Hylan Injections Beat Steroids for Arthritis Thumb

BY PATRICIA L. KIRK

Contributing Writer

SAN ANTONIO — Injections of a hyaluronic acid derivative provide a safer and more effective alternative to corticosteroids for nonoperative treatment of trapeziometacarpal arthritis, according to a report presented at a joint annual meeting of the American Society for Surgery of the Hand and American Society for Hand Therapists.

Long used to treat symptoms of knee osteoarthritis, injections of the hyaluronic acid derivative Synvisc (hylan) were compared with injections of corticosteroid and placebo for basal joint arthritis in a study led by Melvin P. Rosenwasser, M.D., and associates from Columbia University Medical School, New York.

At 1 month, joint arthritides were randomized to three groups: two intraarticular injections of Synvisc at weekly intervals, one placebo injection followed by two Synvisc injections 1 week later, or two saline injections 1 week apart. Patients were evaluated at 2 weeks, 1 month, 3 months, and 6 months and were assessed using patient-rated surveys, including the visual analog scores for pain (VAS), disabilities of the arm, shoulder, and hand (DASH) scores; and physical examination tests looking at range of motion (ROM), grip strength, and pinch strength.

The majority of patients were postmenopausal women, with an average age of 63 years, and the dominant hand was affected. VAS results showed statistically significant improvement in the placebo and steroid groups at 1 month, but not at 6 months, compared with baseline. Significant pain relief in the hylann group occurred at 6 months, but not at 1 month.

Pinch grip strength improved in 50% of the placebo group, 68% of the steroid group, and 44% of the hylan group.

At 6 months, symptoms had improved by 68% in the hylan group, 58% in the steroid group, and 47% in the placebo group.

Benefits with regard to pain, grip, and pinch strength, and range of motion were similar in all three groups until the 26th week, when hylan’s benefits appeared more significant, said Dr. Rosenwasser, noting there were no adverse effects from treatment in any of the groups.

Simple Procedure Relieves Arthritis Thumb Pain

SAN ANTONIO — A simple treatment for basilar thumb arthritis that requires minimal convalescence may be just as effective as more complex procedures requiring a longer healing period, Nicholas J. Meyer, M.D., said at the joint annual meeting of the American Society for Surgery of the Hand and the American Society for Hand Therapists.

The procedure consists of a trapezial excision to stabilize the first and second metacarpal bases, followed by packing of the trapezial space with Gelfoam and suction-


---

**Arthritis**

**Rheumatology News** • December 2005

---