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The Comparison between Healing of Mucoperiosteal Incisions Made by Electrosurgery and Scalpel

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THE COMPARISON BETWEEN HEALING OF MUCOPERIOSTEAL INCISIONS MADE BY ELECTROSURGERY AND SCALPEL

by

Anthony T. Young

A Thesis Submitted to the Faculty of the Graduate School of Loyola University in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of Master of Science

June 1977
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I wish to extend my sincere gratitude to my advisor, Dr. William F. Malone, for his interest and guidance in this thesis. I would like to thank Dr. Patrick D. Toto and Dr. Douglas C. Bowman for their contributions and for participating as members of my research committee.

I also wish to express my appreciation to William G. Sewell who researched and wrote Appendix A and coauthored Appendix B. I am grateful to Dr. Jon B. Suzuki for his assistance in preparing and evaluating the photomicrographs and proofreading the text.

Finally, a loving thank you to Roxanne K. Young for her assistance in preparing the manuscript.
ANTHONY T. YOUNG was born in Chicago, Illinois on March 21, 1947. He was graduated from Lane Technical High School, Chicago, Illinois in January 1965. In January of the same year, he entered Loyola University, Chicago, Illinois as a pre-dental student where he was graduated with the degree of Bachelor of Science in January 1969.

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INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this study was to determine if electrosurgery caused abnormal effects on healing when mucoperiosteal incisions were made directly through the mucoperiosteum to alveolar bone. These incisions were compared histologically under the light microscope to similar incisions using a scalpel. Previous studies were primarily concerned with the deleterious effects of electrosurgery performed in close proximity or momentary contact with bone (Glickman, 1970; Ozimek, 1972; and Nixon, 1975). This investigation deviated from former studies by making deliberate incisions directly through the gingiva to the bone. This afforded a direct comparison of healing between electrosurgery and scalpel incisions. To my knowledge, no previous study has shown any results where contact with bone throughout the length of the incisions was used.
REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

In 1580, William Gilbert, the physician of Queen Elizabeth I, performed experiments in magnetism and electricity and coined the term "electricity." Another landmark in the history of electricity and electrosurgery occurred in 1746 when the Leyden Jar Capacitor was developed. Later, Oersted (1821) discovered electromagnetic induction. Nolet (1834) developed an inductance coil and demonstrated the effects of electrical sparks. The discovery that the Leyden Jar discharged in an oscillating manner went to Henry in 1842. Forty-two years later in 1884, Hertz found these oscillations or waveforms could pass from a generator to a distant receiver without any connections. Three years prior in 1881, Morton combined all previous works by demonstrating an oscillating frequency of 100,000 cps which did not shock the body or cause muscle contraction. In 1891, d'Arsonval found the lower limit of 10,000 cps also contained a thermal component.

A ground plate to distribute the surface charge was first used in 1919 by Iredell and Turner. Then, in 1923, Wyeth observed endothermy (local heat production by high frequency from a spark gap generator) was valuable in treating cancer. Clark (1925) em-
ployed electrodessication and electrocoagulation for oral cancer removal. Histologically, he found cells to be shrunken, elongated, divided, and blood vessels thrombosed. He stated more fibrosis and bone sloughing occurred with electrocoagulation. The first time cutting took precedence over coagulation was in 1925 when Wyeth used proper current levels generated in a vacuum tube and fine electrode tips. The tissue was cut by minutely-localized disintegration of cells at the tip of the electrode; this was called "acusection." A short time later in 1929, McClean stated a vacuum tube oscillator produced current with a waveform more conducive to cutting than to coagulation.

Ellis (1931) measured tensile strength of numerous healing incisions and found in skin, a tensile strength of 97% of normal tissue following knife incisions, and 60% following electrosurgery. Ten years later in 1941, Ogus used electrosurgery for gingivoplasties. Orban showed severe inflammation, necrosis, and bone sloughing due to electrocoagulation in 1944, and in 1945, he and Archer described the reparative processes of connective tissue and epithelium after electrosurgery.

It was shown by Hardwick (1953) the high resistance of bone results in coagulation of bone cells by a current that does not coagulate soft tissue. In 1955 Hartwell demonstrated the viability of the connective tissue base adjacent to periosteum as an important factor influencing the rate of epithelialization and ultimate heal-
ing. In 1957 Catchpole noted ground substance was important in healing.

Oringer (1960) stated coagulation still accompanied the cutting action, which he thought was produced by fully rectified current. In 1962 Mitchell and Lumb discussed the cause of volatilization as being due to vacuum tube oscillators producing continuous frequency sine wave current without damping. They theorized cell morphology was altered by dissolution of molecular structure in the path of the electrode tip. In the next year, 1963, Klingberg and Butcher noted the importance of the epithelium layer in healing; if more connective tissue is removed with epithelium, then healing is delayed further. That same year, Trott and Gorenstein established mitotic rates of rat oral and gingival epithelium. Combined with Stahl's (1968) autoradiographic technique, a definitive set of events for healing dynamics in the rat was established.

Toto and Annoni described the importance of an intact clot as a sealant and defense mechanism during healing (1965). Armstrong (1966) demonstrated it was possible to deepen periosteal involvement. In the same year, Harrison and Kelly showed the fully rectified units to be superior with less lateral heat dissipation. Another investigator, Klug, presented the notion that operator variance was important, but also noted gingivae regenerated to within 0.1 mm of its initial heights (also 1966).

In 1968 Pope used a loop electrode with a partially rectified
unit to perform gingivectomies on dogs and observed retarded healing, bone involvement, and decreased height of gingival contour. In the same year, Battig stated spark gaps produced pulses of damped frequency current of the sine wave form. Kelly demonstrated there was no retardation of reepithelialization in monkeys after one week (1968). Also in 1968, Malone and Manning performed gingivoplasty with a partially rectified unit and found no adverse healing. In another study they emphasized the choice of needle electrodes and swift, deliberate strokes through the tissue as necessary for an optimum tissue response.

Oringer (1969) said an indifferent plate creates a biterminal circuit with an end result of deeper penetration of the electrocoagulation effect. Later that year, Oringer placed lateral heat dissipation in perspective to coagulation. The important factors he mentioned were the time interval between applications of electrode tip to tissues, and the motion of the electrode within the gingival sulcus. He also stated bone necrosis was due to a current type other than fully rectified. Additionally, Oringer stated inadequate output of a fully rectified unit could cause simultaneous coagulation and cutting, meaning that there was not enough power to create total disintegration. In 1969 Schomburg and Malone showed electrode sterilization to be unnecessary when the passive plate was used to complete the circuit.

Malone, Kusek, and Eisenmann (1970) found healing in human
soft tissue to occur within seven days after surgery with reepithelialization and keratinization. Glickman and Imber (1970) compared shallow resections of gingivae in dogs and found no difference between the healing after the knife or electrosurgery. With deep resection there was no problem with the knife, but electrosurgery resulted in deleterious healing problems in bone, ie, necrosis, sequestration, and resorption.

Ozimek (1972) found that in rats, unpredictable healing responses occurred when electrosurgery involved calcified tissues such as bone and cementum. He noted there was a one-day delay in epithelialization of electrosurgery incisions compared to scalpel incisions. Additionally, he found more extensive connective tissue inflammation in electrosurgical incisions that was not evident in scalpel incisions.

In 1974 Schneider and Zaki performed a two-part experiment on rabbits using the light microscope and the electron microscope to investigate gingival wound healing following experimental electrosurgery. Their studies involved soft tissue gingivoplasties, and at the light microscope level they observed an altered homogeneous, hyalinized-appearing connective tissue seen only in the electrosurgerized specimens. At the electron microscope level, the only difference evident between the knife and electrosurgerized specimens was the presence of ill-defined collagen fibers. No other remarkable differences were found.
Nixon, Adkins, and Keys (1975) used 25 guinea pigs and studied the effect of undamped fully rectified current with the electrode in direct contact with the periosteum. They found a substantially more extensive inflammatory reaction and greater destruction of periosteum after electrosurgery compared to the controls incised with a knife.

Wilhelmsen, Ramfjord, and Blankenship (1976) performed electrosurgical gingival "troughing" in Rhesus monkeys and found substantial gingival recession with apical migration of the sulcular epithelium. In addition, burn marks on root surfaces were noted where the electrode made contact.

The literature review presents few studies using mucoperiosteal flaps incised directly over bone. Glickman's study (1970) used a small loop electrode which was brushed through the gingiva almost to the bone in one procedure performed on a dog. He extrapolated results similar to Ozimek's subsequent thesis (1972) that compared 24 electrosurgical incisions and 24 scalpel incisions directly to bone in rat maxillae. Both researchers found that electrosurgical incisions contacting periosteum or tooth structure resulted in delayed healing. Nixon's study (1975) used 25 guinea pigs with similar procedures and results. No study has yet involved the comparison of healing between mucoperiosteal incisions using electrosurgery and the scalpel in primates. This investigation used Rhesus monkeys since these animals are generally accepted as choice speci-
mens for periodontal healing studies.
MATERIALS AND METHODS

A. Experimental Animals

Two adult Rhesus monkeys were used. Four electrosurgical and four scalpel incisions were made in each monkey.

B. Operative Procedures

Using refined electrosurgical current developed by the Cameron-Miller 255 electrosurgery unit and the thinnest needle electrode, incisions were made that completely penetrated the gingiva. A new, sterile Bard-Parker #12 surgical blade was used to make each scalpel incision. Contact with the alveolar bone was intentional and extended the full length of the incisions. All incisions were located buccally and were made with the cutting instrument held almost perpendicular to the alveolar process.

One anterior and one posterior incision were made in each quadrant using one method of incision per quadrant (Table 1). The anterior and posterior incisions were angled so either buccal-lingual or horizontal sections would pass through the incised areas. The incisions were made as deliberately and as quickly as possible. Contralateral sides of the opposite arches in each monkey were in-
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<td>Scalpel</td>
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cised with either electrosurgery or the scalpel to prevent each monkey from favoring either side.

After the incisions were made, the tissue between the incisions was elevated as mucoperiosteal flaps. Each flap was immediately replaced as close as possible to its original position.

C. Tissue Preparation

One monkey was sacrificed 24 hours after the incisions were made to determine if any remarkable, histologic differences occurred that rapidly after surgery. The other monkey was surgerized, then received antibiotics and a soft diet for nine days. On day 14 this second specimen was sacrificed. Both monkeys' incisions were left exposed to the normal oral environment.

After each animal was sacrificed, the skull was immediately immersed in 10% formalin. Then the incised areas were prepared and sectioned as usual for slides that were stained with hematoxylin and eosin. Control sections were obtained from nonsurgerized areas in each monkey. Sections were made as listed in Table 2. The double-blind method of examining data was employed on each slide.

The following features were examined on each slide where the sections made this possible:

(1) the surface of the incised tissues

(2) the presence and character of inflammation

(3) the extent and quality of reparative processes
(4) the histology of the periosteum at each incision base

(5) evidence of bone resorption and necrosis.

Photomicrographs were taken of these features as x40, x100, x200, or x450.
Table 2.--Microscope Slide Sections

### 24-Hr Monkey

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Jaw Incised</th>
<th>Location and Type of Incision</th>
<th>Plane of Section</th>
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<tr>
<td>Maxilla - Right</td>
<td>Anterior - Knife</td>
<td>Horizontal</td>
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<td>Maxilla - Right</td>
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<td>Maxilla - Left</td>
<td>Anterior - Electrosurgery</td>
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<td>Maxilla - Left</td>
<td>Posterior - Electrosurgery</td>
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<tr>
<td>Mandible - Right</td>
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<td>Mandible - Left</td>
<td>Posterior - Knife</td>
<td>Buccal - Lingual</td>
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### 14-Day Monkey

<table>
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<th>Jaw Incised</th>
<th>Location and Type of Incision</th>
<th>Plane of Section</th>
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<tr>
<td>Maxilla - Right</td>
<td>Anterior - Knife</td>
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<td>Maxilla - Right</td>
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<tr>
<td>Maxilla - Left</td>
<td>Anterior - Electrosurgery</td>
<td>Buccal - Lingual</td>
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<td>Mandible - Left</td>
<td>Anterior - Knife</td>
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<td>Mandible - Left</td>
<td>Posterior - Knife</td>
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RESULTS

Examination of the slides involved the histologic comparison of each slide with known control sections. After examining each previously numbered slide, the findings of each were compared to the controls and any histologic differences noted. The slides were then identified by type of incision, and the results pooled so that general comparisons could be made. Aside from the initial examination, pooling the results eliminated needless description of minute details from slide to slide. It also provided for histologic comparisons of one group of slides to another. Representative photomicrographs were taken from each group.

A. Control Sections

These slides showed the monkeys had normal appearing hard and soft tissues (Fig A and B). Normal epithelium was noted with rete pegs intact. The lamina propria exhibited uniform staining with a normal amount of collagen and connective tissue elements. Few capillaries were seen and no demonstrable inflammation was present. The periosteum was intact and adjacent to bone that presented a normal histologic appearance.
Fig A. Note the normal appearing lamina propria, periosteum, and bone (control; H & E x450).

Fig B. The relationship between the overlying epithelium, connective tissue, periosteum, and bone is normal and healthy (control; H & E x100).
B. **Sections of 24-hour Scalpel Incisions**

Figures C and D demonstrated typical scalpel incisions. Note the periosteum was nicked with the scalpel but remained intact. The basal cell layer with the uniform staining lamina propria and its connective tissue have maintained their integrity. A mild inflammatory response initiating repair was observed. Minute areas of hemorrhage and fibrin clot can be illustrated.

C. **Sections of 24-hour Electrosurgery Incisions**

Characteristic electrosurgery incisions are depicted in low power (Fig E and H). Figure G showed where the electrode contacted bone with the resulting blood clot formation. The epithelium has been disrupted from the lamina propria at the basal cell layer. The degenerating lamina propria showed darker staining adjacent to the incision. The connective tissue had apparently lost its cellular and fibrillar definition immediately adjacent to the incision. Figure J demonstrated a proliferative leukocyte infiltration of the lamina propria subadjacent to an incision. This is considered one of the initial stages of acute inflammation. Rete pegs were not observed adjacent to the incision. High magnification of Figures F, G, and I demonstrated the bone was nicked with the electrode. However, no burn marks are apparent, indicating the electrode had been in contact with ossified structures for a minimal length of time.
Fig C. Low magnification of typical scalpel incision at 24 hours. Some hemorrhage and fibrin clot are seen. Periosteal covering is somewhat intact (scalpel; H & E x40).

Fig D. Note the nick in the periosteum and the evenly stained ground substance. A mild inflammatory response indicating repair has begun (scalpel; H & E x100).
Fig E. Low magnification of 24-hour electrosurgery incision. Note that the bone was contacted and the presence of a blood clot. The lamina propria has been disrupted and the margins of the incisions stained more intensely (electrosurgery; H & E x40).

Fig F. High magnification of Figure E showing disrupted, more intensely stained lamina propria (electrosurgery; H & E x200).
Fig G. Higher magnification of Figure E showing that the electrode contacted bone but left no burn marks. Bone marrow area on the lower right appears to be necrotic, which accounts for the belated healing (electrosurgery; H & E x200).

Fig H. Low magnification of electrode contact with bone. Osteoclasia activity would be required for the initiation of repair (electrosurgery; H & E x40).
Fig I. High magnification of Figure H showing area of electrode contact without burn marks. Note disrupted vacuolized lamina propria (electrosurgery; H & E x200).

Fig J. Note intense inflammation of the 24-hour electrosurgery incision (electrosurgery; H & E x200).
D. **Sections of 14-day Scalpel Incisions**

These sections showed polymorphonuclear leukocyte invasion with a moderate concentration of cells. Figure K shows surface epithelialization is near completion. The connective tissue is not disrupted and repair is almost complete. In Figure L the basal cell layer is intact and contacts the basement membrane. The greater staining intensity could be related to increased amounts of immature collagen and increased nutrients available in the ground substance for repair.

E. **Sections of 14-day Electrosurgery Incisions**

Delayed healing is demonstrated in Figure M that showed incomplete epithelial maturation and migration. The incisional cleft remained open. Atypical epithelial cells had lost their definition, were abnormal in size and shape, and contained pyknotic nuclei. The basal layer of epithelial cells no longer retained its morphologic orientation with the lamina propria and had lost its cohesiveness (Fig N and O).

The lamina propria demonstrated an acute inflammatory reaction with polymorphonuclear leukocyte infiltration, a lack of fibrillar definition, and capillary engorgement (Fig Q).

Figure P shows a higher magnification of the bone resorption seen in Figure M. The periosteum has been severely disrupted as reflected by osteoclast activity with concomitant Howship's lacunae.
Fig K. Fourteen-day scalpel incisions demonstrating complete epithelial migration. Repair is almost complete (scalpel; H & E x100).

Fig L. High magnification of Figure K showing mild inflammatory cell infiltration and intact basal cell layer immediately adjacent to the lamina propria. Since this tissue is still undergoing repair, it stains more intensely (scalpel; H & E x200).
Fig M. Section of 14-day electrosurgery incision depicting incomplete epithelial migration and maturation. Note cleft between basal cell layer and lamina propria. Active repair between underlying bone and surface epithelium is evident. Matrix injury is still in progress. Sufficient connective tissue death is contributed to belated epithelial healing (electrosurgery; H & E x40).

Fig N. Higher magnification of Figure M showing moderate inflammation extending to the basal layer of epithelium. Moderate to severe degenerative changes are seen in the lamina propria (electrosurgery; H & E x100).
Figure M

Figure N
Fig O. Higher magnification of Figure M depicting atypical epithelial cells with disrupted junction between lamina propria and the epithelium. Some pyknotic nuclei can be seen. A pale, delicate, edematous network and residue of cells is present (electrosurgery; H & E x450).

Fig P. Higher magnification of Figure M showing necrosis and osteoclastic activity with Howship’s lacunae (electrosurgery; H & E x450).
Fig Q. A different 14-day electrosurgery specimen that clearly shows the inflammatory cells, lack of complete fibrillar definition, and capillary engorgement. The surface epithelium shows obvious degenerative disturbances (electrosurgery; H & E x100).
Figure Q
In isolated instances the inflammatory process was not as evident. However, Figures R and S show delayed epithelialization associated with bone resorption. In contrast, the higher magnification of Figure R seen in Figure T depicts osseous repair with collagen and bundle bone adjacent to mature bone.

In addition, empty lacunae could be found near the area of electrode contact. It was difficult to determine whether the osteocytes "shrunk" away from the lacunae walls during tissue processing, whether they were dehydrated due to electrosurgical current, or whether impaired nutrient function of the periosteum caused their degeneration.
Fig R. Fourteen-day electrosurgery incision with delayed epithelialization. Not many inflammatory cells are present in this section (electrosurgery; H & E x40).

Fig S. Higher magnification of Figure R depicting abnormal epithelialization. The basal cell layer is abnormal and pyknotic nuclei can be seen. The basement membrane is not clearly defined. Few inflammatory cells are present (electrosurgery; H & E x200).
Fig T. Higher magnification of Figure R showing collagen and bundle bone with minimal evidence of inflammatory cells. Osteocytes appear to be in the state of repair (electrosurgery; H & E x200).
Figure T
DISCUSSION

The intent of this study was to demonstrate mucoperiosteal incisions can cause complicated and/or delayed healing. The major consistent difference found between the electrosurgical and scalpel mucoperiosteal incisions was delayed healing. Histologically, the scalpel incisions caused only relative injury to the periosteum. Periosteal damage was limited to the contact point of the blade with the bone. Healing proceeded uneventfully in most of these incisions. The major difference between the 14-day scalpel incision sections and the control sections was the slight inflammatory response present in the healing tissues, which was predictable.

Bone necrosis reflected by Howship's lacunae in sections of electrosurgical incisions may be a primary factor that caused delayed epithelialization and disruption of the lamina propria. Since performing electrosurgical incisions in the vicinity of bone has been known to produce unpredictable results, this study used electrosurgery to incise directly to the bone through the mucoperiosteal incisions. This approach of mucoperiosteal incisions consistently resulted in complicated and delayed healing. The electrosurgical current was directly responsible for abnormal healing results when
used to make mucoperiosteal incisions.

In order to minimize the deleterious effects of heat build-up at the electrode tip, a concerted effort was made to perform all incisions as quickly as possible. The results were in agreement with previous studies (Glickman, 1970; Ozimek, 1972; Nixon, 1975), and few histologic or photomicrographic differences were noted when compared with these investigations.

The diversity of tissue responses reported in the literature was due to the broad range of specimens used to evaluate electro-surgery. Although mice, rats, guinea pigs, dogs, monkeys, and humans have been used as specimens, the experimental results demonstrated that deleterious healing occurred regardless of the specimen used (Pope, 1965; Glickman, 1970; Ozimek, 1972; Nixon, 1975; Wilhelmsen, 1976). The experimental design in each case used incisions through the gingiva to periosteum producing predictably belated healing.

In contrast to these investigations, there were studies whose purpose was to elicit the most innocuous responses possible (Malone, 1969; Eisenmann, 1970; Schneider, 1976). In each investigation, only soft tissues were incised and healing followed uneventfully.

Host response was an important parameter to consider in these investigations. The human response would be predictably better in each instance, particularly in the maxillary incisions, due to the increased blood supply in this area.
Electrosurgery is an excellent modality that may be used for the following procedures: in periodontal surgery for removing tenacious tissue tags interproximally, performing frenectomies and gingivoplasties, removing opecula, planing edentulous ridges, elongating clinical crowns, and gaining access to subgingival caries.

The major advantage of electrosurgery over the scalpel is the accessibility of the electrode tip into areas where conventional instrumentation with a scalpel is impossible. Another advantage is the excellent hemostasis achieved with electrosurgery facilitating tissue dilatation prior to impressions for prosthodontic consideration. An excellent application of electrosurgery is the manner in which a "bleeder" can be quickly sealed using the coagulating current setting.

Use of electrosurgery is contraindicated in patients with a pacemaker or where inevitable contact with periosteum or bone is expected to be more than momentary, ie, radiated patients or patients with a collagen deficiency.

When performing electrosurgery, it is desirable to have a refined, fully rectified unit with the thinnest needle electrode. This will insure a higher degree of efficiency with negligible deleterious effects and minimizes "operator variance."

If the operator restricts his use of electrosurgery to soft tissue modifications using refined instrumentation and acceptable technical approaches, he can insure a more therapeutic profile for
this instrument. This modality is used routinely without problems by oncologists, urologists, general surgeons, and other paramedical personnel.

It would be ludicrous to require dentists who use electrosurgery to be more cautious and prudent (when approaching the tissues around a single tooth in a confined area of the oral cavity) than other medical personnel who routinely use less refined instruments in a bolder manner under less restricted operating fields.

Electrosurgery is not a panacea, but merely a refined manner in which to treat patients; it is still in its infancy. The paucity of innovative research and the reluctance of dental researchers to recognize the significance of employing the assistance of other investigators has hindered advancements of electronic surgery.

Electronic engineering, crystallography, biochemistry, biophysics, and other specialty consultations would expedite research in electrosurgery. This would benefit all therapeutic applications of electrosurgery. There was enough research reported in the literature of other sciences that this author, with expert assistance from an electronic technician, has been able to advance mechanisms and theory on the effects of electrosurgery. How it works and why hard tissues should be avoided are discussed in Appendices A and B.

During healing, the electrosurgical mucoperiosteal incisions were found to vary in the inflammatory response elicited (see Appendix B). It is not clear at this time why varying degrees of in-
flammation occurred in the same animal. The redundant or trite phrase "operator variance" may be appropriate, but, more likely, the peculiarities of electrosurgical current were probably responsible when periosteal tissues were involved.

Previous authors suggest operator variance may be the cause for varying degrees of deleterious healing after electrosurgical procedures. At this point, the author of this study maintains "operator variance" is a normal consideration when using electrosurgery if the electrosurgery performed did not involve periosteal tissues. In order to obtain acceptable experimental results, previous authors had to contend with the various peculiarities of the nature of electrosurgery. Therefore, this author concludes that more than likely, previous experimenters did, in fact, use electrosurgery properly.

Understanding the operation of an electrosurgical unit would benefit any novice operator and is of paramount importance if used daily in clinical practice (see Appendix A).

Research on the effects of electrosurgery in soft tissues with or without hard tissue involvement has been literally exhausted. Current areas for innovative research include the following:

1) refining and updating the electronic components in electrosurgery units using integrated circuitry and electronic clocks that divide a second into one million or more parts allowing finer control over the current.
(2) experimenting with different methods of modifying the RF (radio frequency) and/or using different RF values.

(3) investigating more thoroughly the mechanisms and theory of bone resorption and method of operation of RF.

(4) investigating the biological hazards of RF
   (a) Is enough energy concentrated at the electrode to cause free radicals?
   (b) Is enough energy present to dissociate DNA or other macromolecules?
   (c) Is RF cumulative in tissues of the body?
   (d) Are any biological hazards of microwave radiation applicable to RF radiation?
   (e) Is healing altered by experimenting with different methods of modifying the RF and/or using different RF values?

Dentistry should insist on the updating and refinement of electrosurgery units. Current electrosurgery units are decades behind the state of the art of electronics. Few units use completely solid state circuitry. Integrated circuitry is essentially nonexistent. No unit employs power output metering that is essential to safe, effective operation. Other improvements necessary for sound operation include: capacitive isolation between the unit and electrode cable, over current protection at the output, linear output control, and use of standard electrical color codes for cables (black always in-
icates ground . . . except in electrosurgery units).
SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

Using either electrosurgery or the scalpel, two full thickness mucoperiosteal incisions were made contacting bone in each quadrant of two Rhesus monkeys. One monkey was sacrificed within 24 hours; the other specimen at 14 days. The surgerized tissues were then prepared by standardized laboratory procedures for light microscopic examination with hematoxylin and eosin stain. These slides were examined by the double-blind method. Control sections were made from tissues not surgerized.

The scalpel incisions in each case exhibited normal repair and healing. The electrosurgical specimens presented different histologic pictures. Twenty-four-hour and 14-day specimens showed evidence of decreased osteocyte viability, which accounted for reepithelialization, bone necrosis, and delayed healing. The lamina propria and periosteum were severely disrupted immediately adjacent to the incisions. Although epithelial cells migrated to cover the lamina propria at 14 days, the surface epithelium remained thin, friable, and lacked acceptable maturity. Healing was obviously delayed.

The postsurgical histologic comparisons of healing of mucoperiosteal incisions made by electrosurgery and scalpel demonstrate the
deleterious effects of electrosurgery. Therefore, recommendations that mucoperiosteal incisions should be avoided when using electrosurgery are consistent with the results of the present study.

Electrosurgery should be restricted to soft tissue modifications or if periosteal involvement inadvertently occurred, a surgical pack is a mandate.
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Ellis JD: The rate of healing of electrosurgical wounds as expressed by tensile strength. JAMA 96:16-18, 1931.


Electromagnetic energy is one of three known major energy groups, the other two being gravitation and nuclear forces. Electromagnetic energy consists of small quanta of energy called photons. The energy contained in each photon is given in the formula:

\[ E = h\nu \]

where \( E \) is the energy in ergs, \( h \) is Plank's Constant \( (6.626 \times 10^{-27} \) erg-seconds), and \( \nu \) (nu) is the frequency in cycles per second (cps). The behavior of these photons can be described as waves, and predictions concerning the behavior of these waves can be made using simple laws of wave mechanics. Electromagnetic waves are described in terms of frequency or wavelength that are related by the equation:

\[ c = \lambda \nu \]

where \( \lambda \) (lambda) is the wavelength, \( \nu \) (nu) is the frequency, and \( c \) is the speed of light in a vacuum equal to \( 3 \times 10^{10} \) cm/sec. We shall be discussing these waves in the operation of the electrosurgery unit.

The electromagnetic waves are organized into the electromagnetic spectrum (Fig 1) starting with a frequency of zero, or direct current (DC), and extending through low frequency radio, VHF, UHF, microwaves, infrared, visible light, ultraviolet, x-rays, and gamma
\[ r = \frac{3 \times 10^{10}}{\lambda} \]

Fig 1
rays. In theory, the spectrum could extend up to infinite frequency and zero wavelength; however, little research has been done concerning frequencies above gamma rays that lie between $10^{19}$ and $10^{21}$ cps.

Radio frequency (RF) is that portion of the electromagnetic spectrum that lies between 3 kHz (3,000 cps) and 300 GHz (300 billion cps). One typical electrosurgical unit works at a frequency of 1.75 MHz, which lies between the AM broadcast band and the high frequency aircraft communications band.\(^2\)

It is helpful to look at a typical electrosurgical unit and discuss each section in some detail. Figure 2 shows a block diagram of a simple electrosurgery unit.\(^3\)

The RF oscillator is the heart of the system. It is the function of the oscillator to supply the RF current that is ultimately used at the electrode tip. There are two popular methods of constructing an oscillator. The first is by use of a crystal and the other is the use of a tuned tank circuit.

When crystals of certain substances are compressed or expanded, a voltage appears across opposite faces of the crystal. The polarity of the generated voltage changes when the mechanical force is changed from one that compresses to one that expands the crystal. Conversely, when a voltage is applied between the opposite faces of such a crystal, it will expand or contract depending on the polarity of the applied voltage. This phenomenon is called the piezoelectric effect. Although many crystalline substances are piezoelectric, natural
quartz has about the best frequency stability and is the most widely used crystal in the electronics industry.

If an alternating voltage is applied across the opposite faces of a crystal, it will vibrate. The amplitude of the vibrations is very small at most frequencies but becomes very large at one frequency called the resonant frequency of the crystal. The resonant frequency of a crystal depends on its physical dimensions, particularly its thickness in the direction of vibration. The thinner the crystal, the higher the frequency.

When a capacitor and inductor are arranged in parallel, the circuit is called a tuned tank circuit, and is the simplest form of oscillator (Fig 3).

If the capacitor (C) is charged and allowed to discharge through the inductor (L) the electric energy will be stored in the magnetic field of the inductor. As the charge on the capacitor drops to zero, the magnetic field around the inductor builds to its maximum intensity. When the charge on the capacitor reaches zero, the magnetic field around the inductor will begin to collapse and cause current to flow in the opposite direction, recharging the capacitor to its original value of charge but with opposite polarity. This continues indefinitely in a perfect circuit, creating a flywheel effect at a particular frequency. The frequency at which the circuit oscillates is called the resonant frequency and is given by the formula:
\[ f_0 = \frac{1}{2\pi \sqrt{LC}} \]

where \( f_0 \) is the resonant frequency, \( L \) is the inductance of the coil in henrys, and \( C \) is the capacitance of the capacitor in farads.

Since a perfect circuit does not exist, the resistance of the circuit causes the oscillations to die away slowly. This effect is called damping. In any practical oscillator, to make up for the energy lost is heat due to the resistance of the circuit. The resulting steady waveform is called an undamped wave.\(^4\)

As can be seen from the third equation, the resonant frequency of a tuned tank circuit can be changed by changing the value of \( L \) or \( C \). The most common way to vary the resonant frequency is by the use of a variable capacitor.

In a typical electrosurgical unit a fixed oscillator supplies the RF current and a series resonant circuit is used to vary the current to the patient. The resonant frequency \((f_0)\) of the series resonant circuit is typically the same as the \( f \) of the RF oscillator. The current curve through a series resonant circuit is shown in Figure 4.

As can be seen from Figure 4, if the series resonant circuit were made tunable the current supplied to the patient from the fixed frequency RF oscillator could be regulated from minimum to maximum as the series resonant circuit is tuned from point A to \( f_0 \). It should be noted that this current increase is nonlinear, and great
care should be taken when choosing the output setting for a particular operation as there is a sharp current rise between some adjacent settings on the output control while there is very little difference between other adjacent settings.\(^5\)

In a typical unit a variable capacitor in series with a coil (making a series resonant circuit) is mounted on the front panel of the unit and is controlled by a knob marked off in fixed increments, usually 1 to 10, and marked output. In some older units, such as the Cameron-Miller model #255, separate outputs are used for cutting and coagulation with different variable capacitors for each output. In newer units such as the Macan, a switch is used to control the internal circuitry through the same output.

Once the oscillator produces an RF waveform, the current must be amplified to a usable level. This is done in most units by a single RF amplifier tube. The amplified RF waveform is then impressed on the output of the power supply in such a way as to give the desired output waveform at the electrode tip. The process of impressing one wave on another is called modulation and will be discussed below.

The power supply has many functions. It must take the power available from the wall outlet or other power source and make it usable throughout the unit. Normally, the input power to the unit is 115 or 230 volts at 60 cps. Besides supplying power for the various lights, plate voltage for the amplifier and filament voltage if
the unit has a vacuum tube, the output of the power supply is modulated with RF.

There are two main types of waveforms produced in a typical power supply. These are half-wave rectified and full-wave rectified. Either of these can be filtered or unfiltered. The input of the power supply is a sine wave with a frequency of 60 cps (Fig 5a).

During half-wave rectification as the positive pulse rises from 0 to +Max and then falls back to 0, the diode conducts current through the load. As the negative going pulse falls from 0 to -Max and again rises to 0, current tries to flow in the opposite direction; however, the diode will only pass current in one direction. The diode then blocks the negative pulse and current does not flow through the load until the next positive pulse. The resulting current through the load is as seen in Figure 5b.

During full-wave rectification, opposite pairs of diodes conduct during each half cycle causing current to flow in the same direction through the load regardless of the polarity of the input wave. The output waveform is as in Figure 5c.

Sometimes it is desirable to have a DC output from the power supply. This is done by a technique called filtering. A simple filter is shown in Figure 6. Although there are many different kinds of filters, the one shown is the simplest and most common.

As the first positive pulse from the power supply enters the filter circuit, the capacitor C charges to the +Max of the input
Input
115v 60c

(a) DIODE

(b) Half wave rectification

(c) Full wave rectification

Fig 5
wave. As the pulse drops to 0, the capacitor discharges slowly through the load R keeping the voltage at nearly +Max until the next pulse recharges the capacitor to +Max. This phenomenon is diagrammed in Figure 7.

As can be seen from the solid line in Figure 7, there is a small amount of waviness in the output waveform. This is called ripple voltage and is inherent in all power supplies except batteries. However, with proper selection of components, ripple can be kept to a minimum with .01% being about the best.6

There are many different modulation techniques and the kind chosen for a particular unit is not really important. It is important, however, to understand what is accomplished in the modulator.

The circuitry of the modulator is constructed in such a way that when there is no voltage present at the power supply input (Fig 8a), no RF current will flow through the modulator. The normally open footswitch keeps the power supply voltage from entering the modulator. When the footswitch is pressed the voltage from the power supply enters the modulator and allows RF current to flow at a rate directly proportionate to the voltage level at the power supply input. As the voltage rises from 0 to +Max at the power supply input, more and more RF current is allowed through the modulator. As the power supply input drops from +Max to 0, the modulator conducts less and less until at 0v, no RF current flows. When the power supply is half-wave rectified and unfiltered, the output
waveform to the patient is as shown in Figure 8a. The RF pulses occur at a rate of 60/sec. Figure 8 shows full-wave rectified unfiltered (b) and full-wave rectified, filtered (c).
Fig 8
REFERENCES TO APPENDIX A


MECHANISMS OF BONE RESORPTION INITIATED BY RADIO FREQUENCY ELECTROMAGNETIC WAVES GENERATED IN ELECTRONIC SURGERY

The crystalline nature of calcified tissues in the oral cavity is, in our opinion, of prime importance in causing bone resorption when electrosurgery is used on or near bone. Crystals have been used to generate various frequencies in electronics for over 50 years (this mechanism is called the piezoelectric effect and is explained in Appendix A). It is not unlikely the crystalline components of bone (cementum and even dentin) can conduct the high frequency oscillations produced by the electrosurgery unit directly to viable osteocytes when contact with the electrode is made. When a beam of charged particles, ie, RF, passes through a crystal lattice, it is referred to as "channeling." This has been reported by Brandt in 1968.

In soft tissues of the oral cavity, the current from the electrosurgery unit meets less resistance than in bone and easily cleaves the tissues. Two phenomena occur: one is direct molecular oscillation or vibration, and the other is resistive heating.

In the first situation, the high frequency electrosurgery current is sinusoidal and "flip flops" polar molecules at the fre-
quency of the oscillator in the electrosurgery unit. Resistive heating, in the second instance, causes an instantaneous vaporization of the water content of the tissues creating the "vacuolization" or "blowing apart" of cells often described in the literature.

The two processes do not occur independently. The instantaneous dehydration of the water content of the tissues, however, is not sufficient to be the cause of the deleterious effects in bone stated previously with the use of electrosurgery. Since distilled water is an excellent insulator, the presence of salts, inorganic ions, carbohydrates, lipids, and nucleic acids in vivo facilitate the current flow resulting in molecular oscillations coupled with resistive heating; both are required in order to cleave soft tissues.

High resolution electron microscope examination has correlated the crystallinity of bone and tooth apatite to the fine structures of these tissues in normal and pathologic conditions (Selvig, 1970).

The piezoelectric effect was first demonstrated in bone in 1947 by Hussman (1958). Termine and Posner (1967) used x-ray diffraction and demonstrated amorphous calcium phosphate could be converted to crystalline apatite on exposure to water in vitro. Their results showed crystalline apatite to average 65% of the total cortical bone mineral. Bloom and Fawcett (1968) described the mineral content of bone to average 65% of the fat-free dry weight of mature adult bone.

The origin of the piezoelectric effect in bone has been shown
to arise in part or in whole from the presence of organic molecules particularly collagen (Marino and Becker, 1971), which has also been shown to exhibit the piezoelectric effect (Hussman, 1976). This is important to note since collagen determines the pattern of mineral alignment and architecture in bone. Collagen is a long chain polymer and can be degraded by the piezoelectric effect resulting from the application of high frequency oscillations (Bassett, 1968).

The piezoelectric effect in bone was shown by Marino and Becker (1974) to be independent of age, sex, and lapse of time following either death or removal of the bone specimen from the donor. Bone could therefore exhibit the piezoelectric effect in vitro and in vivo. However, in vitro studies cannot demonstrate bone necrosis; some additional phenomena must be responsible for bone necrosis in living tissues.

Bone has many crystalline forms in vivo (Posner, 1969; Selvig, 1970), but for the purpose of this discussion bone will be considered as a simple, single crystal. When the electrode tip contacts viable bone a voltage is developed across the bone (or crystal) between the electrode tip and the capacitively coupled ground plate (or ground if no plate is used; not recommended clinically). This makes the crystalline structure of bone oscillate at the frequency of the oscillator in the electrosurgery unit causing the piezoelectric effect.

Most electrosurgery units operate at about 1.75 MHz. When
this frequency is applied to bone, the polarity across the faces of the bone crystals changes 1,750,000 times per second. The amplitude of the oscillations is directly proportional to the applied voltage and the applied voltage is directly proportional to the resistance of the crystal for any given voltage generator.

Behari, Guha, and Agarwal (1975) applied a voltage of 220 volts to dry, mature human tibia specimens and measured the current at \(10^{-7}\) amperes. Using Ohm's Law of Resistance \((E=IxR)\), where \(E =\) voltage, \(I =\) current, and \(R =\) resistance, it can be calculated that the average resistance of these bone samples was \(2.2 \times 10^9\) Ohms. Since this resistance is very high, the oscillations would also be very high compared to the static state.

These oscillations conducted through the crystalline structure of bone can easily damage the osteocytes in their lacunae, particularly those near the point of electrode contact, where the voltage developed is highest. Varying degrees of penetration of the radio frequency due to haphazard arrangements of the apatite crystals in bone could be one reason for varied reports of delayed healing.

Once osteocytes have been altered by the RF, varying effects may result depending on the amount of RF that reached the osteocytes. It is possible for enough RF to reach an osteocyte and cause its immediate death due to a combination of resistive heating and molecular oscillation. Another possibility may occur where a mini-
mal amount of RF energy reaches an osteocyte and the cell survives for a period of time before death ensues.

The latter situation probably is another reason delayed healing is reported. The extent of delayed healing would depend on the depth of penetration of the RF energy through the bone. The deeper the RF penetrates, the more osteocytes are affected, delaying healing even further. Normal physiologic bone resorptive sequences must than be initiated to remove dead or dying osteocytes. It has been noted above (p 28) that osseous tissue affected by RF appears to undergo repair in isolated instances. This was considered to be an exception and inconsistent with the results reported here.
REFERENCES TO APPENDIX B


The thesis submitted by Anthony T. Young has been read and approved by the members of the faculty of the Graduate School.

The final copies have been examined by the director of the thesis and the signature which appears below verifies the fact that any necessary changes have been incorporated, and that the thesis is now given final approval with reference to content, form, and mechanical accuracy.

The thesis is therefore accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Degree of Master of Science.

Date 5/9/77

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