 2 cm, 5% of patients) to large (2 to
4 cm, 6.5% of patients) and very large (>4 cm, 88.5% of
patients). A compression of the optic apparatus was evident inour patients and invasion of the orbital wall was evident in
one patient; three patients had radiological evidence of
tumor invasion into the ethmoidal air cells. The most com-
mon presenting symptom was anosmia (30 patients, 48%),
followed by visual disturbances (22 patients, 36%), headache
(18 patients, 29.5%), and psycho-organic syndrome (16 pa-
tients, 26.2%), expressed by a constellation of clinical mani-
festations. A complete list of the presenting symptoms at the
time of diagnosis is listed in Table 1. By symmetrical tumor
location, the right (nondominant) side was selected in 55
patients (90%), whereas six patients (10%) underwent surgery
on the left side.

The operative technique has been presented in our previ-
uous publications (Fig. 1).14,15 In summary, we typically
perform a trephination behind the external orbital process,
just above and superior to the pterion, as for a typical
pterional craniotomy. The craniotomy is extended frontally,
taking care not to open the frontal sinus. The greater wing of
the sphenoid is drilled extradurally in a standard fashion.
After opening the dura, the sylvian fissure is proximally
dissected and the internal carotid artery (ICA), as well as the
neighboring neurovascular structures, are identified.

Thus, the relevant important anatomic structures, such as
the ipsilateral ICA, middle cerebral artery (MCA), anterior
cerebral artery (ACA), and the optic nerve have already been
identified in these initial steps of the operation. Dissection
begins at the posterolateral and posterior tumor parts, lead-
ing to an early decompression of the ACA, the optic nerves,
and chiasm. Subsequently, the tumor nidus sitting on the
sphenoid plane is devascularized. Care should be taken not to
open the ethmoidal air cells during this step of the procedure,
to prevent postoperative cerebrospinal fluid (CSF) leakage.
Hemorrhage is controlled with bipolar coagulation, oxidized
cellulose, and the high-speed diamond drill. To address the
contralateral tumor bulk, partial resection of the falx and
crista galli is performed. At this point the inferior sagittal
sinus is usually hypoplastic or absent, and hemostasis is fairly
easy. The superior tumor parts are gently pulled downwards
and removed. At this time, the contralateral ACA is gently
dissected away from the caudolateral tumor borders. The rest
of the tumor mass is dissected along the arachnoidal plane
and removed.

Follow-up was done at 3 and 12 months postoperatively by
means of a magnetic resonance imaging (MRI) or computed
tomography (CT) scan with contrast medium and at yearly
intervals after that. Patients were considered to have a
recurrence if their studies verified a mass effect in spite of
a complete surgical removal. Mean overall follow-up time was
122 months (8 to 239 months).

Additionally, we reviewed the international literature for
case series reporting outcomes after treatment of olfactory
groove meningiomas, regardless of the operative approach.

Results/Summary of Cases

Complete tumor removal (Simpson grades I or II) was
achieved in 60 patients (98.3%). Subtotal removal (Simpson
grade III) was attained in one patient with recurrent tumor. In
this case there was extensive tumor expansion into the
ethmoidal air cells. The mean hospital stay was 18 days
(6 to 125 days) and dependent on tumor size and comorbid

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Table 1 Prominent Presenting Symptom at the Time of
diagnosis

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Symptom</th>
<th>Number of patients (N = 61)</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Anosmia or hyposmia</td>
<td>30 (49.2%)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Visual loss</td>
<td>22 (36%)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Headache</td>
<td>18 (29.5%)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Vertigo</td>
<td>4 (6.5%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Depression</td>
<td>4 (6.5%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aphasia</td>
<td>1 (1.6%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Epileptic seizure</td>
<td>5 (8.2%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Exophthalmos</td>
<td>1 (1.6%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nausea</td>
<td>2 (3.3%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tinnitus</td>
<td>1 (1.6%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gait disturbance</td>
<td>2 (3.3%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Exhaustion</td>
<td>3 (4.9%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Apathy</td>
<td>6 (9.8%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aggressiveness</td>
<td>6 (9.8%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Psychoorganic syndrome</td>
<td>16 (26.2%)</td>
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</table>
conditions of patients. Tumor removal led to improvement of the pre-existing visual deficits in 18 out of 22 patients, with one patient demonstrating postoperative visual decline.

The overall morbidity and mortality rate was 26% and 1.6% respectively. *Table 2* demonstrates the postoperative complications recorded. The most common were epileptic seizures, occurring in 5 patients (8.2%), followed by subcutaneous CSF collection (3 patients, 5%), postoperative CSF leak (2 patients, 3.2%), and subdural hematoma (2 patients). CSF leak was treated initially unsuccessfully with a lumbar drain; eventually, however, both patients had to undergo operative skull-base reconstruction for dural closure. This was achieved through the initial operative corridor. The two cases of subdural hematomas were treated conservatively, without any neurologic sequelae. Subdural CSF collections were treated effectively with a pressure bandage or a lumbar drain. There was one death, occurring at the third postoperative day owing to pulmonary embolism. If one takes into account the surgery-related complications only, the overall morbidity and mortality drop to 23% and 0%, respectively.

In regard to the histological diagnosis, the overwhelming majority of the tumors (90%) were classified as WHO I. There were three cases of a WHO II meningioma and two cases of an anaplastic tumor (WHO III). One tumor was characterized as a fibrohistiocyteoma. Notably, two of our three recurrent cases were grades higher than WHO I, one being grade II and one grade III.

During the follow-up period, we recorded three tumor recurrences. These were detected in the context of the planned follow-up imaging, were asymptomatic, and occurred at the second, fifth, and sixth follow-up year, respectively. Expectably, these recurrences involved atypical (grade II, two patients) or anaplastic (grade III, one patient) tumors. One patient was diagnosed with a glioblastoma at a location adjacent to the operation site 9 years after the initial surgery, without having received postoperative radiation treatment.

**Discussion**

Olfactory groove meningiomas continue to pose a neurosurgical challenge, owing to the close anatomical relationship with vital neurovascular structures, their high vascularization, and tendency to invade the skull base sinuses, along with the fact that they have usually reached a large size at the time of diagnosis. The evolution of surgical strategies applied mirrors
the progress of the available microsurgical techniques; at the same time, it reflects their inherent shortcomings.

The classic subfrontal approach for olfactory groove meningiomas, introduced by Seeger, is undeniably one of the most commonly used. It usually involves a bifrontal craniotomy, elevation of the frontal lobes, and incision of the falx attachment on the crista galli. This technique allows for early devascularization of the tumor but addresses the crucial posterior neurovascular elements at the end of the procedure. Kempe acknowledges the importance of the early identification of the optic nerve and its neighboring arteries and proposes a unilateral frontal craniotomy, beginning at the midline and extending temporally. The pterional craniotomy proposed herein combines the advantage of early tumor devascularization, as in Seeger’s method, with the benefits of early exposure of the dorsal neurovascular structures. In the pterional approach, the optic nerve, ICA, and ACA are identified and dissected from the tumor borders at the cranio-
beginning, at a minimal distance from the site of the craniotomy and at a time point when the surgeon is not yet exhausted from a lengthy procedure. The craniotomy involves the pterion and the lateral frontal bone; consequently, it spares the frontal sinus and enables early drainage of CSF from the carotid and prechiasmatic cisterns, thereby facilitating adequate brain relaxation. Two further advantages of the pterional approach deserve mention: first, brain retraction is usually minimal and unilateral, typically involving the frontal lobe of the nondominant hemisphere. Consequently, venous congestion and subsequent intraoperative brain edema are reduced. Second, the craniotomy itself is large enough to accommodate the tumor-associated parenchymal edema or the brain edema that may arise intraoperatively.

The ratio of recurrence after olfactory meningioma surgery varies between the different series, ranging from 0 to 31% (→ Table 3).9,14,16–26 In these series, the follow-up period ranges from 1 to 25 years. Expectably, series with shorter follow-up time report significantly reduced recurrence rates.17,22,23 In contrast, higher recurrence rates of up to 41% are associated with longer follow-up periods.15,16 In our series of 61 patients, we recorded three recurrences, corresponding to a rate of 4.9%. Mirimanoff et al came to the conclusion that, apart from tumor histology, the extent of resection and its localization are decisive factors in tumor recurrence.20 This has been confirmed in many series since.9,14,22 Regarding olfactory meningiomas in particular, the presence of tumor remnants within the ethmoidal cells seems to be the most likely etiology for tumor recurrence.2,9,22,27 To deal with this, many neurosurgeons perform coagulation of the tumor base and removal of the hyperostosis with the diamond burr.4,22,24,28 Others will aggressively remove all tumor-infiltrated bone structures.15,22 We would typically remove the tumor, meticulously coagulate its base and remove the hyperostosis with the diamond burr. Autologous fat or galeal graft plus wax and fibrin glue were used to seal the air cells and prevent postoperative CSF leak. From the available literature, we compared the various surgical approaches in regard to recurrence rate (→ Table 3). As the normal distribution of the reported samples could not be verified, we utilized a unilateral U-test (Wilcoxon-Mann-Whitney test, SPSS v.13.0) for statistical evaluation. The overall recurrence ratio of 3.4% of the pterional approach (146 patient reports in total) was lower than the overall rate of the other approaches combined (8.1% in 331 patient reports), and this difference was statistically significant (p < 0.05). Despite the inherent shortcomings of such a comparison, our analysis supports the notion that the pterional approach may be superior to other common approaches in regard to tumor recurrence. Undeniably, other approaches such as the extended frontal (transbasal) approach may have a greater potential in addressing frontal skull base infiltration, at the cost, however, of greater surgical morbidity.29 Our overall morbidity and mortality rate of 26% and 1.6%, respectively, compare favorably to the relevant rates reported in the literature (→ Table 3).9,14,18,19,21–27,30 The reported overall mortality rate (2%) of the pterional approach is significantly lower (p < 0.05, Wilcoxon-Mann-Whitney test, SPSS v.13.0) than the relevant rate of 8% of the various frontal approaches. This may be associated with the potential advantage of the pterional approach in dealing with the crucial neurovascular structures.

In comparison with the “workhorse” in removal of olfactory groove meningiomas, namely the subfrontal approach, the pterional approach has distinct benefits that have previously been mentioned. Our opinion is that the advantages of the subfrontal approach are that it is usually large enough to accommodate the occurrence of brain edema, it facilitates the harvesting of a large fascia graft for frontal skull base reconstruction, and it is familiar to most neurosurgeons. The intrahemispheric surgical corridor has the advantage of utilizing a “natural,” pre-existing path that allows a better tolerated brain retraction. Nevertheless, this approach also suffers from late exposure of the critical neurovascular structures. The supraorbital keyhole approach has undeniable cosmetic advantages; conversely, it necessitates opening the frontal sinus and ultimately working on the vital vessels and nerves at a final stage, through a small corridor. Endoscopic procedures are gaining popularity with the premise of offering a direct and immediate exposure to the tumor while obviating the need for brain retraction and manipulation of the neurovascular structures.22,31–33 This approach seems to be advantageous in removing tumors that have extended in the parasellar sinuses.32 Apart from the high learning curve of the endoscopic techniques, it is also acknowledged that extracapsular dissection of the tumor from the frontal lobes and neurovascular structures needs to be done using conventional bimanual microsurgical techniques at a late operative phase.32 The removal of olfactory meningiomas through the transnasal endoscopic approach is still limited to case reports and small case series, and therefore larger studies should be awaited for a comprehensive evaluation of this technique.34–36

Conclusions

The pterional approach appears to be an excellent solution for the treatment of olfactory groove meningiomas, attaining results comparable, if not superior, to the more commonly used subfrontal techniques. Its foremost advantage is the early and direct visualization of the posterior neurovascular complex. Moreover, it allows preservation of the frontal sinus and timely tumor devascularization while avoiding excessive brain retraction and subsequent venous congestion. The pterional view is familiar to most neurosurgeons and therefore the transition to this technique is fairly straightforward. Extended transbasal techniques are associated with higher morbidity, but their role is unquestioned in cases of extensive skull base infiltration. Endoscopic endonasal approaches do appear promising, especially in cases of tumor expansion into the paranasal sinuses. Their potential limitations have already been acknowledged, but one should await the upcoming larger, long-term studies. The neurosurgeon should be aware of the armamentarium at his disposal in treating olfactory groove meningiomas and select the most appropriate technique—or their combination—on a case-by-case basis.
Financial Disclosure/Conflict of Interest
None.

References