Female Genital Prolapse – Gynaecological Perspective

Definition
Prolapse/Procidentia is the downward descent of the uterus and/or vagina. Procidentia is from the Latin, procidere, to fall. It is not a disease but can be disabling for some women.

Effects of prolapse
The effects of prolapse range widely from no significant symptoms through to local discomfort, loss of sexual function, urinary and bowel problems, discharge, backache, ulceration and infection.

Causes of increased intra-abdominal pressure
There are six main causes (‘the six Fs’): Fluid, fibroids (and other tumours), flatus, foetus, faeces, fat.

When to treat
Treatment should be offered only when the condition is symptomatic and once it has been clearly ascertained that symptoms are due to prolapse.

Additional reasons for treatment may be that the condition interferes with a woman’s normal activity and that the patient actively seeks treatment.

Pelvic organ prolapse is a state of pelvic relaxation due to a disorder of pelvic support structures – that is, the endopelvic fascia.

Loss of pelvic support can occur through:
- Birth trauma
- Increased intra-abdominal pressure due to a chronic cough, chronic constipation, heavy weight lifting/domestic work, obesity or ascitis
- Atrophic changes
- Intrinsic weakness

Pelvic floor muscles wrap around the underside of the bladder, uterus and rectum, giving support

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**Nine Measurement Points for Pelvic Organ Prolapse Quantification (POP-Q)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Point</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Aa</td>
<td>Position of distal anterior vaginal wall, 3cm proximal to the external urethral meatus</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ba</td>
<td>The most distal portion of the remaining anterior vaginal wall above point Aa Point at anterior vaginal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C</td>
<td>The most distal edge of the cervix or vaginal cuff</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D</td>
<td>The position of the posterior fornix</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bp</td>
<td>The most distal position of the posterior vagina; wall above point Ap</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ap</td>
<td>The genital hiatus</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>gh</td>
<td>The perineal body</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>pb</td>
<td>The total vaginal length</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>tvl</td>
<td>The total vaginal length</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Ordinal staging of pelvic organ prolapse**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Stage</th>
<th>Leading edge of Prolapse: Location of the Most Distal Point of the Anterior or Posterior Vaginal Wall (any points Aa, Ap, Ba, Bp)</th>
<th>Leading edge of Prolapse: Location of Apex of Vagina or Cervix (Value of Point C or D)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>O</td>
<td>No prolapse: All points are 3 cm above the hymen (value = -3)</td>
<td>No prolapse: Apex of cervix is at a position above the hymen that equals or is less than +/- 2 cm of vaginal length (value &lt;= (tvl-2))</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I</td>
<td>All points are more than 1 cm above hymen (value &lt; -1)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>II</td>
<td>Maximal prolapse point protrudes to or beyond 1 cm above hymen but not more than 1 cm below hymen (value &gt; -1 to &gt; +1)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>III</td>
<td>Maximal prolapse point protrudes beyond 1 cm above hymen but less than 2cm less than the total vaginal length (value &gt; +1 but &lt; +(tvl - 2))</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IV</td>
<td>Maximal prolapse point protrudes the length of the vagina (2 cm) beyond the hymen. Complete eversion of the vagina +/- cervix (value &gt;/= +(tvl-2))</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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Treatment
- Pelvic floor exercises
- Prevent and limit injury during childbirth
- Topical Oestrogen Therapy
- Smoking cessation
- Avoid constipation
- Avoid heavy lifting
- Pessaries

Diagnosis
- Examine patient
- Rule out pelvic pathology, e.g. pelvic mass

Prevention is better than cure!
Pessary Treatment

Advantages of Pessaries
- Surgery contraindicated / declined
- Family not complete
- Temporary symptom control for those awaiting surgery
- May improve voiding dysfunction

Success Rate
Successful fitting rates are high varying from 74% to 94%. However in 46% of cases refitting within the first week may be required.

Problems
Poor fitting or the inability to retain a pessary may be influenced by the following:
- Deficient perineal body
- Large prolapse
- Wide introitus
- Vagina shorter than 6 cm
- Stenosed / atrophic vagina

A pessary could make stress incontinence worse or unmask stress incontinence

The History of the Pessary
Used in the treatment of genital prolapse for centuries and is one of the oldest medical devices. It reached the peak of popularity in the 19th Century particularly to treat uterine retroversion.

Historical Perspective
Hippocrates mentioned the use of pomegranate to treat prolapse. The earliest written record on the use of pessaries is dated 27 BC and a papyrus from 1500 BC refers to prolapse.

Sizing, fitting and changing
- Immerse the PVC ring in warm water to soften it to aid fitting
- Examine and evaluate the patient’s prolapse and vaginal walls before fitting a ring
- Replace the ring with a new one after a maximum of three months’ use

Research findings on pessary use
- Patient satisfaction with pessaries ranges from 70% - 92%
- Discomfort from prolapse reduce from 90% to 3%
- May help prevent the progression of prolapse
- Can cause a significant improvement in POP-Q score  
  Farrell 2006

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