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Oxycodone versus morphine for analgesia after laparoscopic endometriosis resection

Lijun Niu^{1†}, Lihong Chen^{2†}, Yanhua Luo³, Wenkao Huang⁴ and Yunsheng Li^{1*}

Abstract

Background: The objective of this study was to compare the analgesic potency of oxycodone versus morphine after laparoscopic deep infiltrating endometriosis resection.

Methods: Fifty patients undergoing laparoscopic deep infiltrating endometriosis resection were randomized to receive oxycodone or morphine intravenous-PCA after surgery. The primary outcome was opioid consumption during the 24 h after surgery. Secondary outcomes included time to first request for analgesia, the number of bolus, pain, sedation, nausea, vomiting, respiratory depression, and bradycardia. The prominent pain that caused patients to press the analgesic device was also recorded.

Results: Oxycodone consumption (14.42 ± 2.83) was less than morphine consumption (20.14 ± 3.83). Compared with the morphine group, the total number of bolus (78 vs 123) was less and the average time to first request for analgesia (97.27 ± 59.79 vs 142.17 ± 51) was longer in the oxycodone group. The incidence of nausea was higher in the morphine group than in the oxycodone group at 0–2 h (45.45% vs 17.19%), 2–4 h (50% vs 17.19%), 12–24 h (40.91% vs 13.04%) and 0–24 h (39.17% vs 19.13%). The overall incidence of vomiting was higher in the morphine group (27.27% vs 13.92%). There was no difference in visual analogue scale score, the incidence of respiratory depression, and bradycardia between groups. Of the three types of pain that prompted patients to request analgesia, the incidence of visceral pain was highest (59.9%, $P < 0.01$).

Conclusion: Oxycodone was more potent than morphine for analgesia after laparoscopic endometriosis resection, and oxycodone has fewer side effects than morphine.

Name of the registry: Chinese Clinical Trial Registry

Trial registration number: ChiCTR1900021870

URL of trial registry record: <http://www.chictr.org.cn/edit.aspx?pid=35799&htm=4>

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Keywords: Deep infiltrating endometriosis, Morphine, Oxycodone, Postoperative analgesia, Visceral pain

Background

Deep infiltrating endometriosis (DIE) is a specific form of endometriosis characterized by endometriosis implants that penetrate for more than 5 mm in the affected tissue, which includes bladder, ureter, vagina, rectum, uterosacral ligaments, etc. Medical treatment for DIE is usually limited, complete excision of the lesions under the laparoscopy is the preferred method [1]. Pain is the most prominent symptom of DIE, and there are some studies

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about long-term pain control after DIE excision [2, 3], but there is no research on analgesia after laparoscopic DIE resection.

Incisional pain, shoulder pain, and visceral pain are three main types of pain after laparoscopic surgery [4]. The prominent type of pain in the first 24 h after surgery varies from surgery to surgery, and there are no studies on the pain characteristics within 24 h after laparoscopic DIE resection.

Oxycodone, which is a semisynthetic μ - and κ -opioid receptor agonist, can provide better analgesia than pure μ -opioid receptor agonists after some surgeries due to the critical role of κ -opioid receptors in the reduction of visceral pain [5–8]. However, its analgesic effect after laparoscopic DIE resection is unknown.

Since DIE resection involved one or more abdominal internal organs, we speculated that visceral pain was an important component of the pain after laparoscopic DIE resection. Given that oxycodone had both μ - and κ -opioid receptor agonist, we hypothesized that oxycodone was more potent than morphine for analgesia after laparoscopic DIE resection. This present study aimed to confirm visceral pain was an important component of the pain after laparoscopic DIE resection and compare the analgesic potency and side effects of oxycodone versus morphine, in order to provide a better choice for good analgesia after laparoscopic DIE resection.

Methods

Patients and study design

This prospective randomized double-blinded clinical trial, which adhered to CONSORT guidelines and included a completed CONSORT checklist as an additional file, was approved and was performed from April 2019 to August 2019, in accordance with the Helsinki Declaration of the World Medical Association. This study has been registered in the Chinese Clinical Trial Registry (registration No. ChiCTR1900021870).

After obtaining the patients' written informed consent, 50 adults (20–55 years of age), presenting with American Society of Anesthesiologists (ASA) physical status I and II, and scheduled for laparoscopic DIE resection under general anesthesia, were included in the trial. Patients were excluded in case of drug or alcohol addiction; known allergy to any drug used in the study; chronic opioid therapy in the 3 months before surgery; chronic therapy with antidepressants or clonidine; a history of abdominal surgery; bilirubin level >3.0 mg/dL; aspartate aminotransferase and/or alanine aminotransferase >250 IU; body mass index (BMI) >30 kg/m² or <18 kg/m²; postoperative recovery in the intensive care unit; prolongation of operation time; and surgical complications during operation (such as bleeding...etc.).

The day before the operation, the patients were instructed carefully to use a visual analogue scale (VAS; score range, 0 cm [no pain] to 10 cm [worst pain]) to measure the degree of pain. If VAS >3 , patients received analgesia by pressing intravenous patient-controlled analgesia (IV-PCA) device until VAS ≤ 3 . Meanwhile, the three main pain components after laparoscopic surgery were explained in detail as described below to the patients [9]. Incisional pain was defined as wound pain located in the abdominal wall, which may be superficial and clear to localize. Visceral pain was defined as pain inside the abdomen, which may be deep, dull, and difficult to localize. Shoulder pain was defined as pain in the shoulder. After patients receiving analgesia by pressing the analgesic device, we asked patients what kind of prominent pain caused them to press the analgesic device and recorded it.

Patients were randomly assigned to 2 groups, morphine (M, $n=25$) group, and oxycodone (O, $n=25$) group by using a computer-generated random number table. Patients received morphine or oxycodone IV-PCA (morphine or oxycodone 1 mg/ml; no background infusion; bolus 0.05 mg/kg, 2 ml; and a lock-out time of 8 min) for 24 h postoperatively. At the end of the operation, a 0.1 mg/kg dose of morphine or oxycodone was given. Allocation concealment was performed using a sealed envelope approach because randomly generated treatment allocations were placed in sealed opaque envelopes. The envelopes were opened by a nurse who was not involved in this study just before the induction of anaesthesia. The anaesthesiologists who were responsible for the anaesthesia and analgesia during the operation were blinded to the group allocation. The nurses who prepared the analgesic device were not involved in the observation, pain scoring of patients, and treatment of the patients during the operating room. The surgeons and observers were also blinded to the group allocation [10].

Surgical procedure

All patients received standardized general anaesthesia without premedication. General anaesthesia was induced with 2 mg/kg propofol, 3 μ g/kg fentanyl, and 0.15 mg/kg cisatracurium following standard monitoring including arterial blood pressure, electrocardiogram, Narcotrend (MonitorTechnik, Bad Bramstedt, Germany), arterial oxygen saturation, and end-tidal carbon dioxide monitoring. Anaesthesia was maintained with 2–3% sevoflurane to keep the Narcotrend depth-of-anaesthesia value between 30 and 50. Remifentanyl was continuously infused at the rate of 0.15–0.25 μ g/kg/min. At the end of the surgery, a 0.1 mg/kg dose of tropisetron was given. Patients were transferred to the post-anaesthesia care unit (PACU) after surgery.

The pressure of carbon dioxide was maintained at 12 mmHg during the operation. All surgical interventions were performed by the same surgeons with high experience in performing laparoscopic interventions. Details of the surgical method used were reported in Setälä et al. [11].

Clinical observations

For each patient, the age, BMI, duration of surgery and PACU, time of carbon dioxide pneumoperitoneum, ASA class, and excised site were recorded. The primary end-point of the study was total morphine or oxycodone consumption during the 24 h after laparoscopic DIE lesion resection. Morphine or oxycodone consumption at 2 h, 4 h, 8 h, 12 h and 24 h after surgery were also recorded. Secondary outcomes included the time to first request for analgesia, the number of IV-PCV bolus, pain, sedation, the incidence of nausea, respiratory depression, vomiting, and bradycardia. The pain was evaluated at 2, 4, 8, 12 and 24 h after operation. The following parameters including the number of IV-PCV bolus, nausea, vomiting, sedation, respiratory depression, and bradycardia were recorded at the same time intervals. Nausea and vomiting were recorded as present or absent. Sedation was scored according to the Ramsay sedation scale. Respiratory depression was recorded as present or absent and was defined as a respiratory rate < 8 breaths/min or peripheral capillary oxygen saturation (SpO_2) < 95% without oxygen treatment. Bradycardia was recorded as present or absent and was defined as a heart rate < 50 beats/min [10].

Statistical Analysis

Postoperative opioid consumption in the first 24 h after surgery was considered the primary efficacy variable. Based on an unpublished pilot study with 20 patients undergoing laparoscopic DIE resection where a mean morphine and mean oxycodone consumption of 20 and 15 mg, respectively (standard deviation of 5 mg) was used. The calculated sample size was 23 individuals in each group ($\alpha = 0.05$; power = 0.9). Finally, 25 patients in each group were planned for inclusion.

The normality of continuous data was tested using the Shapiro–Wilk test. Normally distributed parameters were presented as mean \pm standard deviation and analysed using the Student's *t*-test. Non-normally distributed parameters were presented as medians [interquartile range (IQR)] and analysed using the Mann–Whitney *U* test. The Bonferroni correction was used for multiple measures. Categorical data were described as numbers or percentages and analysed with the chi-square or Fisher's exact tests, as appropriate. The difference in continuous variables over time was tested by the repeated-measures

analysis of variance. Statistical significance was defined as $p < 0.05$. SPSS Statistics version 26.0 for Windows was used to perform all analyses [10].

Results

Out of 50 patients assessed for eligibility, 48 were enrolled and randomly assigned to each of the two groups, and 45 (90%) completed the study (Fig. 1, CONSORT flow diagram). The demographic variables and operative characteristics, including age, BMI, ASA class, surgical duration, time of carbon dioxide pneumoperitoneum, length of stay in the PACU, and excision site were statistically insignificant between the groups (Table 1).

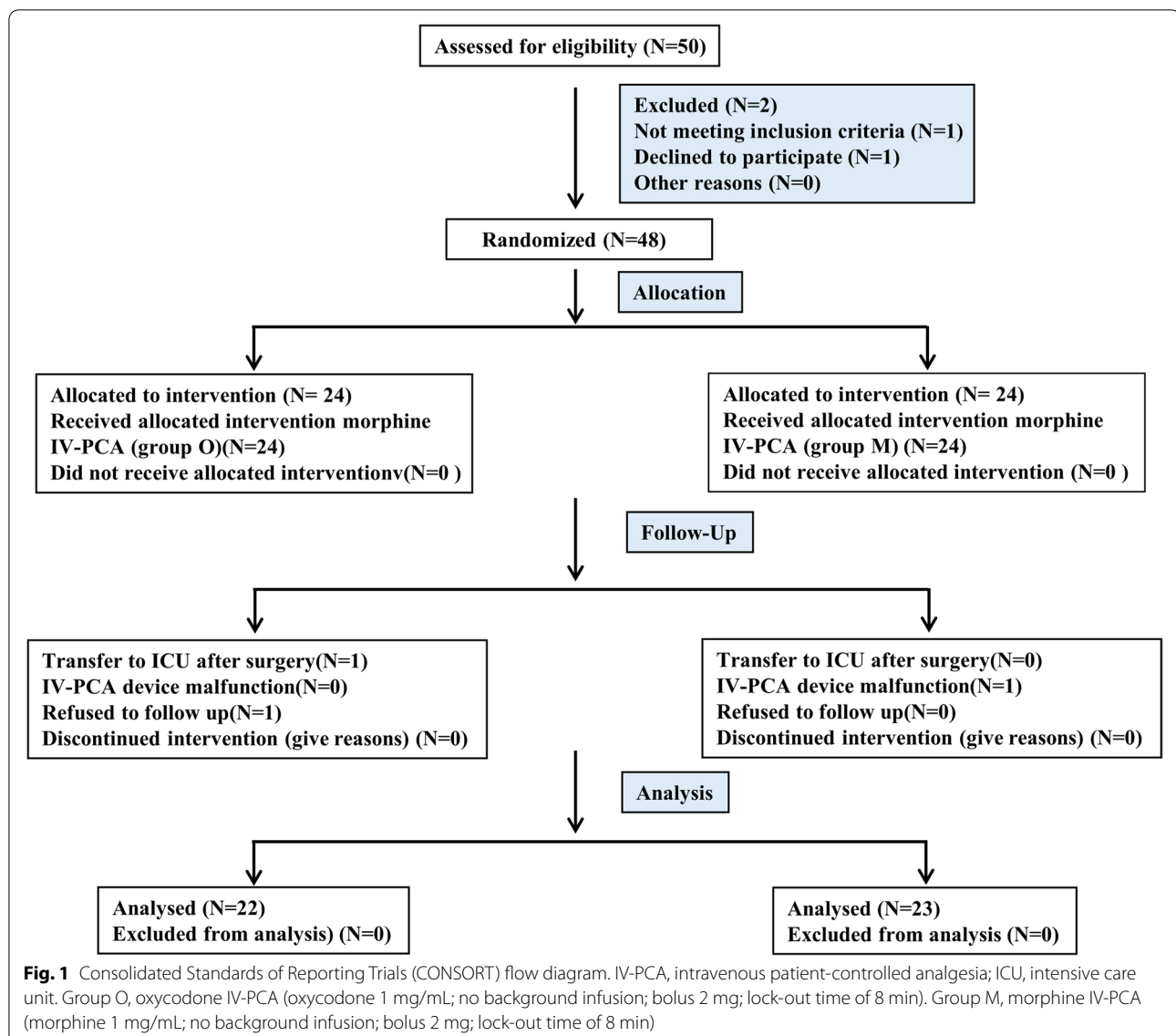
Total opioid consumption was higher in group M (mean \pm SD, 20.14 \pm 3.83) than in group O (mean \pm SD, 14.42 \pm 2.83). More specifically, morphine consumption was higher than oxycodone consumption at all postoperative time intervals except at 8–12 h (Fig. 2A). Meanwhile, the total number of IV-PCA bolus in the first 24 h after surgery was less in the group O (*n*, 78) than that in the group M (*n*, 123). In detail, the number of IV-PCA bolus was less in the group O than in the group M at 0–2 h and 4–8 h ($p < 0.05$, Fig. 2B). The VAS score in group O [interquartile range (IQR), 3(2–3)] was the lower at the 4th hour compared with group M [interquartile range (IQR), 3(2.75–4)] ($p < 0.01$, Table 2), but there were no significant differences at the other time points (Table 2). The average time to first request for analgesia was significantly shorter in group M (mean \pm SD, 97.27 \pm 59.79) than in group O (mean \pm SD, 142.17 \pm 51) ($p < 0.01$, Fig. 3).

There was no difference in Ramsay scores between groups at any time points (Table 2). The overall incidence of nausea was higher in group M (% , 39.17) than in group O (% , 19.13). More specifically, the incidence of nausea was higher in group M than in group O at 0–2 h, 2–4 h, and 12–24 h. The overall incidence of vomiting was higher in group M (% , 27.27) than it was in group O (% , 13.92), despite no difference was observed between groups at different observation intervals. There was no difference in the incidence of respiratory depression and bradycardia between groups (Table 2).

Of the three types of pain that prompted patients to request analgesia, the incidence of visceral pain was highest, either at different observation intervals or in different groups or all patients, except at 0–2 h in group O. The incidence of shoulder pain was higher than that of incision pain at 0–24 h in all groups (Table 3).

Discussion

In this prospective double-blind randomized controlled study, the results presented some significant findings. First, visceral pain was the dominating pain in the first



24 h after laparoscopic DIE resection. Second, morphine IV-PCA and oxycodone IV-PCA could provide effective and safe analgesia. Meanwhile, oxycodone consumption was significantly less than morphine consumption. Finally, the incidence of nausea and vomiting in the oxycodone group was lower than the morphine group. These results suggested that oxycodone was more potent than morphine for analgesia after laparoscopic DIE resection.

In the present study, oxycodone consumption was significantly less than morphine consumption, which suggested that the analgesic potency of oxycodone was higher than morphine, and was consistent with studies of Lenz et al. [8] and Li et al. [12]. Furthermore, the average time to first request for opioid in the oxycodone group was significantly shorter than the morphine group, and

the total number of bolus in oxycodone group was significantly less than the morphine group, which further confirmed that oxycodone was potent than morphine for analgesia. The main possible reason was that oxycodone also activated the κ receptor, which was more effective in reducing visceral pain, and visceral pain was the major component of the pain after laparoscopic DIE resection.

Oxycodone is a semisynthetic opioid that may be an agonist of the central and peripheral κ - as well as μ -opioid receptors [5]. A lot of studies demonstrate that intravenous oxycodone is an effective treatment for acute postoperative pain. Hwang et al. [13] found oxycodone significantly relieved immediate postoperative pain in patients undergoing laparoscopic cholecystectomy. Taniskanen et al. [14] found PCA with oxycodone provided

Table 1 Patients' demographics and operative data

Demographics	Group M	Group O
Age (mean \pm SD, y)	32.1 \pm 4.0	32.7 \pm 3.4
BMI (mean \pm SD, kg/m ²)	21.8 \pm 2.4	22.0 \pm 2.7
ASA Class (I/II, n)	20/2	20/3
Duration of surgery (mean \pm SD, min)	168.6 \pm 37.2	172.2 \pm 43.0
Time of carbon dioxide pneumoperitoneum (mean \pm SD, min)	160.5 \pm 36.9	163.8 \pm 43.1
Duration of PACU (mean \pm SD, min)	60.0 \pm 13.12	58.1 \pm 11.9
Excised site		
Uterus (n)	19	12
Ovaries (n)	12	8
Rectum (n)	14	17
Oviduct (n)	9	3
Ureter (n)	6	7
Vagina (n)	6	12
Ligament (n)	11	9
Bladder (n)	2	5

Data are displayed as mean \pm SD or n. BMI: body mass index

ASA American Society of Anesthesiologists, PACU post-anaesthesia care unit

satisfactory postoperative pain relief after craniotomy. In our study, the VAS score was acceptable and was not different between groups, which indicated that with PCA technology, oxycodone and morphine could effectively reduce the pain after laparoscopic DIE resection.

Moreover, some studies have shown that oxycodone can better relieve visceral pain. In a volunteer research experiment, Staahl et al. [15] found oxycodone was clearly superior to both placebo and morphine in pain modulation to thermally and mechanically induced visceral pain. In a study of laparoscopic cholecystectomy, An et al. [7] found preemptive oxycodone 0.1 mg/kg administration could effectively suppress visceral pain

when compared to an equal dose of sufentanil. The main reason was that oxycodone was not only the μ -opioid receptor agonist but also the κ -opioid receptor agonist [8, 15]. κ -opioid receptor has been suggested as a possible target for attenuating visceral pain. It raises the threshold for visceral pain stimulation, thereby blocking peripheral pain signals and thus attenuating input to the central nervous system, finally alleviating visceral pain [16].

However, some studies have shown that the analgesic potency of oxycodone was not better than that of morphine. Pedersen et al. [17] found that oxycodone was not superior in the treatment of visceral pain after percutaneous kidney stone operation. The possible reasons were that the pain intensity after percutaneous kidney stone operation may be too low to yield a significant difference in opioid consumption and this study only analysed the consumption of morphine and oxycodone 4 h after surgery. In another study [18] comparing morphine and oxycodone in patients with corrective breast or lumbar spinal surgery in which patients used IV-PCA for postoperative pain relief, a similar amount of morphine and oxycodone was needed for sufficient analgesia. The main reason may be that the main type of pain after these surgeries was not visceral pain.

Postoperative pain management after laparoscopic surgery remains a great challenge. One of the important reasons is that the components of pain after laparoscopic surgery are complex. Pain after laparoscopic surgery can be divided into incision pain, shoulder pain and visceral pain [4]. The characteristics of postoperative pain vary from procedure to procedure. For example, incisional pain dominated in incidence and intensity compared with visceral pain and shoulder pain during 24 h after laparoscopic cholecystectomy [19]. Visceral pain was the dominating pain after uncomplicated laparoscopic fundoplication [20] and

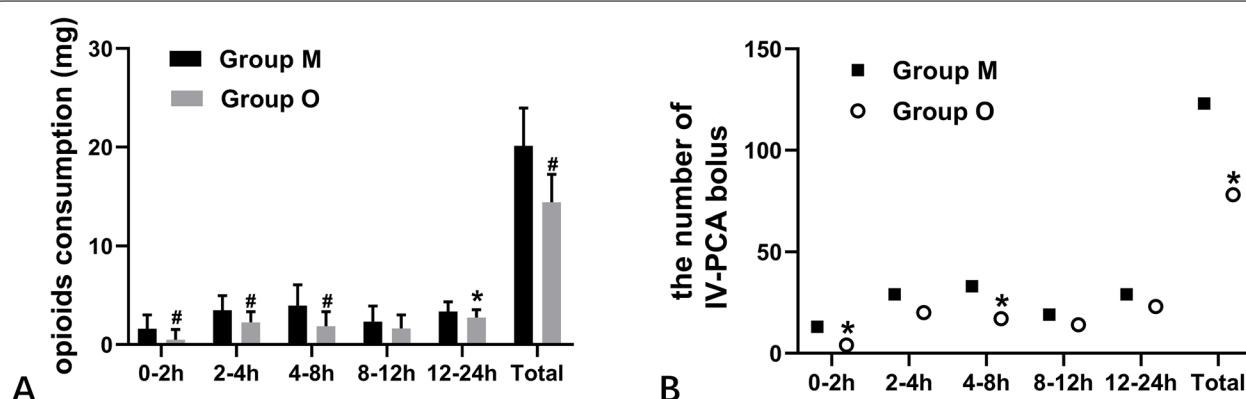


Fig. 2 Oxycodone and morphine consumption, and the number of IV-PCA bolus during the 24-h postoperative period. Data are displayed as mean \pm SD or n. * compared with group O, $p < 0.05$; # compared with group O, $p < 0.01$

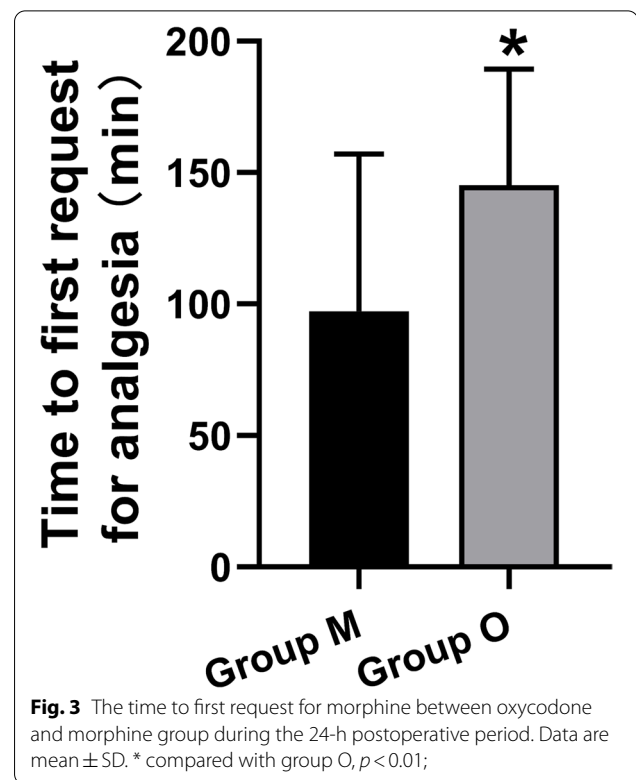
Table. 2 The VAS, Ramasy, Nausea, Vomiting, Respiratory depression, and Bradycardia at observation time points

	group M	group O
VAS median (IQR)		
2 h	3(2–3)	3(2–3)
4 h	3(2.75–4)	3(2–3)*
8 h	3(3–4)	3(3–4)
12 h	3(2.75–4)	4(3–4)
24 h	3(2.75–3)	3(3–3)
Ramasy median (IQR)		
2 h	2(2–3)	3(2–3)
4 h	3(2–3)	3(2–4)
8 h	3(2–3)	3(2–4)
12 h	3(2–4)	3(2–4)
24 h	3(2–3)	3(2–3)
Nausea (n)		
2 h	10	4*
4 h	11	4*
8 h	9	5
12 h	8	6
24 h	9	3*
Total	47	22 [#]
Vomiting (n)		
2 h	6	3
4 h	8	3
8 h	7	4
12 h	5	2
24 h	6	4
Total	30	16 [#]
Respiratory depression (n)		
2 h	1	0
4 h	1	2
8 h	2	1
12 h	3	2
24 h	2	3
Total	9	8
Bradycardia (n)		
2 h	1	0
4 h	1	1
8 h	1	0
12 h	0	1
24 h	1	1
Total	4	3

Data are displayed as median (IQR) or n. * compared with group M, $P < 0.05$;

[#] compared with group M, $P < 0.01$. VAS: visual analogue scale

laparoscopic inguinal hernia repair [21]. Shoulder pain was the most intense pain in postoperative 24 h after total laparoscopic hysterectomy [4]. The reasons for the different types of pain in different surgeries are unclear, which may be related to the site of surgical separation

**Table. 3** The occurrence of the types of pain that prompted patients to request analgesia

Time intervals	Incisional pain	Shoulder pain	Visceral pain
Group M			
0–2 h	1	3	9* [#]
2–4 h	3	8	18* [#]
4–8 h	5	9	19* [#]
8–12 h	3	5	11* [#]
12–24 h	4	7	18* [#]
0–24 h	16	32*	75* [#]
Group O			
0–2 h	1	1	2
2–4 h	2	6	12*
4–8 h	2	5	10*
8–12 h	2	4	8*
12–24 h	3	6	14* [#]
0–24 h	10	22*	46* [#]
All patients			
0–2 h	2	4	11* [#]
2–4 h	5	14*	30* [#]
4–8 h	7	15	29* [#]
8–12 h	5	9	19* [#]
12–24 h	7	13	32* [#]
0–24 h	26	55*	121* [#]

Data are displayed as n. * compared with incisional pain, $P < 0.05$; [#] compared with shoulder pain, $P < 0.05$

and resection, and pressure and time of carbon dioxide pneumoperitoneum.

Since the major pain components are different, interventions targeting the major pain are necessary to obtain better pain relief. For example, local anesthesia infiltration and nerve block are more suitable for postoperative analgesia with incision pain as the main pain. NSAIDs are more appropriate for postoperative analgesia in shoulder pain as the dominating pain. Therefore, it is important to identify prominent pain and analyse the impact of analgesic interventions on prominent pain in order to get better postoperative analgesia. In this study, we explored the most important pain component within 24 h. The results showed that during 24 h after laparoscopic DIE resection, visceral pain was the prominent pain that prompted patients to request analgesia at almost all observation time points, which was different from pain characteristics of laparoscopic cholecystectomy and laparoscopic hysterectomy.

The pathophysiological mechanisms of visceral pain are extremely complex and poorly understood. One of the important mechanisms is peripheral and/or central pathway sensitization, which increases the perception of visceral stimulation and leads to visceral hypersensitivity, and may be affected by multiple conditions, including stress, mood, and some conditions induced by surgery, for example, organ injury or stretch of intense force by distension or contraction, peritoneal inflammation, local acidosis, and visceral mucosa ischemia [22]. The possible reasons for the dominating pain after laparoscopic DIE resection was visceral pain might be that laparoscopic DIE resection needed to explore and resect more tissues and organs inside the abdomen, such as rectum, ureter, vagina, and required longer carbon dioxide pneumoperitoneum time which might induce visceral mucosa ischemia.

Postoperative nausea and vomiting (PONV) are common adverse effects in PCA with opioids. It is known the use of opioids is a risk factor of PONV. Opioids cause nausea and vomiting by stimulating the chemoreceptor trigger zone in the medulla via μ -receptor [23]. Although many patients eventually develop tolerance to this side effect, nausea and vomiting during the early phase of treatment often lead patients to discontinue opioid therapy, resulting in analgesic undertreatment. Therefore, reduction the incidence of PONV is expected to improve the overall quality of analgesic efficacy. It is reported that oxycodone had lower incidence of PONV than other opioids. In a study of elective abdominal surgery [24], oxycodone IV-PCA showed lower incidence of PONV than sufentanil IV-PCA during postoperative pain management. In our study, we found that the incidence of PONV was lower in the oxycodone group than that in

the morphine group. The reasons were listed as follows. Firstly, oxycodone has a weaker μ -receptor affinity than morphine [25], which may mitigate gastrointestinal side effects caused by μ -receptor agonism. Second, in this study, patients in the oxycodone group required less oxycodone. It is known that opioid-related side effects such as nausea and vomiting are dose-dependent. As a result, patients treated with oxycodone had lower incidence of PONV. However, Kim et al. [26] found that the incidence of PONV was higher in oxycodone IV-PCA than fentanyl IV-PCA in the postoperative analgesia of laparoscopic supracervical hysterectomy. The main reason may be that the ratio of oxycodone to fentanyl (potency ratio 75:1) was too high. More studies are still needed to determine whether oxycodone has a lower incidence of PONV than other opioids.

There was no difference in the incidence of respiratory depression, or bradycardia between groups, and no clinically significant postoperative respiratory depression or bradycardia was observed. The possible reasons might be that most patients did not use the PCA device to completely eliminate their pain, or PCA technology could effectively reduce respiratory depression and bradycardia.

There were some limitations in the present study. First, we only explored the main type of pain after laparoscopic DIE resection, but did not evaluate the frequency and intensity of the three types of pain. Further research was to characterize the early pain characteristics. Second, we did not follow up the patients to evaluate whether chronic pain was reduced with the oxycodone in the study. Future research should also focus on the long-term effects. The third limitation was that the patients' pain thresholds were not tested before conducting the study.

Conclusions

In conclusion, oxycodone and morphine could provide effective and safe analgesia after laparoscopic DIE resection. The consumption of oxycodone was less than morphine, and the incidence of nausea and vomiting with oxycodone was lower than that with morphine. Therefore, oxycodone was more potent than morphine for postoperative pain relief after laparoscopic DIE resection.

Abbreviations

DIE: Deep infiltrating endometriosis; ASA: American Society of Anesthesiologists; BMI: Body mass index; VAS: Visual analogue scale; IV-PCA: Intravenous patient-controlled analgesia; PACU: Post-anaesthesia care unit; M: Morphine; O: Oxycodone; SpO₂: Peripheral capillary oxygen saturation; IQR: Interquartile range; PONV: Postoperative nausea and vomiting.

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Authors' contributions

All authors have read and approved the manuscript. YSL: the study concept and design; analysis and interpretation of data; revising the manuscript for important intellectual content; approval of the final version to be published. LHC: the study concept and design; analysis and interpretation of data; revising the manuscript for important intellectual content; approval of the final version to be published. LJN: acquisition of data; analysis and interpretation of data; drafting the manuscript; approval of the final version to be published. YHL: acquisition of data; analysis of data; revising the manuscript for important intellectual content; approval of the final version to be published. WKH: acquisition of data; interpretation of data; drafting the manuscript; approval of the final version to be published.

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Availability of data and materials

The datasets used and/or analysed during the current study are available from the corresponding author on reasonable request.

Declarations

Ethics approval and consent to participate

This trial was performed in accordance with the Declaration of Helsinki and was approved by the Institutional Ethical Review Committee for Clinical Trials of The First Affiliated Hospital of Sun Yat-sen University (NO. [2019]043). Written Informed consent to participate in the study was obtained from participants.

Consent for publication

Not applicable.

Competing interests

The authors declare that they have no competing interests.

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