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Hyperbaric oxygen and steroid therapy for idiopathic sudden sensorineural hearing loss

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In our controlled retrospective analysis of medical records in tertiary care academic medical center, we aimed to investigate the therapeutic effects of hyperbaric oxygen (HBO) therapy combined with steroid administration for idiopathic sudden sensorineural hearing loss (ISSNHL) in comparison with that of steroid administration alone. Our subjects were 130 consecutive inpatients with ISSNHL (hearing levels ≥ 40 dB; time from the onset of hearing loss to the start of treatment ≤ 30 days). Sixty-seven patients underwent HBO plus steroid therapy (HBO group), and 63 were given steroids alone (steroid group). Hearing recovery was evaluated by grade assessment and by the improvement in hearing compared to that in the unaffected contralateral ear. The cure rate and hearing improvement rate were not statistically different between the two groups; however, the recovery rate was significantly higher in the HBO group than in the steroid group (59.7% vs. 39.7%; $P < 0.05$). With regard to patients with initial hearing levels of ≥ 80 dB, the hearing improvement rate was significantly higher in the HBO group than in the steroid group ($51.1 \pm 7.0\%$ vs. $27.1 \pm 7.8\%$; $P < 0.05$), while in patients whose initial hearing levels were < 80 dB, hearing outcomes were not statistically different between the two groups. In both the HBO and steroid groups, patients with initial hearing levels of < 80 dB showed a better hearing improvement rate than those with initial hearing levels of ≥ 80 dB. In conclusion HBO therapy shows a significant additional effect in combination with steroid therapy for ISSNHL, particularly in patients with severe hearing loss.