

Endoscopic stapling of the pharyngeal pouch

**Understanding NICE guidance –
information for people considering
the procedure, and for the public**

November 2003



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**National Institute for
Clinical Excellence**

MidCity Place
71 High Holborn
London
WC1V 6NA

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About this information

This information describes the guidance that the National Institute for Clinical Excellence (NICE) has issued to the NHS on a procedure called endoscopic stapling of the pharyngeal pouch. It is not a complete description of what is involved in the procedure – the patient’s healthcare team should describe it in detail.

NICE has looked at whether endoscopic stapling is safe enough and works well enough for it to be used routinely for the treatment of pharyngeal pouch.

To produce this guidance, NICE has:

- looked at the results of studies on the safety of endoscopic stapling of the pharyngeal pouch and how well it works
- asked experts for their opinion
- asked the views of the organisations that speak for the healthcare professionals and the patients and carers who will be affected by this guidance.

This guidance is part of NICE’s work on ‘interventional procedures’ (see ‘Further information’ on page 10).

About endoscopic stapling of the pharyngeal pouch

A pharyngeal pouch occurs when the lining of the pharynx (the tube running from the back of the nose and mouth to the top of the windpipe) breaks through its walls. It is quite rare – only about 1 person in 100,000 a year will develop it – and it affects mainly older people. It can make swallowing difficult and cause a cough. Some people with a pharyngeal pouch have problems with their breathing.

The traditional form of treatment for a pharyngeal pouch is conventional open surgery to the neck. This involves the surgeon exposing the area for treatment through a cut.

Now, treatment can be carried out using an 'endoscope', which is a thin, flexible telescope that is put through the mouth and into the pharynx. Surgical procedures can be carried out using instruments put through the tube of the endoscope. This is called 'endoscopic surgery'.

Endoscopic surgery to treat a pharyngeal pouch can be carried out using heat or lasers to seal the opening to the pouch. Another method is to close the opening of the pouch using staples fixed by an instrument inserted through the endoscope – this method is known as 'endoscopic stapling'.

How well it works

What the studies said

The studies NICE looked at suggested that people who had endoscopic stapling took less time to recover and spent less time in hospital than people who had conventional surgery. People were able to swallow normally soon after having the procedure.

What the experts said

The experts agreed that endoscopic stapling is already used widely in centres that specialise in treating head and neck diseases. Its quicker operation time and shorter stay in hospital mean that it is useful for treating people with a pharyngeal pouch. The experts did note that the condition can come back after it has been treated, but that the procedure can be done again.

Risks and possible problems

What the studies said

The studies noted only a few complications with this procedure. A few patients had mild bleeding or damage to the pharynx. Some patients weren't able to eat normally after the operation and needed to be fed through a fine tube passed from the nose to the stomach, but this problem was rare.

What the experts said

The experts agreed that people treated with this procedure were no more likely to have problems than if they were treated by other methods.

What has NICE decided?

NICE has considered the evidence on endoscopic stapling of the pharyngeal pouch. It has recommended that when doctors use it for people with a pharyngeal pouch, they should be sure that:

- the patient understands what is involved and agrees (consents) to the treatment, and
- the results of the procedure are monitored.

NICE has noted that surgeons who carry out endoscopic stapling should have special training in the method. It's also important to provide good care for people after they have had the operation.

What the decision means for you

Your doctor may have offered you endoscopic stapling of the pharyngeal pouch. NICE has considered this procedure because it is relatively new. NICE has decided that the procedure is safe enough and works well enough for use in the NHS. Nonetheless, you should understand the benefits and risks of endoscopic stapling of the pharyngeal pouch before you agree to it. Your doctor should discuss the benefits and risks with you. Some of these benefits and risks may be described above.

Further information

You have the right to be fully informed and to share in decision-making about the treatment you receive. You may want to discuss this guidance with the doctors and nurses looking after you.

You can visit the NICE website (www.nice.org.uk) for further information about the National Institute for Clinical Excellence and the Interventional Procedures Programme. A copy of the full guidance on endoscopic stapling of the pharyngeal pouch is on the NICE website (www.nice.org.uk/IPG022guidance), or you can order a copy from the website or by telephoning the NHS Response Line on 0870 1555 455 and quoting reference number N0357. The evidence that NICE considered in developing this guidance is also available from the NICE website.

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