

## EXPERIENCE OF ND: YAG LASER POSTERIOR CAPSULOTOMY IN 500 CASES

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### ABSTRACT

**BACKGROUND/ OBJECTIVES:** Posterior capsular opacification (PCO) is the commonest cause of glare and reduced visual acuity after cataract surgery. The Nd: YAG Laser is the alternate to surgical treatment for capsulotomy. To determine the time period of development of PCO, the complications of Nd: YAG laser during capsulotomy and post laser best corrected visual acuity, this study was carried out.

**SETTING:** Department of Ophthalmology Eye Hospital Hyderabad Sindh attached with Liaquat University of Medical and Health Sciences Jamshoro, Sindh – Pakistan; from January 2002 to March 2004.

**METHODS:** Five hundred pseudophakic eyes of 500 patients older than 15 years having PCO with decreased best corrected Visual Acuity (VA) of two or more Snellen's chart line and met the inclusion and exclusion criteria were selected from out patients department for Nd: YAG laser capsulotomy. Before laser treatment, the VA was assessed and all patients were examined on slit lamp for IOP and to rule out the causes for reduced vision other than PCO. Then 2-3 mm size capsulotomy was done with Q-switched Nd: YAG Laser, with Abraham's posterior capsulotomy lens, after topical anesthesia, by using minimum amount of energy and fewest numbers of pulses. Patients were followed for assessment of best corrected VA and for possible complications just after laser and at the end of 1<sup>st</sup> week, 2<sup>nd</sup> week and the 4<sup>th</sup> week. The post-laser treatment was advised in accordance with complications to each patient.

**RESULTS:** Of the five hundred eyes, 230 (46.0%) belonged to male sex and 270 (54.0%) females. The majority of patients i.e. 230 eyes (46%) had PCO between 3 to 12 months postoperatively. The mean period between cataract surgery and Nd: YAG laser capsulotomy was 2.06 years. The types of PCO were fibrosis in 339 (67.8%) eyes, Elschnig pearls in 102 (20.4%) eyes and wrinkling in 59 (11.8%) eyes. Pre-laser visual acuity was CF-6/60 in 262 (52.4%) eyes, 6/36-6/24 in 140 (28.0%) eyes and 6/18-6/12 in 98 (19.6%) eyes. Post-laser VA was improved to 6/9-6/6 in 372 (74.4%) eyes. Out of 500 patients, 40 (8.0%) eyes developed the complications due to YAG laser which included IOL pitting in 27 (5.40%) eyes, raised IOP in 04 (0.80%), uveitis in 03 (0.60%), iris bleeding (hyphema) in 03 (0.60%), vitreous in anterior chamber in 02 (0.40%), and cystoids macular edema (CME) in 01(0.20%) eye. None of the eye developed sight threatening complications like retinal detachment or macular hole. The 128 (25.6%) eyes did not achieve the significant improvement because of pre-existing pathology in the posterior segment that was not diagnosed at the time of screening due to thick PCO.

**CONCLUSION:** Nd: YAG laser capsulotomy is effective and convenient method for doing capsulotomy in all types of PCO. It is free from the risk of endophthalmitis found in surgical capsulotomy.

### INTRODUCTION

Posterior capsular opacification (PCO) is the commonest complication of cataract surgery with an incidence of between 10% to 50% by 2 years postoperatively.<sup>1,2</sup> It is generally accepted that PCO formation is a manifestation of proliferation of equatorial epithelial cells across the posterior capsule. It consists of formation of Elschnig pearls, multiple layers of proliferated epithelium and cells showing myofibroblastic differentia-

tion on the posterior capsule.<sup>3</sup> It causes reduction in VA and contrast sensitivity by obstructing the view or by scattering the light that is perceived by patients as glare.<sup>4-6</sup> It also decreases the field of view during therapeutic and diagnostic procedures.<sup>7</sup> There is considerable interest in its prevention. Biconvex and plano convex polymethyl methacrylate (PMMA) intraocular lenses (IOLs)<sup>8-10</sup> as well as silicone plates IOLs<sup>11</sup> have been reported to have beneficial effects on posterior capsular opacity. However, other modifi-

cations of IOL design or surgical technique have had little influence on development of PCO rates.<sup>12</sup> The treatment of PCO was surgical with needle either through anterior chamber or pars plana, which is not free from drastic complications such as endophthalmitis. Now a days this PCO is treated with Nd: YAG laser, which is safe, effective and out patient department procedure.<sup>13,14</sup> The avoidance of potential surgical complications such as endophthalmitis, and the shorter postoperative recovery has made the Nd: YAG laser capsulotomy a widespread and popular approach for treatment of PCO. In Nd: YAG laser posterior capsulotomy, some complications have been reported such as increased intraocular pressure (IOP),<sup>15-21</sup> cystoids macular edema,<sup>18,22-24</sup> retinal detachment<sup>22,24-26</sup>, endophthalmitis,<sup>14,16,18,22,23</sup> anterior vitreous opacification and destruction<sup>26,27</sup>, IOL damage and decentration,<sup>15,18,28,29</sup> posterior subluxation of IOL into vitreous cavity<sup>30</sup> and lowering of endothelial cell count of the cornea<sup>31</sup>, as well as macular hemorrhage.<sup>32</sup> Complications are infrequent but very severe, having great impact on visual acuity.

**PATIENTS AND METHODS**

Five hundred eyes having PCO after extra capsular cataract surgery underwent Nd: YAG laser capsulotomy at the department of ophthalmology of Liaquat University of Medical & Health Sciences Jamshoro Sindh – Pakistan (Eye Hospital Hyderabad Sindh) during a period from January 2002 to March 2004. The patients for this study were selected from out patients department which included hospital patients and referred cases. The patients older than 15 years having PCO with uneventful extra capsular cataract extraction (ECCE) with posterior chamber IOL implant and having decreased best corrected visual acuity of two or more Snellens line were included in the study. The patients of PCO with IOL who were not enrolled in the study were cases below 15 years age, cases with postoperative complications such as endophthalmitis, dislocated IOL, IOL implanted in traumatic cataract, diagnosed diabetic patients with diabetic retinopathy, patients having combined procedure and simple ECCE. The pre-laser best corrected visual acuity was assessed. On slit lamp examination intraocular pressure, anterior and posterior segment abnormal findings were recorded, in all patients. The cornea was anaesthetized with topical application of either 0.5% proparacain hydrochloride (Alcaine) or 0.4% benoxinate hydrochloride (Novesine) eye drops and Abraham’s posterior capsulotomy lens that provided proper focusing, magnification of anterior segment and stabilization of eye ball. The Q- switched Nd: YAG laser

(SYL9000 YAG laser system) was used to make a hole of 2-3 mm in the posterior capsule, by using amount of energy ranging 1-6 milli joules (mj) and fewest numbers of pulses. The energy and pulses were increased gradually according to thickness of capsule and response in each case. Only those pupils were dilated with 1% tropicamide pre-operatively where pupillary diameter was less than 3mm. Patients were followed for assessment of best-corrected visual acuity and for possible complications just after laser treatment and at the end of 1<sup>st</sup> week, 2<sup>nd</sup> week and 4<sup>th</sup> week and treatment was advised in accordance with complications.

**RESULTS**

Of 500 eyes, 230 (46.0%) belonged to male sex and 270 (54.0%) females. The majority of patients i.e. 230 eyes (46%) had PCO between 3 to 12 months post-operatively (**Table I**). The most common types of PCO were fibrosis in 339 (67.8%) eyes, followed by Elschnig’s pearls in 102 (20.4%) eyes and wrinkling in 59 (11.8%) eyes (**Table II**). Before YAG laser treatment, the visual acuity was CF-6/60 in 262 (52.4%) eyes, 6/36-6/24 in 140 (28.0%) eyes and 6/18-6/12 in 98 (19.6%) eyes (**Table III**). Post YAG laser treatment visual acuity was improved to 6/9-6/6 in 372 (74.4%) eyes (**Table IV**). The comparison of pre and post YAG laser treatment visual acuity (**Table V**) showed that 128 (25.6%) eyes did not achieve the significant improvement in visual acuity, because of preexisting pathology in the posterior segment such as age related macular degeneration (7.8%), diabetic retinopathy (6.20%), optic atrophy (3.6%), glaucoma (2.8%), myopic degeneration (2.4%), etc. which were undetected due to thick PCO (**Table VI – VII**).

**TABLE I:  
DURATION OF PCO DEVELOPMENT  
AFTER PC - IOL IMPLANT**

Duration in Months	Number of PCO cases	Percentage
03-12	230	46.0
13-24	120	24.0
25-36	70	14.0
37-48	50	10.0
After 48	30	6.00
<b>Total</b>	<b>500</b>	<b>100%</b>

*Mean period between cataract surgery and Nd: YAG laser capsulotomy was 2.06 years.*

**TABLE II:  
TYPES OF POSTERIOR CAPSULE OPACIFICATION**

Age in years	Number of eyes	Elschnig's pearls	Fibrosis	Wrinkling
15-30	26	07	17	02
31-40	70	30	30	10
41-55	163	40	106	17
56 above	241	25	186	30
<b>Total</b>	<b>500</b>	<b>102 (20.4%)</b>	<b>339 (67.8%)</b>	<b>59 (11.8%)</b>

**TABLE III:  
PRE-LASER TREATMENT VISUAL ACUITY**

Visual Acuity	Number of cases	Percentage
CF – 6 / 60	262	52.4
6 / 36 – 6 / 24	140	28.00
6 18 – 6 / 12	98	19.6
<b>Total</b>	<b>500</b>	<b>100%</b>

**TABLE IV:  
POST-LASER TREATMENT VISUAL ACUITY**

Visual Acuity	No. of Cases	Percentage %
CF – 6 / 60	58	11.6
6 / 36 – 6 / 24	42	8.4
6 / 18 – 6 / 12	28	5.6
6 / 9 – 6 / 6	372	74.4
<b>Total</b>	<b>500</b>	<b>100%</b>

**TABLE V:  
COMPARISON OF PRE ND POST YAG LASER  
VISUAL ACUITY**

Visual Acuity	Pre Laser V.A.	Post Laser V.A
CF – 6 / 60	262	58
6 / 36 – 6 / 24	140	42
6 18 – 6 / 12	98	28
6 / 9 – 6 / 6	00	372
<b>Total</b>	<b>500</b>	<b>500</b>

**TABLE VI:  
CAUSES FOR NO IMPROVEMENT**

Cause	Number of cases (n=500)	Percentage
Age related macular degeneration	39	7.80
Diabetic retinopathy	31	6.20
Optic atrophy	18	3.60
Glaucoma	14	2.80
Myopic degeneration	12	2.40
Hypertensive retinopathy	06	1.20
Amblyopia	05	1.00
Retinitis pigmentosa	02	0.40
Cystoid macular edema	01	0.20
<b>Total</b>	<b>128</b>	<b>25.6%</b>

**TABLE VII:  
COMPLICATIONS OF ND: YAG LASER**

Visual Acuity	Number of cases (n=500)	Percentage
IOL pitting	27	5.40
Raised IOP	04	0.80
Mild anterior uveitis	03	0.60
Iris bleeding (hyphaema)	03	0.60
Vitreous in AC	02	0.40
Cystoid macular edema	01	0.20
<b>Total</b>	<b>40</b>	<b>8.0%</b>

## DISCUSSION

Opacification of posterior capsule is the commonest time-related complication of extra-capsular cataract extraction, more frequently in children and younger adults.<sup>33-35</sup> In this study of 500 cases, the average time from cataract surgery to Nd: YAG laser capsulotomy was 2.06 years, the minimum 3 months and the maximum more than 4 years. The majority of patients (46%) had PCO between 3 months to 12 months post-operatively. Apple DJ has noted the incidence of PCO upto 50% by two years post-operatively,<sup>9</sup> while other authors have reported the incidence of PCO upto 43% in five years duration after extra capsular cataract extraction<sup>3</sup> and in study of 369 eyes noted the frequency of PCO in 1.6%, 12.3%<sup>35</sup> and 26.5% after cataract surgery in the duration of 1, 2 and 3 years respectively. The duration of PCO development in this study is comparable with these authors. The reason for high incidence of PCO in early post-operative days may be the use of low quality IOL and poor polishing of posterior capsule. The types of PCO in this study were fibrosis 67.8%, Elschnig's pearls 20.4% and wrinkling 11.8%, while Hassan KS, et al. noted the fibrosis 44.64%, Elschnig's pearls 32.14% and wrinkling 1.8% in their study of 86 eyes.<sup>17</sup> The results of this study are also comparable with this study. In this study, twenty-seven eyes (5.4%) had inadvertent IOL pitting. In none of these cases the pitting accounted for significant IOL damage or visual impairment. Hassan KS, et al. has noted high incidence of IOL pitting 19.8% cases in a study of 86 eyes.<sup>17</sup> The retro focusing of laser aiming beam reduces the risk of IOL pitting,<sup>37</sup> but we believed that in spite of retro-focusing the high energy level can damage the low quality intra ocular lens. A transient rise in IOP after Nd: YAG laser capsulotomy has been well documented.<sup>19</sup> We noted the rise in IOP 8-10 mmHg from base line in four (0.80%) eyes during first 24 hours after laser treatment. In all of these, the IOP returned to normal level within one week by treating with topical  $\beta$ -Blocker (0.5% Betaxolol) one drop twice a day. Potential risk factor for the development of immediate rise in IOP was found in aphakic eyes<sup>37</sup> and the use of higher total energy for capsulotomy.<sup>38</sup> Some authors have reported average 10 mmHg rise of IOP in one third of treated eyes.<sup>37,39</sup> Hussain MM in his study of 125 eyes treated by Nd: YAG laser capsu-

lotomy found 25-30 mmHg rise in IOP in 1.6% cases,<sup>43</sup> whereas other authors have found average 6 mmHg rise in IOP in 37.9% aphakic eyes out of 29 eyes and 16.07% in pseudophakic eyes out of 57 eyes.<sup>17</sup> In this study, the incidence of rise in IOP is low because all patients had posterior chamber IOL implantation and we used very low energy level. Different authors have proposed several other theories like trabecular damage, cell debris and IOL material for rise in intra ocular pressure.<sup>19,26,40</sup> Iris bleeding (hyphema) was noted in three (0.60%) eyes. However, Harris WS found iris bleeding in four cases during YAG laser capsulotomy in a study of 342 eyes.<sup>41</sup> Etiology remains an enigma. We also noted that traveling of acoustic shock waves from the laser beam that focused too near to iris, damaged some microvessels of iris to bleed in anterior chamber. In this study, three (0.60%) eyes developed mild anterior uveitis. However, another author has reported mild uveitis in 31(36%) eyes out of 86 eyes,<sup>17</sup> hence, comparatively this incidence is very low in our study because we avoided laser treatment in early post-operative days and used low energy level. We also noted vitreous in anterior chamber after Nd: YAG laser capsulotomy in two eyes, whereas Harris WS has mentioned vitreous in anterior chamber in 4.4% cases in a study of 342 eyes.<sup>41</sup> It is suggested that rupture of anterior vitreous face causes herniation of the vitreous through capsulotomy hole around the margin of small optic IOL to anterior chamber. But visual acuity was not affected in these cases, however long-term follow-up is necessary for such patients to see the risk of vitreoretinal traction that may develop retinal detachment. We also observed the incidence of cystoids macular edema in one (0.20%) eye. While, Hussain MM found CME in 0.8% cases in the study of 125 pseudophakic eyes treated by Nd: YAG laser capsulotomy.<sup>43</sup> Our ratio is comparatively very low. The possible mechanism of CME is suggested that the prostaglandin released from the anterior segment, reaches the retina through vitreous and alters the permeability of para macular capillaries to develop cystoids macular edema.<sup>42</sup> Delaying the capsulotomy for 90 days after cataract surgery allows full recovery of the blood aqueous barrier, which can reduce the rate of cystoids macular edema.<sup>42</sup> In this study the best corrected visual acuity of 6/9-6/6 was achieved in 372 (74.4%) eyes and this is a dramatic improvement in VA after Nd:YAG laser

capsulotomy, where as 128 (25.6%) eyes did not show the significant improvement in visual acuity because of preexisting pathology in the posterior segment which was undetected due to thick posterior capsular opacity at the time of screening. Wilkins M, et al noted VA improvement in seven patients under non glare conditions and ten patients under glare condition out of seventeen.<sup>44</sup> Other authors have shown over all 91% improvement in the VA after laser capsulotomy.<sup>45</sup> Meanwhile, Hasan, et al noted improvement of VA after Nd: YAG laser capsulotomy on Snellen's chart as 1-3 lines in 42 out of 86 patients, 4-6 lines in 31 out of 86 patients and there was no improvement of VA in 13 patient due to preexisting fundus pathology.<sup>17</sup> That is why Nd: YAG laser capsulotomy has been accepted as standard treatment for PCO that rapidly improves the visual acuity.<sup>46, 47</sup>

## CONCLUSION

The various sight-threatening complications are noted in the literature by different authors but our study noted CME in only 0.20% cases. We suggest that Nd: YAG laser is the relatively safe and cost effective and convenient method for doing capsulotomy in all types of PCO. In this regard, minimum energy combined with minimum number of precisely focused shots for achieving the desired effect should be used.

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