



“TREXIT 2020”: why the time to abandon transrectal prostate biopsy starts now

Jeremy Grummet¹ · Michael A. Gorin² · Rick Popert³ · Tim O'Brien³ · Alastair D. Lamb⁴ · Boris Hadaschik⁵ · Jan Philipp Radtke⁵ · Florian Wagenlehner⁶ · Eduard Baco⁷ · Caroline M. Moore⁸ · Mark Emberton⁸ · Arvin K. George⁹ · John W. Davis¹⁰ · Richard J. Szabo¹¹ · Roger Buckley¹² · Andrew Loblaw¹³ · Matthew Allaway¹⁴ · Christof Kastner¹⁵ · Erik Briers¹⁶ · Peter L. Royce¹ · Mark Frydenberg¹⁷ · Declan G. Murphy¹⁸ · Henry H. Woo¹⁹

Received: 24 November 2019 / Revised: 11 December 2019 / Accepted: 6 January 2020
© The Author(s) 2020. This article is published with open access

In 1847, 20 years before germ theory was popularised by Louis Pasteur, the Hungarian physician Ignaz Semmelweis famously reduced maternal mortality from post-partum sepsis from 16 to 1% simply by encouraging hand hygiene among his peers [1]. Despite the evidence, many physicians of the day were offended by the assertion that they themselves may be the cause of patient deaths and rejected Semmelweis's life-saving advice. Aged just 47, he suffered a nervous breakdown, was committed to an asylum and died within 2 weeks, ironically and tragically, from a gangrenous wound.

Like Semmelweis, urologists today have the opportunity to nearly eliminate infections we cause by performing transrectal (TR) prostate biopsy and switch instead to the clean transperineal (TP) approach—a process our co-authors at Guy's Hospital in London, UK, have opportunistically dubbed “TReXit” [2, 3].

Despite the recent advances in prostate cancer imaging with MRI [4] and PSMA PET [5], a biopsy is still required to establish a diagnosis of prostate cancer. The vast majority of prostate biopsies are still performed using the TR approach—over 2 million per year in Europe and North America alone [6]. However, in recent years TP biopsy has gained increasing favour due to its avoidance of rectal flora [7].

By passing the biopsy trocar from dirty to clean, TR biopsy breaks the fundamental surgical principle of sterile technique. The procedure is thus plagued by the potential for inoculation of a large dose of rectal bacteria into the bloodstream. Despite the use of standard antibiotic prophylaxis, typically a fluoroquinolone, due to the emergence of multi-drug resistant bacteria, post-TR biopsy infection is increasing [6, 8] and was recently reported to be alarmingly high at 10% [9]. TR biopsy sepsis can also be life-threatening. Its mortality rate is 0.13% of TR biopsies in

✉ Jeremy Grummet
jgrummet@gmail.com

¹ Department of Surgery, Central Clinical School, Monash University, Melbourne, VIC, Australia

² Department of Urology, The James Buchanan Brady Urological Institute, Johns Hopkins University School of Medicine, Baltimore, MD, USA

³ Guy's and St Thomas' Hospital, London, UK

⁴ Oxford University, Oxford, UK

⁵ Essen University Hospital, Essen, Germany

⁶ Justus-Liebig University, Gießen, Germany

⁷ Oslo University Hospital, Oslo, Norway

⁸ University College London, London, UK

⁹ University of Michigan, Ann Arbor, MI, USA

¹⁰ MD Anderson Cancer Center, Houston, TX, USA

¹¹ Southern California Kaiser Permanente, Los Angeles, CA, USA

¹² North York General Hospital, North York, ON, Canada

¹³ Odette Cancer Centre, Sunnybrook Health Sciences Centre, University of Toronto, Toronto, ON, Canada

¹⁴ Urology Associates, Baltimore, MD, USA

¹⁵ Addenbrookes Hospital, Cambridge University, Cambridge, UK

¹⁶ European Cancer Patient Coalition, Brussels, Belgium

¹⁷ Monash University, Clayton, VIC, Australia

¹⁸ Peter MacCallum Cancer Centre, University of Melbourne, Melbourne, VIC, Australia

¹⁹ Sydney Adventist Hospital, University of Sydney, Sydney, NSW, Australia

Taiwan [10], and was calculated at an additional ten deaths per year in Norway (population 5 million) [9].

To combat this problem, clinicians have resorted to escalating the type of prophylactic antibiotic employed [11], with some suggesting the use of carbapenems [12, 13]. Whilst this may reduce the sepsis rate [14], it is in direct opposition to the advice from the US Center for Disease Control [15]. Both the US Food and Drug Administration [16] and the European Medicines Agency [17] have recently issued strong warnings recommending against the use of fluoroquinolones also.

Not only is there the obvious human cost of suffering from TR-biopsy related infections, but there is also the financial burden. Analysis of an Australian government Department of Health database revealed that the mean cost per admission was US\$6844 [18]. This did not take into account loss of productivity of patients or carers. More recently in the United States, the estimated cost of post-biopsy sepsis was between US\$8672 and US\$19,100 per patient [19].

TP biopsy, on the other hand, avoids rectal flora altogether. Whilst there are no RCTs directly comparing TR and TP biopsy infection, the differences in infection rates are stark, with sepsis from TP biopsy approaching zero. This is regardless of whether just a single dose of first-generation cephalosporin is used [20], or antibiotic prophylaxis is omitted altogether [21]. This lack of sepsis has been shown in numerous studies [22–25], including a series of 1194 consecutive TP biopsies performed across five centres in Melbourne, Australia, in which the re-admission rate for infection was zero [26]. TP biopsy became standard practice by these authors in 2012.

Regarding detection of significant cancer, TP biopsy is at least equivalent to TR biopsy, with some evidence that TP biopsy offers superior detection of anterior tumours [27].

Some authors have cited the increased rate of acute urinary retention (AUR) with the TP approach as an argument against its use. However, the largest series of 1287 consecutive biopsies at North York General Hospital in Toronto, Canada, reported the rate at just 1.6% [23]. Conversely, AUR was as high as 24% in the PICTURE study [28]. Erectile dysfunction (ED) was also noted in this study. Notably, this cohort received a median of 49 cores at 5 mm intervals, taken as a systematic mapping biopsy. Most TP systematic biopsies recommend less than half this number [18–24] of cores. Whilst patients should be advised of the risks of AUR and transient ED in TP biopsy (as they should in TR biopsy also), neither of these complications are life-threatening.

Until recently, the greatest deterrent to widespread uptake of TP biopsy has been logistical. Whereas TR biopsy can readily be performed in the office under local anaesthesia (LA), TP biopsy has historically required use

of a grid-stepper unit so that general anaesthesia (GA) has been used for men to tolerate the multiple needle passes through the perineum. Whilst TP biopsy under LA has been successfully performed using a grid-stepper unit [29], a new and parallel skin puncture is required for every biopsy taken, requiring a broad area of LA coverage.

The development of freehand techniques for performing TP biopsy, which employ two common access cannulae through the perineal skin, has made it possible for this procedure to now be performed far more readily under LA. In the largest study to date, the 1287 aforementioned Toronto patients underwent a systematic TP biopsy under LA (LATP biopsy) using one such freehand technique [23]. A minimum of ten cores were taken. Patients tolerated the procedure well and none were admitted for infection. A challenge with the method described by this group is the use of a simple common access cannula, which is not coupled to the ultrasound probe. While the authors achieved mastery of this technique within a 6-week learning curve, the needle not being maintained in line with the ultrasound probe makes it difficult for the user to track the location of the needle relative to the probe.

This issue has since been addressed with the introduction of the PrecisionPoint Transperineal Access System™ (Perineologic, Cumberland, MD, USA), which attaches to the ultrasound probe and maintains a common access cannula in line with the probe. This simple device has revolutionized freehand MRI-targeted and systematic LATP biopsy and its successful use has been described by groups in the United States and UK [21, 30–32]. Notably, LATP biopsy can be achieved using any ultrasound probe currently used for TR biopsy, as long as the prostate can be viewed in the sagittal plane and an access system attached to the probe—a technique first described by the group in Oxford, UK [33, 34].

The major barriers to implementation of in-office TP prostate biopsy, namely the increased capital costs for linear array brachytherapy probes, grid-stepper units and the need for GA, have therefore now been removed.

Recognising its improved patient safety, we believe LATP biopsy should now become standard of care. As such, healthcare payers and policymakers should facilitate adoption of this practice. However, we must first ensure appropriate training and equipment are made available to the urologic community.

The TRexit initiative, run by the South East London Cancer Alliance that comprises six hospitals serving 1.5 million people, is a project doing just this. Through provision of training and resources, the TRexit initiative successfully ceased all TR biopsies and converted to LATP biopsy in March 2019, (days before the UK government had planned, but failed, to deliver Brexit) [2]. The TRexit

initiative aims to have TR biopsy replaced right across the UK. TRexit has also occurred in Norway due to the recent widely publicized post-TR biopsy patient death and local sepsis rate of 10%, compared with the zero rate of post-biopsy infection at Oslo University Hospital when TP biopsy was introduced [9].

In conclusion, we ask that our colleagues do not bestow the same fate suffered by Semmelweis on those who champion TP biopsy. The mechanism underlying TR-biopsy-related sepsis is clear and can be readily avoided using the TP approach, which is now also feasible under LA. We believe a well-planned global TRexit, with a phase-out period of TR biopsy led by centres experienced in TP biopsy, should be instigated in 2020, aiming for completion by the end of 2022.

Compliance with ethical standards

Conflict of interest JG—honoraria BK Ultrasound, Biobot. RP—bursary NHS Innovation Accelerator; honoraria BXT Accelyon, BK Ultrasound, 3D Biopsy; professional services agreement HCA International. BH—advisor to MedCom, Lightpoint Medical, Uromed. MA—founder and CEO of Perineologic. No other authors have conflict of interest.

Publisher's note Springer Nature remains neutral with regard to jurisdictional claims in published maps and institutional affiliations.

Open Access This article is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License, which permits use, sharing, adaptation, distribution and reproduction in any medium or format, as long as you give appropriate credit to the original author(s) and the source, provide a link to the Creative Commons license, and indicate if changes were made. The images or other third party material in this article are included in the article's Creative Commons license, unless indicated otherwise in a credit line to the material. If material is not included in the article's Creative Commons license and your intended use is not permitted by statutory regulation or exceeds the permitted use, you will need to obtain permission directly from the copyright holder. To view a copy of this license, visit <http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>.

References

1. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ignaz_Semmelweis. Accessed 9 Nov 2019.
2. <https://nhsaccelerator.com/trexit-initiative-transperineal-prostate-biopsies-local-anaesthetic/>. Accessed 9 Nov 2019.
3. <https://www.medscape.com/viewarticle/912823>. Nick Mulcahy. Accessed 9 Nov 2019.
4. Rouvière O, Schoots IG, Mottet N. EAU-EANM-ESTRO-ESUR-SIOG Prostate Cancer Guidelines Panel Multiparametric magnetic resonance imaging before prostate biopsy: a chain is only as strong as its weakest link. *Eur Urol*. 2019;75:889–90.
5. Kalapara AA, Nzenza T, Pan HY, Ballok Z, Ramdave S, O'Sullivan R, et al. Detection and localisation of primary prostate cancer using ⁶⁸Ga-PSMA PET/CT compared with mpMRI and radical prostatectomy specimens. *BJU Int*. 2019. <https://doi.org/10.1111/bju.14858>.

6. Borghesi M, Ahmed H, Nam R, Schaeffer E, Schiavina R, Taneja S, et al. Complications after systematic, random, and image-guided prostate biopsy. *Eur Urol*. 2017;71:353–65.
7. Davis P, Paul E, Grummet J. Current practice of prostate biopsy in Australia and New Zealand: a survey. *Urol Ann*. 2015;7:315–9.
8. Knaapila J, Kallio H, Hakanen AJ, Syvänen K, Ettala O, Kähkönen E. Antibiotic susceptibility of intestinal *Escherichia coli* in men undergoing transrectal prostate biopsies: a prospective, registered, multicentre study. *BJU Int*. 2018;122:203–10.
9. Johansen TEB, Zahl PH, Baco E, Bartoletti R, Bonkat G, Bruyere F, et al. Antibiotic resistance, hospitalizations, and mortality related to prostate biopsy: first report from the Norwegian Patient Registry. *World J Urol*. 2019. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s00345-019-02837-0>.
10. Wei TC, Lin TP, Chang YH, Chen TJ, Lin AT, Chen KK. Transrectal ultrasound-guided prostate biopsy in Taiwan: a nationwide database study. *J Chin Med Assoc*. 2015;78:662–5.
11. Roberts MJ, Bennett HY, Harris PN, Holmes M, Grummet J, Naber K, et al. Prostate biopsy-related Infection: a systematic review of risk factors, prevention strategies, and management approaches. *Urology*. 2017;104:11–21.
12. Leahy OR, O'Reilly M, Dyer DR, Phillips D, Grummet JP. Transrectal ultrasound-guided biopsy sepsis and the rise in carbapenem antibiotic use. *ANZ J Surg*. 2015;85:931–5.
13. Losco G, Studd R, Blackmore T. Ertapenem prophylaxis reduces sepsis after transrectal biopsy of the prostate. *BJU Int*. 2014;113 Suppl 2:69–72.
14. Jiang P, Liss MA, Szabo RJ. Targeted antimicrobial prophylaxis does not always prevent sepsis after transrectal prostate biopsy. *J Urol*. 2018;200:361–8.
15. <https://www.cdc.gov/drugresistance/threat-report-2013/pdf/ar-threats-2013-508.pdf>. US Dept of Health and Human Services, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Accessed 9 Nov 2019.
16. <https://www.fda.gov/drugs/drug-safety-and-availability/fda-drug-safety-communication-fda-updates-warnings-oral-and-injectable-fluoroquinolone-antibiotics>. US Food and Drug Administration. Accessed 9 Nov 2019.
17. https://www.ema.europa.eu/en/documents/referral/quinolone-fluoroquinolone-article-31-referral-disabling-potentially-permanent-side-effectslead_en.pdf. European Medicines Agency. Accessed 9 Nov 2019.
18. Roth H, Millar JL, Cheng AC, Byrne A, Evans S, Grummet J. The state of TRUS biopsy sepsis: readmissions to Victorian hospitals with TRUS biopsy-related infection over 5 years. *BJU Int*. 2015;116 Suppl 3:49–53.
19. Gross MD, Alshak MN, Shoag JE, Laviana AA, Gorin MA, Sedrakyan A, et al. Healthcare costs of post-prostate biopsy sepsis. *Urology*. 2019;133:11–15. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.urology.2019.06.011>.
20. Pepdjonovic L, Tan GH, Huang S, Mann S, Frydenberg M, Moon D, et al. Zero hospital admissions for infection after 577 transperineal prostate biopsies using single-dose cephazolin prophylaxis. *World J Urol*. 2017;35:1199–203.
21. Gorin MA, Meyer AR, Zimmerman M, Harb R, Joice GA, Schwen ZR, et al. Transperineal prostate biopsy with cognitive magnetic resonance imaging/biplanar ultrasound fusion: description of technique and early results. *World J Urol*. 2019. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s00345-019-02992-4>.
22. Grummet JP, Weerakoon M, Huang S, Lawrentschuk N, Frydenberg M, Moon DA, et al. Sepsis and 'superbugs': should we favour the transperineal over the transrectal approach for prostate biopsy? *BJU Int*. 2014;114:384–8.
23. Stefanova V, Buckley R, Flax S, Spevack L, Hajek D, Tunis A, et al. Transperineal prostate biopsies using local anesthesia:

- experience with 1,287 patients. Prostate cancer detection rate, complications and patient tolerability. *J Urol.* 2019;201:1121–6.
24. Wadhwa K, Carmona-Echeveria L, Kuru T, Gaziev G, Serrao E, Parashar D, et al. Transperineal prostate biopsies for diagnosis of prostate cancer are well tolerated: a prospective study using patient-reported outcome measures. *Asian J Androl.* 2017;19:62–66.
 25. Vyas L, Acher P, Kinsella J, Challacombe B, Chang RT, Sturch P, et al. Indications, results and safety profile of transperineal sector biopsies (TPSB) of the prostate: a single centre experience of 634 cases. *BJU Int.* 2014;114:32–7.
 26. Grummet J, Pepdjonovic L, Moon D, Borghesi M, Ahmed H, Nam R, et al. Complications after systematic, random, and image-guided prostate biopsy. *Eur Urol.* 2017;71:353–65.
 27. Hossack T, Patel MI, Huo A, Brenner P, Yuen C, Spornat D, et al. Location and pathological characteristics of cancers in radical prostatectomy specimens identified by transperineal biopsy compared to transrectal biopsy. *J Urol.* 2012;188:781–5.
 28. Miah S, Eldred-Evans D, Simmons LAM, Shah TT, Kanthabalan A, Arya M, et al. Patient reported outcome measures for transperineal template prostate mapping biopsies in the PICTURE study. *J Urol.* 2018;200:1235–40.
 29. Bass EJ, Donaldson IA, Freeman A, Jameson C, Punwani S, Moore C, et al. Magnetic resonance imaging targeted transperineal prostate biopsy: a local anaesthetic approach. *Prostate Cancer Prostatic Dis.* 2017;20:311–7.
 30. Meyer AR, Joice GA, Schwen ZR, Partin AW, Allaf ME, Gorin MA. Initial experience performing in-office ultrasound-guided transperineal prostate biopsy under local anesthesia using the precisionpoint transperineal access system. *Urology.* 2018;115:8–13.
 31. Kum F, Elhage O, Maliyil J, Wong K, Faure Walker N, Kulkarni M, et al. Initial outcomes of local anaesthetic freehand transperineal biopsies in the outpatient setting. *BJU Int.* 2018. <https://doi.org/10.1111/bju.14620>.
 32. Zimmerman ME, Meyer AR, Carter HB, Allaf ME, Gorin MA. In-office transperineal prostate biopsy using biplanar ultrasound guidance: a step-by-step guide. *Urology.* 2019;133:247.
 33. Campbell A, Omer AE, Popert R, Lamb A. Local anaesthetic transperineal prostate (LATP) biopsy using the precision point access system: a step-by-step video. *Eur Urol Suppl.* 2019;18. [https://doi.org/10.1016/S1569-9056\(19\)31670-7](https://doi.org/10.1016/S1569-9056(19)31670-7).
 34. Omer A, Lamb AD. Optimizing prostate biopsy techniques. *Curr Opin Urol.* 2019;29:578–86.