Correlation of Electronic (Web-Based and Smartphone) Administration of Measures of Pelvic Floor Dysfunction: A Randomized Controlled Trial

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Objective: We hypothesized that instruments of pelvic floor dysfunction would yield similar responses on web-based and smartphone administration compared with paper.

Methods: Subjects presenting with pelvic floor disorders were prospectively enrolled at 5 sites and invited to complete 4 validated pelvic floor disorder questionnaires (Pelvic Floor Distress Inventory 20, Pelvic Floor Impact Questionnaire 7, Pelvic Organ Prolapse/Urinary Incontinence Sexual Function Questionnaire 12, Bristol Stool Scale) on both paper and electronic formats, 2 weeks apart, with the order of administration being randomized. Participants completed the questionnaires electronically on the internet via REDCap or using the PelvicTrack App on a smartphone or tablet.

Results: Two hundred thirty-four subjects were enrolled, and 132 subjects (56%) completed both sets of questionnaires with no intervening treatment. This group was 58 (±15) years old with body mass index 28 (±6) kg/m² and parity 2 (1, 3) and was 77% white, 6% African American, 7% Asian, and 10% other. Presenting complaints were classified as 58% urinary, 37% prolapse, and 5% fecalatory. There was no difference in overall demographic information between those who completed the second round of questionnaires and those who did not. There was no difference in age between those who chose to complete the questionnaires via REDCap and those who chose to complete the questionnaires via smartphone. Correlation coefficients between questionnaire administration range from 0.5 to 0.8. There was no significant difference in the responses for each total scale and individual scale between the first or second administration.

Conclusions: We demonstrated moderate to strong reliability between scales of pelvic floor dysfunction administered electronically compared with paper version. Our results strongly suggest that it is feasible and reliable to administer pelvic floor questionnaires in an electronic format on REDCap and on smartphones.

Key Words: electronic questionnaire, pelvic floor questionnaires, PFDI, PFIQ, PISQ, validation

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H ealth questionnaires are a form of patient-reported outcomes (PROs) commonly used in health care. Health questionnaires are often used as intake logs, discerning and recording the symptoms and severity of a problem at the time of presentation. Unfortunately, PRO forms are often underutilized or uninterpretable in clinical practice because they are collected on paper. A recent study by Berger and Schimpf demonstrated that, even in a highly educated population, completion of a paper form of pelvic floor questionnaire was low. In a study by Movas et al., using web-based surveys increased the completion rate of quality-of-life assessments from 52% to 90%. As medicine strives to incorporate technology into its systems and practices, we have to consider how to collect data electronically while ensuring that this new format is equivalent to the paper questionnaires we rely on. In a meta-analysis by Gwalney et al., unique studies evaluating 278 PRO scales were reviewed, and the authors noted that the mean difference between electronic and paper scales was 0.2%, indicating equivalence. Unfortunately, none of the validated scales were measures of pelvic floor dysfunction. Within urogynecology, PRO scales such as the Pelvic Floor Distress Inventory (PFDI), Pelvic Floor Impact Questionnaire (PFIQ), Bristol Stool Scale (BSS), Bladder Diaries, and others are used ubiquitously. Their impact, however, is diminished by poor compliance and recall bias.

The move toward electronic PRO measures would be endorsed by patients (who can track and interact with their own data), physicians (who can track progress and study group outcomes), and by regulators (who want to ensure accurate and reproducible data collection). Electronic PRO tools, particularly on the patient’s own device, would allow for increased rate of reporting through mobile availability, automatic time stamping of data at the actual time of questionnaire completion to prevent recall bias, and reduction in data entry mistakes and costs.

In this study, we tested our hypothesis that responses on electronically administered (web-based or smartphone) validated instruments of pelvic floor dysfunction would be comparable to responses on those same instruments when administered on paper. The original studies have each been validated on paper. The methodology of electronic validation of multiple related PRO scales has been previously used for asthma scales.

The objective of this study was to correlate responses on electronically administered (web-based and smartphone) validated instruments of pelvic floor dysfunction with responses on the same paper instruments.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

This prospective validation study was performed by the Collaborative Research in Pelvic Surgery Consortium. Columbia University Medical Center served as the data coordinating center. The protocol was approved by the Collaborative Research in Pelvic Surgery Consortium Steering Committee, and institutional review board approval was obtained from each of the 5 recruiting centers.
centers (Houston Methodist Hospital [Pro00012984], University of Wisconsin [2015-0809], Columbia University Medical Center [AAAO8451], University of Arkansas for Medical Sciences [204332], and University of Calgary [REB17–1784]). CONSORT guidelines were followed (Supplemental Digital Content 1, http://links.lww.com/FPMRS/A73).

Women 18 years or older presenting to 1 of these 5 female pelvic medicine and reconstructive surgery (FPMRS) clinics seeking care for pelvic floor disorders were eligible for this study if no intervening treatment was planned for the 2 weeks between questionnaire completion. New or returning patients were eligible. Subjects were further excluded if they did not have access to a computer/web or a smartphone, if they were not fluent in English, or if they were pregnant. Demographic measures were collected, including age, body mass index (BMI), race, ethnicity, parity, education level, and presenting chief complaint.

Participants completed 4 validated pelvic floor dysfunction instruments: PFDI Short-Form (PFDI-20), PFIQ-7, Pelvic Organ Prolapse/Urinary Incontinence Sexual Function Questionnaire (PISQ-12), and the BSS. Subjects were allocated via 1:1 random number blocks to either an initial paper or electronic questionnaire set. The randomization scheme was generated by using the Web site Randomization.com (seed 1553). A research coordinator or study personnel generated the random allocation sequence, enrolled participants, and assigned participants to interventions. Participants who had a smartphone (iPhone platform) and agreed to download the no-cost PelvicTrack App (Virtabot, Inc, www.virtabot.com, New York, NY) completed the questionnaires on their phone. Those who did not have a smartphone or were not willing to download the app completed questionnaires via web-based administration using REDCap (www.project-redcap.org). Subjects who were randomized to initially complete the electronic forms were either directly provided or mailed paper copies of the questionnaires and a self-addressed stamped envelope, and asked to wait 2 weeks before completing and mailing the paper questionnaire. Subjects received a reminder telephone call or email based on their preferred contact method approximately 2 weeks after initial completion. The second questionnaire set was administered prior to any treatment 2 or more weeks after completion of the first questionnaire set (Fig. 1). The primary outcome analyzed was the correlation between the paper and electronic administration of each pelvic floor questionnaire.

**Pelvic Floor Distress Inventory**

The PFDI is a commonly used PRO scale in the field of urogynecology and in our clinics.\(^8\) It was designed to assess symptom distress in women with pelvic floor dysfunction. The short and long forms have demonstrated high correlation \((r > 0.86)\). The short form consists of 20 items divided into 3 scales: Urinary Distress Inventory, Pelvic Organ Prolapse Distress Inventory, and the Colorectal-Anal Distress Inventory.

**Pelvic Floor Impact Questionnaire**

The PFIQ-7 is used to assess life impact in women with pelvic disorders.\(^8\) The short form consists of 3 scales with 7 items each and correlates highly with the long form \((r > 0.90)\). The 3 scales include Urinary Impact Questionnaire, Pelvic Organ Prolapse Impact Questionnaire, and Colorectal-Anal Impact Questionnaire.

**Pelvic Organ Prolapse/Urinary Incontinence Sexual Function Questionnaire**

The PISQ-12 is used to assess sexual function in patients who have pelvic organ prolapse and/or urinary incontinence.\(^9\) The short form consists of 12 items and correlates highly with the long form \((r > 0.92)\).

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**FIGURE 1.** CONSORT flow diagram.
Bristol Stool Scale

The BSS was developed to classify human feces as a surrogate marker of colon transit time. It is useful as a means of clinical communication and evaluating the effectiveness of treatments on “constipation” and defecatory dysfunction. Stool is divided into 7 types and represented graphically.

Prior validation metrics of the PFIQ-7 and PFDI-20 short forms compared with the long forms were used for the power calculation. A sample size of 36 subjects in each arm (108 participants in total) had more than 80% power to detect an effect size of 0.5 or greater with 0.05 two-sided significance. As we were recruiting new patients (before subjects had the option to elect interval treatment), our target enrollment was 216 patients to allow for a 50% dropout rate due to subjects electing interval treatment. Continuous variables were compared with paired and Student t test, and categorical values were analyzed with χ². Correlation coefficients were calculated using Pearson and Spearman tests, depending on the distribution of data. Statistical analysis was performed with SPSS (version 25, Chicago, Ill).

RESULTS

Two hundred thirty-four subjects were enrolled and randomized between August 2015 and March 2018. One hundred ten subjects completed the first administration on paper, and 124 were randomized to electronic administration, of which 72 completed the smartphone questionnaire and 52 on the web via REDCap. There was no difference in age between those who chose to complete the electronic version via REDCap and those who chose to complete the electronic version on the smartphone. In addition, there was no difference in completion rate between those who chose to do the electronic questionnaires on the phone and those who chose to do the electronic questionnaires via REDCap.

Overall mean/median scores and correlation coefficients between the paper and electronic total and subscales are shown in Table 2. Correlation coefficients range from 0.5 to 0.8. There was no significant difference in the responses for each total scale between the paper and electronic version of the questionnaires on the smartphone versus REDCap. There was no difference in age between those who chose to complete the electronic version via REDCap and those who chose to complete the electronic version on the smartphone. In addition, there was no difference in completion rate between those who chose to do the electronic questionnaires on the phone and those who chose to do the electronic questionnaires via REDCap.

DISCUSSION

Our multicenter consortium successfully recruited and retained participants to reliably validate electronic pelvic floor dysfunction PROMs. We demonstrated moderate to strong reliability between these electronic and paper questionnaires. The electronic and paper questionnaires. The electronic and
paper versions of the PFDI-20 and PISQ were strongly correlated with r values of 0.74 and 0.86, respectively. The paper and electronic versions of the PFIQ-7 and BSS were moderately correlated with r values of 0.63 and 0.58, respectively. Our results are similar to those of 2 prior authors who demonstrated strong correlation between paper-based and electronic administration of the PISQ-12 and the PFIQ-7. Parnell et al looked at 52 women who completed both a web-based and paper-based version of the PISQ-12. They demonstrated a correlation of 0.88 between web-based and paper. Additionally, they found that women preferred the web-based administration. Sun et al looked at 68 women who completed a paper and then crossed over to a WeChat version of the PFIQ-7. They demonstrated a correlation of 0.9 between formats. Additionally, they investigated completion times and subject preference for the formats and found no difference. Our study is unique in that it also demonstrates correlation between paper-based and electronic administration of the PFDI-20 and BSS. Further, we specifically looked at the commonly used REDCap database and the use of smartphone to complete questionnaires. By expanding the platforms that women can complete these validated questionnaires, our hope is to have an impact of ease of use, access, completion rates, and patient satisfaction. As Berger and Schimpf demonstrated, even in a highly educated population, completion of a paper form of pelvic floor questionnaire was low. Having validated questionnaires available in other formats may help us increase completion rates.

The BSS was the lowest correlated questionnaire in our study. It is possible that this is due to variations that can occur in subject’s stool consistency irrelevant to the correlation of the electronic questionnaire.

There are several strengths to our study. This was a randomized multicenter study following CONSORT guidelines including 5 different FPMRS practices across the United States and Canada, which provides a representative sample of the population of women seeking care for pelvic floor disorders. A diversity of presenting pelvic floor complaints was seen. A second strength of the study was that the a priori sample size was reached. Third, we achieved a good response rate of 56% for the completion of both sets of questionnaires. Lastly, we evaluated 2 forms of electronic questionnaires: smart phone application and computer-based REDCap.

There are limitations to our study, which include the study population’s mean age was 58 years, thus potentially representing a younger patient population who may be more familiar with electronic devices. It is possible that older women presenting to these clinics self-selected not to participate, creating a selection bias. However, moving forward this may not be as much of a concern as our younger, more electronically savvy patients age and move into an older cohort and close the disparity gap in electronic literacy. A prior multicenter survey of women presenting to urogynecologists revealed the majority of women desire use of the internet or social media to learn more about their pelvic floor disorders.

Our data suggest that it is feasible and reliable to administer commonly used validated pelvic floor questionnaires in an electronic format via a web-based interface or on a woman’s cell phone or tablet. This may allow FPMRS specialists to utilize current technology to better capture patients’ responses on an up-to-date instrument that is current and to provide a more accessible and simpler interface to help improve patient satisfaction.

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