

Traumatic isolated anterior dislocation of the radial head

A case with a 32-year follow-up

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Case report

Thirty-two years ago, a 13-year-old boy was examined for pain in his nondominant elbow caused by a trivial trauma. At that time, flexion was painful and restricted by 20°. No diagnosis was made; but upon reexamining the radiographs, an isolated anterior dislocation of the radial head was seen (Figure 1). Recently, at aged 45 years, the patient attended our hospital because of sudden pain on the medial side of the elbow. There was no recent history of trauma; and up to this latest incidence of elbow pain, the patient had been working as a warehouseman without any difficulties. The elbow

had a decrease in flexion of 10° and a 30° loss of supination as compared with the contralateral side. Extension and pronation were normal. The radial head was not painful when palpated or during pronation or supination. The radiographs showed an anterior dislocation of the radial head. The shape of the radial head was normal, and there appeared to be no proximal migration or valgus deformation of the radius. The wrist appeared normal on the radiographs, although clinically the ulnar head seemed to be a little bit more pronounced than it was on the opposite side. The pain on the medial side of the elbow seemed to be unrelated to the old dislocation of the radial head.



Figure 1 A. Anterior dislocation of the radial head at aged 13 years.



Figure 1 B. Thirty-two years later. The radial head is dislocated, but it is of normal shape, and there is no proximal migration.

Discussion

Isolated anterior radial head dislocations are rare. Evans (1949) stated that a forced pronation trauma might be the causative injury. According to Lloyd-Roberts (1977), the existence of a congenital anterior unilateral dislocation as a separate entity is doubtful. He recommended surgical correction when the radial head was dislocated anteriorly in children. In his view, the outcome without surgery may be unsatisfactory as far as motion, stability, and strength are concerned. Blount (1954) was opposed to surgical intervention in these cases because the loss of elbow function may become more troublesome than the instability of the joint. Recently, Vinz (1989) reported 11 patients with a delayed diagnosis of isolated radial head dislocation

who had been operated on. Only 2 of the patients had a good or excellent result after surgery.

References

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