Functional rhinoseptoplasty: clinical decision protocol

Original Article

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Abstract

Introduction: Functional Rhinoseptoplasty (F-RSP) is a complex procedure with increased morbidity and substantially longer operative time compared to conventional septoplasty. On this regard, the clinical decision concerning this procedure should be thoughtful and objective. Both the nasal septum and the internal and external nasal valves play crucial roles in nasal airflow, emphasizing the importance of directed physical examination in patients with chronic nasal obstruction. As a surgical procedure with facial aesthetic impact, the joint definition of appropriate aesthetic goals between physician and patient, the presence of body dysmorphic syndrome and recognition of prior and/or concomitant psychiatric pathology are of paramount importance.

Objectives: To present a diagnostic aid protocol and surgical guidance for patients undergoing FSP-R.

Materials and Methods: Literature review and adaptation of published algorithms.

Results: We identified 4 protocols in the international literature. Based on these, a protocol for approaching patients with chronic nasal obstruction and potential candidates for F-RSP was developed within the ENT consultation. Focused on clinical interview, it aims to investigate the real motivations and expectations of candidates for the procedure and to exclude those with uncontrolled psychiatric pathology, particularly in cases of suspected body dysmorphic syndrome. In the objective examination, it proposes methods for evaluating the internal and external nasal valve, nasal septum, and inferior turbinates, establishing a decisional score. It also allows for the description of the nasal pyramid from an aesthetic point of view; standardized photographic documentation of patients and their facial morphing to plan the surgical procedure.

Conclusions: This protocol systematizes surgical indications for F-RSP in ENT consultations. However, it still requires practical application in consultation and recording of the respective results in the Portuguese population for validation purposes.

Keywords: Functional Rhinoseptoplasty; Chronic Nasal Obstruction; Nasal Septum; Nasal Valves; Facial Plastic Surgery

Introduction

Nasal obstruction is a common complaint in otorhinolaryngology (ORL), and several questionnaires have been developed to evaluate the impact of this condition on the patient's quality of life.¹⁻³ However, identifying the nasal structures restricting the airflow can be a challenge. Septal deviations are found in 75–80% of adults, leading to the surgical referral of patients with nasal obstruction for conventional septoplasty, often with improved symptoms and rhinomanometry results.⁴⁻⁶

The nasal septum, along with the internal and external nasal valves, play an important role in nasal airflow. Physical examination of these structures is crucial for making a decision on whether to recommend functional septorhinoplasty (FSRP). ^{47,8}

The external nasal valve consists of the caudal border of the lower lateral cartilage, columella, and nasal floor. The internal nasal valve comprises the caudal border of the upper lateral cartilage, nasal septum, nasal floor, and head of the inferior turbinate. The internal nasal valve in Caucasians is usually placed at an angle of 10–15° (septum and caudal border of the triangular cartilage). This valve exhibits a wide dynamic range in asymptomatic individuals. Nasal valve collapse, reported in up to 13% of the population, can be diagnosed using anterior rhinoscopy, nasal endoscopy, or the modified Cottle maneuver following nasal decongestion. Several etiologies of nasal valve collapse have been described in the literature, including post-rhinoplasty changes, cutaneous neoplasm resection, facial paralysis, trauma, and congenital defects.9

In contrast to aesthetic rhinoplasty, the aim of FSR P is to improve nasal obstruction while preserving the shape of the nose. Regardless of the type of rhinoplasty, the surgeon must inform the patient preoperatively that maintaining or enhancing nasal breathing is fundamental to achieving satisfactory longterm outcomes. The patient should also be informed that certain alterations to the shape of the nose are not viable because they affect nasal breathing, and that certain functional changes to the nasal pyramid may change its appearance. It is impossible to disassociate the two types of procedures, since both have aesthetic and functional implications, independent of their initial purpose. In this study, we will describe procedures primarily aimed at improving nasal function, such as FSRP.^{8,10}

Several studies have described the beneficial effects of FSRP, but few randomized clinical trials have compared different surgeries. Numerous techniques have been proposed to correct a decreased internal nasal valve angle, including spreader grafts, auto-spreader flaps, butterfly grafts, titanium butterfly implants, upper lateral splay grafts, flaring sutures, and lateral nasal wall suspension. For fixed external nasal lateral wall collapse, techniques include alar batten grafts, butterfly grafts, titanium butterfly implants, lateral crural strut grafts, and lateral crural cephalic turn-in flaps. In cases of dynamic external nasal lateral wall collapse, options include absorbable external nasal lateral wall implants and external nasal lateral wall radiofrequency. For external nasal valve collapse or narrowing, techniques such as alar kidney grafts and lateral crural strut grafts have been proposed. Nasal septal deviation with L-strut involvement may require FSRP for spreader graft interposition or extracorporeal septoplasty if it cannot be corrected with a conventional septoplasty approach.¹⁰⁻¹²

FSRP is a complex procedure with a high morbidity rate and longer operative time than conventional septoplasty. Some complications described in the literature are epistaxis, aesthetic nasal deformity, graft infection or extrusion, nasal obstruction worsening, periorbital hematoma, skin infection or necrosis, toxic shock syndrome, epiphora, and cerebrospinal fluid fistulas in the anterior skull base.^{13,14}

Given the aesthetic impact of this surgical procedure on the face, it is especially important for the surgeon and patient to jointly define appropriate and realistic aesthetic goals. Patients with psychiatric conditions, especially those with body dysmorphic disorder, should be previously identified, as this subgroup has poorer aesthetic outcomes from a subjective perspective.^{15,16}

Previous studies have proposed various protocols for evaluating patients eligible for rhinoplasty in order to provide objective medical guidance, aid in surgical planning, and predict potential risks and complications for each patient.^{7,8,14,17}

Thus, this study aimed to develop a protocol specifically designed for the diagnosis and surgical planning of patients with indications for FSRP.

Materials and Methods

We conducted a literature review and adapted the algorithms published in the literature. The PubMed platform was searched using the following keywords: "functional rhinoplasty," "functional septorhinoplasty," "septorhinoplasty protocol," "rhinoplasty protocol," "nasal valve evaluation," "rhinoplasty evaluation," and "septorhinoplasty evaluation." Indications for FSRP were considered for the development of the protocol, including reduced internal nasal valve angle, fixed or dynamic external nasal lateral wall collapse, external nasal valve collapse or narrowing, and nasal septum deviations involving the L-strut that cannot be corrected with conventional septoplasty.

Protocols that did not propose methods to evaluate the functional components of the nasal pyramid were excluded. The selected protocols were translated into European Portuguese and adapted accordingly.

Results

We identified four protocols in the international literature^{4,7,8,17}, which served as the foundation for developing a new protocol for approaching patients with chronic nasal obstruction who may be eligible for FSRP during an ORL appointment (Figure 1).

All personal and family history factors that could influence the choice of surgical techniques and outcomes of FSRP were identified. In this context, we considered it appropriate to ask the patient about the presence of congenital craniofacial anomalies, such as cleft palate or other facial dysmorphic syndromes, and nasal trauma, as these conditions can change the normal anatomy of the nasal pyramid.¹⁷⁻¹⁹ The surgeon should also be informed of any bleeding dyscrasias and hypertension, as they are associated with increased risk of intraoperative and postoperative bleeding.^{17,20,21}

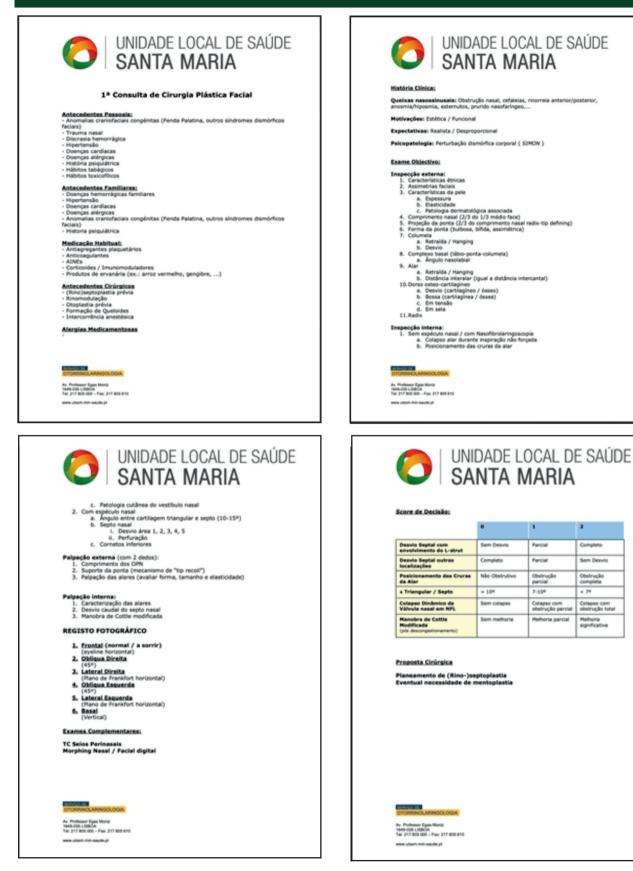
Patients with allergies, particularly allergic rhinitis, may benefit from FSRP, although they typically do not achieve the same subjective improvement in nasal obstruction as healthy controls.^{22,23} Previous studies have indicated that smoking habits may be associated with a higher incidence of postoperative complications, but a recent retrospective study showed that the subjective outcomes were not worse in the long term.^{24,25} Substance use disorders, particularly the use of nasally inhaled cocaine, are associated with a higher prevalence of septal perforation or saddle nose deformity and may indicate special surgical needs.²⁶ Cardiac disease or previous anesthetic complications may increase anesthetic risks, and may require the postponement of the surgical procedure in some cases. Accurate documentation of the patient's usual medications is important, including antiplatelet agents, anticoagulants, nonsteroidal anti-inflammatory drugs, corticoids, immunomodulators, and herbal products, such as red rice, ginger, garlic, or gingko biloba. Previous allergy to medications should also be noted.7,14,17,21

Patients who have previously undergone septorhinoplasty or isolated septoplasty present a challenge to facial plastic surgeons due to potential fibrosis, unpredictable changes in nasal anatomy, and the possible need to use previously irradiated auricular, costal, or cadaveric cartilage.^{27–29}

Nasal pyramid infiltration, regardless of the type, often lead to unpredictable postoperative outcomes and, in some cases, more adherent dissection planes. Complete resorption of the infiltrated product may take up to 2–3

Figure 1

Evaluation protocol for FSRP candidates at the ORL service of the Santa Maria local health unit. FSRP, functional septorhinoplasty; ORL, otorhinolaryngology



years. For infiltrations with hyaluronic acid, hyaluronidase may be considered during the preoperative evaluation.^{30,31}

While septorhinoplasty incisions are rarely associated with hypertrophic scarring or keloid formation, keloids, although uncommon, are more frequent in Black patients. Therefore, it is important to inquire about any history of keloid formation after previous surgeries. ³²

The developed protocol focuses on the clinical interview, aiming to first investigate the nasal sinus complaints, motivations, and expectations of the candidates from the procedure. It also seeks to identify and exclude individuals with unstable psychiatric conditions or suspected body dysmorphic disorder.^{7,8,14,17}

The protocol proposes methods for evaluating the internal and external nasal valve, nasal septum, and inferior turbinates during the objective examination. It also requires aesthetic description of the nasal pyramid, photographic documentation of the patients, and corresponding facial morphing to facilitate surgical planning..^{7,8,14,17}

We also established a decision score based on the reviewed literature and evaluation of the nasal structures responsible for chronic nasal obstruction. This tool helps to select candidates for FSRP or isolated septoplasty. Key factors determining the recommendation for FSRP (as opposed to isolated septoplasty) include the presence of septal deviation involving the L-strut, medialization or lateralization of the crura of the lower lateral cartilages with nasal airflow obstruction, a narrow internal nasal valve angle (caudal border of the triangular cartilage - nasal septum), dynamic collapse of the nasal valve during nasal vestibule endoscopy, and symptom improvement with the modified Cottle maneuver after nasal decongestion.

Discussion

Surgical management of nasal obstruction often involves the accurate identification of the subgroup of patients who may benefit from FSRP. Despite being a common complaint in ORL visits, correct identification of the nasal structures limiting the nasal airflow can be challenging. Patients presenting with anterior septal deviation involving the L-strut, medialization or lateralization of the crura of the lower lateral cartilages with nasal airflow obstruction, a narrow internal nasal valve angle (caudal border of the triangular cartilage – nasal septum), dynamic collapse of the nasal valve during nasal vestibule endoscopy, and symptom improvement with the modified Cottle maneuver after nasal decongestion may not achieve adequate relief from isolated septoplasty.

FSRP is a surgical procedure associated with greater complexity, morbidity, and operative time compared to conventional septoplasty; therefore, it should be considered in carefully selected cases. Decisions regarding this surgical procedure must be deliberate and objective, particularly in public health services where the morbidity and operative time of procedures without a functional objective represent additional costs, which limit investments in other medical areas.

This protocol aims to systematize surgical indications for FSRP in ORL appointments, provide a detailed description of the entire nasal pyramid, and document the clinical and surgical history of the candidates for FSRP. This protocol can enable the correct identification of patients eligible for FSRP and exclusion of patients with inadequate expectations of the surgical procedure, high anesthetic risk, unstable psychiatric conditions, or body dysmorphic disorder.

However, this protocol still requires practical implementation in clinical settings and validation of results in the Portuguese population.

Conclusion

This protocol aims to systematize surgical indications for FSRP in ORL appointments. However, it will require clinical implementation and validation of results in the Portuguese population.

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Conflict of Interests

The authors declare that they have no conflict of interest regarding this article.

Data Confidentiality

The authors declare that they followed the protocols of their work in publishing patient data.

Human and animal protection

The authors declare that the procedures followed are in accordance with the regulations established by the directors of the Commission for Clinical Research and Ethics and in accordance with the Declaration of Helsinki of the World Medical Association.

Privacy policy, informed consent and Ethics committee authorization

All the processed data were based in published reports that fulfilled privacy policy and ethical considerations.

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Scientific data availability

There are no publicly available datasets related to this work.

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