ORIGINAL ARTICLE

Validation of the Videofluoroscopic Dysphagia Scale in Various Etiologies

Juyong Kim · Byung-Mo Oh · Jung Yoon Kim · Goo Joo Lee · Seung Ah Lee · Tai Ryoon Han

Received: 17 July 2013/Accepted: 4 March 2014/Published online: 23 March 2014 © Springer Science+Business Media New York 2014

Abstract The videofluoroscopic dysphagia scale (VDS) was developed as an objective predictor of the prognosis of dysphagia after stroke. We evaluated the clinical validity of the VDS for various diseases. We reviewed the medical records of 1,995 dysphagic patients (1,222 men and 773 women) who underwent videofluoroscopic studies in Seoul National University Hospital from April 2002 through December 2009. Their American Speech–Language–Hearing Association's National Outcome Measurement System (ASHA NOMS) swallowing scale, clinical dysphagia scale (CDS), and VDS scores were evaluated on the

J. Kim · B.-M. Oh · J. Y. Kim · G. J. Lee · S. A. Lee · T. R. Han (🖾) Department of Rehabilitation Medicine, Seoul National University College of Medicine, 101 Daehak-ro Jongno-gu, Seoul 110-744, Republic of Korea e-mail: tairyoon@snu.ac.kr

J. Kim e-mail: j-y-zone@hanmail.net

B.-M. Oh e-mail: keepwiz@gmail.com

J. Y. Kim e-mail: schola21@gmail.com

G. J. Lee e-mail: 29zoo@hanmail.net

S. A. Lee e-mail: lsarang80@hanmail.net

J. Y. Kim

Department of Rehabilitation Medicine, National Rehabilitation Hospital, Seoul, South Korea

S. A. Lee

Department of Physical Medicine and Rehabilitation, Kyung Hee University College of Medicine Kangdong Hospital, Seoul, South Korea basis of the clinical and/or videofluoroscopic findings by the consensus of two physiatrists. The correlations between the VDS and the other scales were calculated. The VDS displayed significant correlations with the ASHA NOMS swallowing scale and the CDS in every disease group (p < 0.001 in all groups, including central and peripheral nervous system disorders), and these correlations were more apparent for spinal cord injury, peripheral nerve system disorders, and neurodegenerative diseases (correlation coefficients between the VDS and the ASHA NOMS swallowing scale: -0.603, -0.602, and -0.567, respectively). This study demonstrated that the VDS is applicable to dysphagic patients with numerous etiologies that cause dysphagia.

Keywords Deglutition · Deglutition disorders · Etiology · Validity of results

Introduction

Dysphagia is a significant clinical problem that can disrupt quality of life and lead to life-threatening conditions such as aspiration pneumonia [1, 2]. Although several clinical bedside tests are widely used [3, 4], the videofluoroscopic swallowing study (VFSS) has been generally accepted as a gold standard in evaluating and managing dysphagia [4–6]. Because the VFSS can evaluate penetration and aspiration in addition to many different abnormalities in the oral, pharyngeal, and esophageal phases, the VFSS has some merit in determining which swallowing therapy should be performed and what type of diet should be prescribed. To measure these VFSS findings as objective quantitative scores, the videofluoroscopic dysphagia scale (VDS), with a sum of 100 points, was created according to the odds

Table 1 Videofluoroscopic dysphagia scale

Parameter	Coded value	Score	
Lip closure	Intact	0	4
	Inadequate	2	
	None	4	
Bolus formation	Intact	0	6
	Inadequate	3	
	None	6	
Mastication	Intact	0	8
	Inadequate	4	
	None	8	
Apraxia	None	0	4.5
	Mild	1.5	
	Moderate	3	
	Severe	4.5	
Tongue-to-palate contact	Intact	0	10
	Inadequate	5	
	None	10	
Premature bolus loss	None	0	4.5
	<10 %	1.5	
	10-50 %	3	
	>50 %	4.5	
Oral transit time	≤1.5 s	0	3
	>1.5 s	3	
Triggering of pharyngeal swallow	Normal	0	
	Delayed	4.5	
Vallecular residue	None	0	6
	<10 %	2	
	10-50 %	4	
	>50 %	6	
Laryngeal elevation	Normal	0	9
	Impaired	9	
Pyriform sinus residue	None	0	13.5
	<10 %	4.5	
	10-50 %	9	
	>50 %	13.5	
Coating of pharyngeal wall	No	0	9
	Yes	9	
Pharyngeal transit time	≤1.0 s	0	6
	>1.0 s	6	
Aspiration	None	0	12
	Supraglottic penetration	6	
	Subglottic aspiration	12	
Total	- 1		100

ratios of various prognostic factors (Table 1). The VDS is known as a reliable, objective, and quantifiable predictor of long-term persistent dysphagia after stroke: Sensitivity and

Table 2 Clinical dysphagia scale				
Location	Nonstem lesion	0		
	Stem lesion	5		
T-cannula	No	0		
	Yes	25		
Aspiration	No	0		
	Yes	10		
Lip sealing	Intact	0		
	Inadequate	2		
	None	4		
Chewing and mastication	Intact	0		
	Inadequate	4		
	None	8		
Tongue protrusion	Intact	0		
	Inadequate	4		
	None	8		
Laryngeal elevation	Intact	0		
	Inadequate	5		
	None	10		
Reflex coughing	No	0		
	Yes	30		
		100		

specificity of the VDS were 0.91 and 0.92. VDS reliability (intraclass correlation coefficient: 0.556) was reported as moderate agreement [6, 7]. Moreover, the VDS can predict aspiration 6 months after stroke (p < 0.05) [6]. However, the clinical applicability of the VDS has not been proven for etiologies other than stroke. Although stroke is the leading cause of dysphagia, other different disorders can provoke dysphagia [1, 8]. Therefore, quantitative measurement of the VFSS for those etiologies is needed, and the VDS might be a good option.

The aim of the present study was to determine the clinical applicability of the VDS in various etiologies.

Methods

Subjects

Data were collected retrospectively for dysphagic patients who underwent a VFSS for the first time in a Seoul National University Hospital between April 2002 and December 2009. The exclusion criterion was inadequate medical records. We obtained clinical data such as sex, age, etiology of dysphagia defined by the clinician who managed the patients, and duration from onset. If the etiology was not identified by the clinician, then the patient was included in the unknown etiology group without identified neurological and structural abnormalities. If the

Table 3 The	American	Speech–Language	Hearing	Association
National Outco	omes Measu	rements System sw	allowing s	cale

	,
Level 1	Individual is not able to swallow anything safely by mouth. All nutrition and hydration is received through nonoral means (e.g., nasogastric tube, PEG)
Level 2	Individual is not able to swallow safely by mouth for nutrition and hydration but may take some consistency with consistent maximal cues in therapy only. Alternative method of feeding is required
Level 3	Alternative method of feeding required as individual takes less than 50 % of nutrition and hydration by mouth, and/or swallowing is safe with consistent use of moderate cues to use compensatory strategies and/or requires maximum diet restrictions
Level 4	Swallowing is safe but usually requires moderate cues to use compensatory strategies, and/or individual has moderate diet restrictions and/or still requires tube feedings and/or oral supplements
Level 5	Swallowing is safe with minimal diet restrictions and/or occasionally requires minimal cueing to use compensatory strategies. May occasionally self cue. All nutrition and hydration needs are met by mouth at mealtime
Level 6	Swallowing is safe and individual eats and drinks independently and may rarely require minimal cueing. Usually self cues when difficulty occurs. May need to avoid specific food items (e.g., popcorn and nuts), or requires additional time (due to dysphagia)
Level 7	Individual's ability to eat independently is not limited by swallow function. Swallowing would be safe and efficient for all consistencies. Compensatory strategies are effectively used when needed
DEC	

PEG percutaneous endoscopic gastrostomy

patient and caregiver could not remember the onset of dysphagia, then it was recorded as unknown. The protocol for this study was approved by the Institutional Review Board of Seoul National University Hospital.

Outcome Measure

To quantify the clinical severity of dysphagia, the clinical dysphagia scale (CDS) (Table 2) was scored. The CDS has been confirmed as a quantitative clinical tool that represents the VFSS findings well, and it could be adapted to various patients with dysphagia irrespective of the causal disorders [5]. Also, it showed good reliability (intraclass correlation coefficient: 0.886) [9]. The sensitivity and specificity of the CDS for reporting penetration and aspiration were 81.0, 70.7 % and 78.1, 77.9 %, respectively [10]. The quantified severity of the VFSS findings was calculated as the VDS.

The American Speech–Language–Hearing Association National Outcome Measurement System (ASHA NOMS) swallowing scale (Table 3) was scored [11] using the recommended diet after the VFSS. The ASHA NOMS swallowing scale classifies swallowing function according to the diet limitations of a patient (grade 1: no oral feeding; grade 7: no limitation of the diet). It may be a useful tool for grading the severity of dysphagia, and it has been used in many studies [5, 11, 12].

Procedures

Immediately before the VFSS, a physiatrist first obtained the clinical history (location of lesion, presence of T-cannula, and aspiration symptoms) of the patient and performed a physical exam (lip sealing, mastication, tongue protrusion, laryngeal elevation, and cup drinking), after which the CDS was scored. After scoring the CDS, the VFSS was performed by a physiatrist using the protocol from Logemann's study [4, 5, 13]. Patients were given 2 or 5 mL of diluted barium (35 % weight/volume), pudding, curd-type yogurt, and boiled rice twice as food for the lateral VFSS view. Diluted barium and curd-type yogurt were given in both the lateral and anteroposterior positions. All test procedures were recorded on a digital video file and analyzed by agreement of two physiatrists. Oral and pharyngeal transit times were measured by using frame-byframe analysis. These two physiatrists recommended a diet according to the clinical features and VFSS findings of the patient and graded the recommended diet according to the ASHA NOMS swallowing scale. Then, the physiatrist who performed the VFSS scored the VDS using the VFSS findings. All of the outcome scales were rated by the physiatrist who was trained to do so for at least 1 year.

Data Analysis

Spearman's correlation coefficient between the VDS and other scores was calculated. We also analyzed the etiology and age group of the patients. SPSS version 17.0 (SPSS, Inc., Chicago, IL, USA) was used for all statistical procedures. A p value of <0.05 was considered significant.

Results

A total of 2,164 dysphagic patients who had undergone the VFSS were identified. In total, 169 patients were excluded (there was no medical record of the etiology for 2 patients, and the description of the VFSS findings was imperfect for 167 patients). Data for the remaining 1,995 patients (1,222 men) were analyzed in this study.

The characteristics of the patients are given in Table 4. The average age of the patients was 58.7 ± 19.3 years. Excluding 197 patients who could not remember the onset of dysphagia, the average duration between the onset of dysphagia and the time of evaluation for 1,798 patients was 243.5 ± 711.6 days (range = 0–30 years, median =

Table 4	Patient	characteristics	(N =	1,995)
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Characteristics					
Age (years) ^a	58.7 ± 19.3				
Sex (M/F) [n (%)]	1,222/773 (61.3/38.7)				
Etiology [<i>n</i> (%)]					
Central nervous system					
Stroke	742 (37.2)				
Brain tumor	199 (10.0)				
Neurodegenerative diseases	111 (5.6)				
Traumatic brain injury	37 (1.9)				
Other brain disorders	136 (6.8)				
Spinal cord injury	37 (1.9)				
Peripheral nervous system					
NMJ disorders or myopathy	52 (2.6)				
Peripheral neuropathy	48 (2.4)				
Others					
Local structural lesions involving the head and neck	279 (14.0)				
Poor general medical condition	259 (13.0)				
Unknown	95 (4.8)				
ASHA NOMS ^a	4.18 ± 2.20				
CDS ^a	23.5 ± 20.7				
VDS ^a	29.2 ± 19.8				

NMJ neuromuscular junction, *ASHA NOMS* American Speech–Language–Hearing Association National Outcome Measurement System swallowing scale, *CDS* clinical dysphagia scale, *VDS* videofluoroscopic dysphagia scale

^a Values are mean \pm standard deviation. All other values are number and percent of patients

41 days). The three most common causal disorders of dysphagia were (1) central nervous system disorders (e.g., stroke, brain tumor, neurodegenerative disease, traumatic brain injury, and spinal cord injury), (2) local structural lesions involving the head and neck (e.g., tumors of the oral cavity, pharynx, and esophagus; postoperative anatomical alteration; anterior cervical osteophyte; and corrosive esophageal stricture), and (3) poor general medical condition due to other medical or surgical problems. The rates of incidence of these three causal disorders were 58.0, 14.0, and 13.0 %, respectively.

The values of the ASHA NOMS, the CDS, and the VDS of various etiologies are given in Table 5. For the ASHA NOMS, local structural lesions involving the head and neck had lowest value (3.6 ± 2.4), while unknown etiology had the highest (5.4 ± 2.2). For the CDS, the lowest value was for unknown etiology (15.3 ± 19.7) and the highest for peripheral neuropathy (28.3 ± 22.1). For the VDS, the lowest value was for unknown etiology (18.3 ± 18.8) and the highest for neuromuscular junction disorders or myopathy (37.6 ± 19.1).

In every disease group there was a significant correlation between the VDS and the ASHA NOMS swallowing scale (p < 0.001 in all groups). Most of the disease groups showed at least moderate strength of correlation, particularly spinal cord injury, peripheral neuropathy, and neurodegenerative disease (correlation coefficients between the VDS and the ASHA NOMS swallowing scale of these disease groups: -0.603, -0.602, and -0.567, respectively). Furthermore, for every etiology, there was a significant correlation with at least moderate strength between the VDS and CDS scores (p < 0.001 in all groups) (Table 6).

In addition, the data revealed significant correlations in all age groups between the VDS and the other scales (p < 0.001 in all decades; Table 7).

Discussion

The VDS displayed significant correlations with the ASHA NOMS swallowing scale and the CDS scores, regardless of the etiology and age of the patients. Therefore, a higher VDS score indicates greater diet limitations and more severe dysphagia.

Originally, the VDS was created to quantify the severity of dysphagia of patients who had a stroke [6], but there were also statistically significant correlations for the rest of the etiologies included in this study. Moreover, for many etiologies (i.e., spinal cord injury, peripheral neuropathy, neurodegenerative disease, traumatic brain injury, brain tumor, poor general medical condition, and local structural lesions involving the head and neck), the correlation between the VDS and the ASHA NOMS swallowing scale was stronger than that for stroke. Thus, the VDS also can be applied to describe quantitatively the severity of dysphagia in conditions other than stroke.

However, there were no significant differences of the ASHA NOMS, the CDS, and the VDS between "stronger" and "weaker" correlated etiologies. For instance, if the clinician could not find the cause of dysphagia, we classified that as unknown etiology. It means that the cause of dysphagia might not be severe in some patients with somatization disorder and laryngopharyngeal reflux. All three scales showed that the dysphagia of the patients with unknown etiology is the least severe. However, this cannot explain why the strongest correlation was found for unknown etiology. Maybe these differences resulted from the characteristics of each etiology. For example, the diet recommendation for the acute stroke patients could be more conservative, although it could be more lenient for the chronic stroke patients. This tendency might result in the relatively low correlation found in stroke etiology. However, this assumption cannot be generalized to other

Table 5 Disease-specific values of scales

Etiology	n	%	ASHA NOMS	CDS	VDS
Central nervous system					
Stroke	742	37.2	4.3 ± 2.0	21.9 ± 20.0	27.8 ± 18.5
Brain tumor	199	10.0	4.3 ± 2.2	24.4 ± 20.8	27.4 ± 19.2
Neurodegenerative disease	111	5.6	4.5 ± 2.1	24.1 ± 19.2	33.6 ± 20.0
Traumatic brain injury	37	1.9	4.2 ± 2.2	23.6 ± 24.9	27.4 ± 19.3
Other brain disorders	136	6.8	4.0 ± 2.3	23.2 ± 19.5	29.0 ± 20.5
Spinal cord injury	37	1.9	4.4 ± 2.3	21.2 ± 18.5	30.0 ± 19.4
Peripheral nervous system					
NMJ disorders or myopathy	52	2.6	4.2 ± 2.2	23.0 ± 21.8	37.6 ± 19.1
Peripheral neuropathy	48	2.4	4.0 ± 2.2	28.3 ± 22.1	33.6 ± 19.1
Others					
Local structural lesions involving the head and neck	279	14.0	3.6 ± 2.4	27.0 ± 22.7	34.8 ± 21.3
Poor general medical condition	259	13.0	4.0 ± 2.2	26.2 ± 21.0	28.8 ± 19.5
Unknown	95	4.8	5.4 ± 2.2	15.3 ± 19.7	18.3 ± 18.8

Values are mean \pm standard deviation

NMJ neuromuscular junction, ASHA NOMS American Speech-Language-Hearing Association National Outcome Measurement System swallowing scale, CDS clinical dysphagia scale, VDS videofluoroscopic dysphagia scale

 Table 6
 Disease-specific correlation coefficients between videofluoroscopic dysphagia scale and other scales

Table	7	Age-specific	correlation	coefficients	between	videofluoro-
scopic	dy	sphagia scale	and other s	scales		

Etiology	n	%	ASHA NOMS ^a	CDS ^a
Central nervous system				
Stroke	742	37.2	-0.498	0.472
Brain tumor	199	10.0	-0.533	0.541
Neurodegenerative disease	111	5.6	-0.567	0.501
Traumatic brain injury	37	1.9	-0.563	0.424
Other brain disorders	136	6.8	-0.333	0.530
Spinal cord injury	37	1.9	-0.603	0.546
Peripheral nervous system				
NMJ disorders or myopathy	52	2.6	-0.485	0.508
Peripheral neuropathy	48	2.4	-0.602	0.520
Others				
Disorders involving head and neck area	279	14.0	-0.503	0.531
Poor general medical condition	259	13.0	-0.542	0.471
Unknown	95	4.8	-0.634	0.661

NMJ neuromuscular junction, *ASHA NOMS* American Speech–Language–Hearing Association National Outcome Measurement System swallowing scale, *CDS* clinical dysphagia scale

^a Values are correlations coefficients between videofluoroscopic dysphagia scale and ASHA NOMS and CDS. p < 0.001 in all groups

disease categories. Further study will be required to answer this question.

Significant correlations also were found in every age group. In particular, a correlation was also evident for those who were younger than 10 years (although the correlation coefficient was lower than that for other age groups, the

Age	n	%	ASHA NOMS ^a	CDS ^a
0–9	82	4.1	-0.378	0.738
10–19	45	2.3	-0.571	0.563
20–29	63	3.2	-0.603	0.522
30–39	87	4.4	-0.606	0.683
40–49	180	9.0	-0.461	0.440
50-59	360	18.0	-0.565	0.481
60–69	585	29.3	-0.536	0.516
70–79	417	20.9	-0.533	0.533
80-	176	8.8	-0.551	0.386

ASHA NOMS American Speech–Language–Hearing Association National Outcome Measurement System swallowing scale, CDS clinical dysphagia scale

^a Values are correlations coefficients between videofluoroscopic dysphagia scale and ASHA NOMS and CDS. p < 0.001 in all groups

p value was significant). Even though the VFSS can be performed with children [14], the evidence obtained for adults cannot be generalized to children [15]. The VDS also could be clinically useful for quantitatively describing the severity of dysphagia in children. In addition, the VDS could be a helpful reference for choosing the diet for dysphagic children. However, the correlation coefficient was lower than that for other age groups. Therefore, the VDS should not be the criterion and the diet should be determined carefully using all clinical information.

The VDS can produce numerical data regarding swallowing function through the use of comprehensive VFSS findings [6]. Therefore, clinicians can more precisely understand and explain dysphagia and delineate the aggravation and improvement of dysphagia in detail as opposed to only describing the presence of penetration or aspiration. Moreover, because the VDS is determined by VFSS, it can be a more objective tool than other clinical evaluations despite the need for the fluoroscopic room.

The CDS, which was developed to screen dysphagia after stroke using clinical findings such as clinical history and bedside test data, displayed correlation with the VFSS findings in various disease groups [5]. In the current study, correlations between the CDS and the VDS were evident for all disease and age groups, indicating that the VDS correlates with the clinical findings of dysphagic patients irrespective of the causal disorder(s) or age of the patients. Accordingly, clinicians can use the CDS and the VDS for dysphagic patients for clinical or academic purposes to quantify the severity of dysphagia.

This study has some limitations. First, some information was not obtainable such as the duration of dysphagia from onset to study participation for some patients. However, this did not affect the results of the study regarding the correlations between the scores. Second, this study was a retrospective single-center study, which could result in bias and loss of data (e.g., level of spinal cord injury, type of operation on head and neck area, level of cognition). Third, the raters of the VDS were not blinded to the clinical findings which could be a limitation. Fourth, only one physiatrist scored the VDS for one patient. If two or more physiatrists scored the VDS, then the data might be more reliable. Further prospective multicenter studies with more data such as follow-up prognosis will be required to solve these issues.

Conclusions

The VDS is a useful scale for quantifying the severity of dysphagia in various disease and age groups. The VDS can be a useful tool in clinical settings and studies to measure the findings of the VFSS.

Acknowledgments This research was supported by a grant of the Korea Health Technology R&D Project through the Korea Health Industry Development Institute (KHIDI), funded by the Ministry of Health & Welfare, Republic of Korea (A101272).

Conflict of interest The authors have no conflicts of interest to declare.

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Juyong Kim MD

Byung-Mo OhMD, PhDJung Yoon KimMDGoo Joo LeeMDSeung Ah LeeMD, PhDTai Ryoon HanMD, PhD