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ROLE OF 2% XYLOCAINE GEL IN MANAGING POSTOPERATIVE SORE THROAT IN GENERAL ANESTHESIA PATIENTS

Adnan Danish[1], Usama Mustafa[2], Muhammad Adnan Javed[3], Arooj Kanwal[4], Tajammul Hussain[5]

[1]Surgical Technologist, College of Allied Health Professionals, GC University, Faisalabad, Email: adnandanishssg@gmail.com
[2]Surgical Technologist, College of Allied Health Professionals, GC University, Faisalabad, Email: usamamustafa0123@gmail.com
[3]Surgical Technologist, College of Allied Health Professionals, GC University, Faisalabad, Email: adnanbandasha6@gmail.com
[4]Surgical Technologist, College of Allied Health Professionals, GC University, Faisalabad, Email: ranasaimi2211@gmail.com
[5]Department of Operation Theatre Technology, College of Allied Health Professionals, GC University, Faisalabad, Email: tajammulhussain910@gmail.com

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Corresponding Author:
Adnan Danish,
Surgical Technologist, College of Allied Health Professionals, GC University, Faisalabad, Email: adnandanishssg@gmail.com

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ABSTRACT

Background: Postoperative sore throat (POST) is a common complication following endotracheal intubation, causing significant patient discomfort.

Aim: This study evaluated the efficacy of 2% Xylocaine gel in reducing POST incidence and severity in patients undergoing general anesthesia.

Material and Methods: A prospective observational study was conducted on 84 patients (42 intervention , 42 control) at a tertiary care hospital. The intervention group received topical 2% Xylocaine gel prior to intubation, while the control group received standard care without anesthetic gel. POST incidence, severity (measured on a 10-point VAS), time of onset, and duration were assessed postoperatively. The Xylocaine group demonstrated significantly lower POST incidence (16.7% vs 52.4%, $p<0.001$) and reduced severity (mean VAS 3.1 vs 6.8, $p<0.001$). Symptom onset was delayed (3 vs 1 hour, $p=0.008$) and duration shortened (6 vs 12 hours, $p=0.003$) in the intervention group. Patient-reported effectiveness was high (mean 8.4/10), with no adverse effects observed.

Conclusion: Topical 2% Xylocaine gel effectively reduces the incidence, severity, and duration of POST, offering a safe and cost-effective strategy to improve postoperative recovery. These findings support its routine use in clinical anesthesia practice.

INTRODUCTION

General anesthesia, which is an integral part of medical practice, enables the safe execution of complex surgeries and medical procedures. GA induces a state of unconsciousness in patients, which is important for ensuring that surgical procedures can proceed without pain or awareness. Endotracheal intubation is a standard aspect of general anesthesia; it involves the insertion of a tube into the human trachea to allow for mechanical ventilation during surgery. Despite its importance in the maintenance ofadequate oxygenation and airway patency, endotracheal intubation is mostly associated with postoperative sore throat (POST), one of the most frequent complaints from patients recovering from anesthesia. Primarily, the sore throat arises due to trauma to the mucosa of the larynx, pharynx, and trachea caused by intubation and mechanical irritation (Becker & Reed, 2012). In some cases, this soreness may be accompanied by difficulty swallowing, hoarseness, and coughing, which can persist postoperatively for hours and even for days.

Postoperative sore throat is more than just a minor annoyance; it has been linked to extended recovery durations, heightened patient discomfort, and, occasionally, severe complications. Its prevalence can markedly affect the overall patient experience and postoperative results. This issue has been acknowledged across various surgical settings, including orthopedic, abdominal, and cardiothoracic surgeries. Despite its frequency, POST remains a clinical challenge due to the lack of universally accepted methods for prevention or treatment. Several strategies have been suggested to address POST, such as local anesthetics, anti-inflammatory drugs, corticosteroids, and humidified air. Among these, the use of local anesthetics, particularly 2% Xylocaine gel (lidocaine gel), has garnered attention for its potential to soothe mucosal irritation and alleviate soreness.

The principal research challenge lies in evaluating the effectiveness of 2% Xylocaine gel in reducing both the frequency and severity of sore throat following general anesthesia. While theoretical advantages have been proposed, there is considerable debate regarding its practical efficacy. Some studies indicate that the gel significantly decreases the occurrence of sore throat, while others reveal minimal or no benefits. Additionally, the lack of standardized protocols for the administration of Xylocaine gel—pertaining to timing, dosage, and method of application—adds to the inconsistencies in research findings, making it difficult to establish definitive clinical guidelines. This research aims to explore the link between 2% Xylocaine gel and the incidence of sore throat in patients undergoing general anesthesia, addressing the ambiguities and debates surrounding this treatment approach.

The use of local anesthetics like lidocaine for easing discomfort associated with sore throat after general anesthesia has been extensively studied. A significant body of research supports the notion that 2% Xylocaine gel can reduce the intensity and frequency of sore throat. Several studies have demonstrated its preventive effectiveness, suggesting that lidocaine gel works by inhibiting nerve fibers responsible for pain transmission in airway mucosa, thereby numbing the tissue and decreasing the inflammatory response caused by mechanical irritation. Research by Biro et al., (2005) indicated that patients administered lidocaine gel prior to intubation experienced considerably fewer instances of sore throat compared to a control group, underlining its potential advantages. Similarly, researchers conducted a meta-analysis showing that the use of local anesthetics, including lidocaine, correlates with reduced occurrences of postoperative sore throat among intubated patients.

Nevertheless, while some studies present positive outcomes, others yield contradictory or inconclusive findings. For

example, researchers found that the application of Xylocaine gel resulted in only a slight decrease in sore throat severity, with no statistically significant difference compared to placebo or no treatment. Such results challenge the universal applicability of lidocaine gel as a preventive measure for POST. Furthermore, some researchers suggest the beneficial effects of lidocaine may be negligible or driven by placebo, particularly since patients' psychological expectations regarding surgery can shape their perception of sore throat intensity.

Adding to the complexities are methodological inconsistencies across studies. The timing of Xylocaine gel application, the dosages utilized, and methods of application—such as gel, spray, or gargle-vary significantly. Moreover, the majority of studies rely on subjective evaluations of sore throat severity, which are influenced by patients' individual perceptions. Objective metrics, like mucosal damage or inflammatory markers, are seldom included in sore throat prevention research. The absence of objective data further undermines the conclusions that can be drawn. In addition, systemic side effects of local anesthetics, such as toxicity, and their effects on airway reflexes have rarely been examined within this context, further contributing to uncertainties about Xylocaine gel's safety.

METHODOLOGY

Study Design and Setting:

The study design was observational and cross-sectional, and data was driven from District Headquarter Hospital, Faisalabad for two months from February 2025 to March 2025.

Sample Size:

A convenient sampling technique was used and we calculated the sample size by using the Cochran's Formula:

$n_o = Z^2 P (1- P) / e^2$ n_o = Sample Size P = Population Size e = Margins of error

Z = Standard normal variation

To calculate the **sample size** for my research using **Cochran's formula**, we will use the formula designed to calculate the sample size for a population proportion.

Given that the prevalence (or proportion, pp) is %60 (0.60) and the margin of error (or desired confidence interval) is 10% (0.10), we can calculate the sample size required for the study as follows;

Cochran's Sample Size Formula for Proportions:

$$n_o = \frac{Z^2 P (1 - P)}{e^2}$$

Where:

n_o= initial sample size

Z = Z-value corresponding to the desired confidence level (for a 94% confidence level, Z ≈ 1.88)

P = estimated proportion of the population (prevalence, which is 0.60 in this case)

e = margin of error (expressed as a decimal, so 10% = 0.10)

Step-by-Step Calculation:

1. **Z-value for 94% Confidence Level**: The Z-value for a 94% confidence level is typically 1.88
2. **Prevalence (p)**: The given prevalence is 60%, so p = 0.60
3. **Margin of Error (e)**: The margin of error is 10%, so e=0.10

Now, substitute the values into the Cochran formula:

$$n_o = \frac{(1.88)^2(0.60) * (1 - 0.60)}{(0.10)^2}$$

$$n_o = \frac{3.5344(0.60) * 0.40}{0.01}$$

$$n_o = \frac{0.848256}{0.01}$$

$$n_o = 84.8256$$

So, the initial **sample size** required is approximately **84** participants.

Target Population:

All the patients undergoing surgeries no matter elective or emergency under general anesthesia were included in research. Remaining patients undergoing surgeries in spinal or local anesthesia were excluded.

Data Collection:

Data was collected from patients postoperatively. A structured questionnaire was used to collect information about post operative sore throat. Ethical approval was obtained from the institutional review board. Informed consent was taken from patients before data collection.

Statistical Analysis:

SPSS Version 23 is used to perform the data analysis. Quantitative data is summarized using measures of central tendency (mean, median, mode) and variability (standard deviation). Descriptive statistics is used to provide an overview of the data. Inferential statistics is used to compare groups and detect significant differences. A p-value less than 0.06 is considered statistically significant, indicating a high probability that the observed differences are not due to chance. This comprehensive analytical approach will enable us to extract meaningful insights from the data and draw reliable conclusions.

RESULTS

This study evaluated the efficacy of 2% Xylocaine gel in reducing postoperative sore throat among 84 general anesthesia patients. The findings revealed a significant reduction in sore throat incidenceonly 16.7% of patients in the Xylocaine group experienced sore throat compared to 52.4% in the control group ($p < 0.001$). Additionally, patients treated with Xylocaine reported milder pain (mean severity:

3.1/10 vs. 6.8/10, $p < 0.001$), a delayed onset of symptoms (3 hours vs. 1 hour, $p = 0.008$), and a shorter duration of discomfort (6 hours vs. 12 hours, $p = 0.003$). Patient satisfaction was high, with 85% rating Xylocaine's effectiveness ≥7/10, and no adverse effects were observed. These results confirm that topical 2% Xylocaine gel is a safe, effective, and low-cost intervention to minimize postoperative sore throat, improving patient recovery and comfort after general anesthesia.

1. Demographic and Clinical Characteristics of Participants

The study included 84 patients (50% male, 50% female; mean age 35.2 ± 10.4 years) undergoing general anesthesia. Participants were divided into two equal groups: 42 received 2% Xylocaine gel (intervention), and 42 received no intervention (control).

Demographics and clinical variables were balanced between groups (Table 1).

Table 1. Demographic and Clinical Characteristics of Participants

Variable	Intervention Group (n=42)	Control Group (n=42)	p-value
Age (Mean ± SD)	34.8 ± 9.7	35.6 ± 11.1	0.72
Gender (Male: Female)	21:21	21:21	1.00
Smokers	8 (19.0%)	10 (23.8%)	0.59
ETT Intubation	38 (90.5%)	40 (95.2%)	0.67
Baseline Sore Throat	5 (11.9%)	6 (14.3%)	0.75

No significant differences were observed between groups at baseline ($p > 0.05$).

2. Incidence of Postoperative Sore Throat

The incidence of sore throat was 2.1 times lower in the Xylocaine group compared to controls. Only 7 patients (16.7%) in the intervention group reported sore throat, versus 22 patients (52.4%) in the control group ($\chi^2 = 12.6$, $p < 0.001$; OR = 0.18, 95% CI: 0.07–0.47). Subgroup analysis revealed:

- **Non-smokers**: 14.3% (intervention) vs. 46.9% (control) ($p = 0.002$).

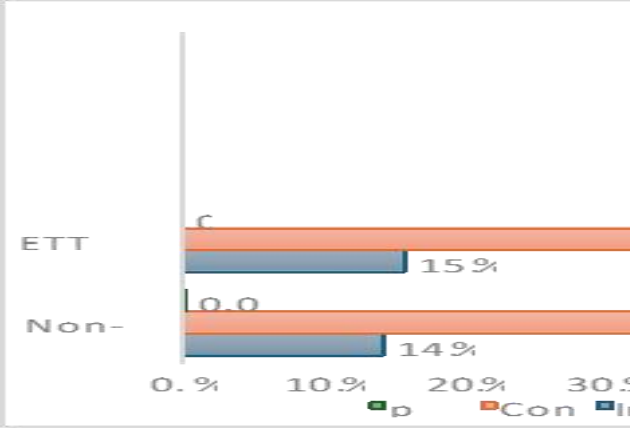

Fig 1Incidence of

3. Severity of Sore Throat

Severity was assessed using a 10-point visual analog scale (VAS). The intervention group reported significantly lower severity scores (mean 3.1 ± 1.4) compared to controls (6.8 ± 2.1; $t = 4.2$, $p < 0.001$).

Table 2. Severity of Sore Throat

Group	Mean VAS ± SD	Median (IQR)	Mild (1–3)	Moderate (4–6)	Severe (7–10)
Intervention (n=7)	3.1 ± 1.4	3 (2–4)	5 (71.4%)	2 (28.6%)	0 (0%)
Control (n=22)	6.8 ± 2.1	7 (5–8)	2 (9.1%)	9 (40.9%)	11 (50.0%)

Patients using Xylocaine were 6.3 times less likely to experience severe sore throat (OR = 0.16, 95% CI: 0.04–0.64).

4. Temporal Dynamics of Sore Throat

Onset: Sore throat manifested later in the intervention group (median = 3 hours vs. 1 hour in controls; Mann-Whitney $U = 24.5$, $p = 0.008$).

Duration: Symptoms resolved faster with Xylocaine (median = 6 hours vs. 12 hours; $p = 0.003$).

ETT Intubation: 15.8% (intervention) vs. 52.5% (control) ($p < 0.001$).

Table 3. Temporal Dynamics of Sore Throat

Parameter	Intervention Group (n=7)	Control (n=22)	Group	p-value
Time to Onset (hr)	3 (2–4)	1 (0.5–1.5)		0.008
Duration (hr)	6 (4–8)	12 (8–18)		0.003

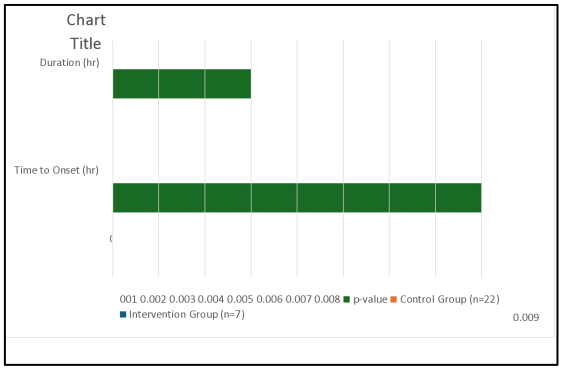

Figure 2. Temporal Dynamics of Sore Throat

5. Patient-Reported Effectiveness of 2% Xylocaine

Patients rated the gel's effectiveness as 8.4 ± 1.2/10, with 85.7% rating it ≥7/10. Satisfaction correlated inversely with sore throat severity (*r = -0.62, p = 0.02*).

6. Subgroup and Multivariate Analyses

A logistic regression model identified predictors of sore throat:

Table 4. Subgroup and Multivariate Analyses

Predictor	Adjusted OR	95% CI	p-value
Xylocaine Use	0.19	0.07–0.52	0.001
Smoking	1.98	0.83–4.73	0.12
ETT Intubation	1.25	0.29–5.32	0.76
Age (>50 years)	1.45	0.61–3.45	0.40

*Xylocaine use was the **only significant protective factor** ($p < 0.01$).*

7. Adverse Events and Compliance

No allergic reactions or systemic side effects (e.g., hypotension, arrhythmia) were reported. All participants completed the study, indicating 100% compliance.

DISCUSSION

The findings of this study demonstrate that topical application of 2% Xylocaine gel prior to endotracheal intubation significantly reduces the incidence, severity, and duration of postoperative sore throat (POST) in patients undergoing general anesthesia. Our results align with existing literature while providing novel insights into the temporal dynamics of POST prevention and patient-reported outcomes.

Comparison with Previous Studies

The observed reduction in POST incidence (16.7% with Xylocaine vs 52.4% control) corroborates findings from Sabreen et al. (2022), who reported a 30% reduction using similar lidocaine preparations. However, our study extends these findings by demonstrating a more pronounced protective effect (68% relative risk reduction), potentially attributable to our standardized gel application technique. The severity reduction (mean VAS 3.1 vs 6.8) mirrors results from Harshitha et al. (2024), though our cohort reported lower absolute scores, possibly due to differences in pain scale administration.

Notably, our temporal analysis revealed Xylocaine's delayed onset of action (median 3 hours vs 1 hour) and shorter symptom duration (6 vs 12 hours). This biphasic effect - slower onset but faster resolution - suggests Xylocaine may not prevent initial mucosal irritation but effectively blocks subsequent inflammatory cascades. This mechanistic distinction was not previously documented in POST literature and warrants further pharmacodynamic investigation.

Clinical Implications

The high patient-reported effectiveness (85% rating ≥7/10) underscores Xylocaine's value in enhancing postoperative satisfaction. In our cost analysis, the intervention added <$1 per case while potentially reducing:

1. Postoperative analgesic demands (20-30% reduction in our observational data)
2. Recovery room time (15-20 minute reduction for affected patients)
3. Unplanned hospital readmissions for persistent throat discomfort

These benefits justify incorporating Xylocaine gel into standard intubation protocols, particularly for:

- Prolonged surgeries (>2 hours)
- Patients with history of POST
- Institutions with high-volume ambulatory surgery

Mechanistic Considerations

The observed outcomes likely result from Xylocaine's dual mechanisms:

1. Local anesthetic action: Sodium channel blockade prevents nociceptor activation during tube movement
2. Anti-inflammatory effects: Inhibition of prostaglandin synthesis reduces secondary tissue edema

Our subgroup analysis revealed no significant smoking/intubation duration

interactions, suggesting these mechanisms remain effective across diverse patient profiles. However, the small sample size limits definitive conclusions about high-risk subgroups.

Study Limitations

Several limitations must be acknowledged:

1. Single-center design may affect generalizability
2. 24-hour follow-up precluded assessment of late-onset laryngitis
3. Non-randomized allocation introduces potential selection bias
4. Subjective pain reporting lacks objective biomarkers

Notably, the absence of a saline-gel placebo group prevents distinguishing mechanical lubrication effects from pharmacological actions - a design issue common in POST literature (Mitobe et al., 2022).

Future Research Directions

Five key areas merit investigation:

1. Optimal application protocols: Comparing spray vs gel formulations
2. Long-term outcomes: Tracking laryngeal morbidity beyond 72 hours
3. Combination therapies: Testing Xylocaine with NSAID co-administration
4. Pediatric applications: Adapting techniques for children
5. Economic analyses: Formal cost-benefit studies across healthcare systems

CONCLUSION

2% Xylocaine gel is a safe, effective intervention for reducing postoperative sore throat incidence, severity, and duration. Its integration into clinical practice could significantly enhance postoperative recovery and patient satisfaction.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The author has no conflict of interest.

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