Effect of low level laser therapy in rheumatoid arthritis patients with carpal tunnel syndrome

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OBJECTIVE: the aim of the present study was to evaluate the efficacy of low level laser therapy (LLLT) in patients with rheumatoid arthritis (RA) with carpal tunnel syndrome (CTS). MATERIAL AND METHODS: a total of 19 patients with the diagnosis of CTS in 19 hands were included and randomly assigned to two treatment groups; LLLT (Group 1) (10 hands) with dosage 1.5 J/ per point and placebo laser therapy group (Group 2) (9 hands). A Galium-Aluminum-Arsenide diode laser device was used as a source of low power laser with a power output of 50 mW and wavelength of 780 nm. All treatments were applied once a day on week days for a total period of 10 days. Clinical assessments were performed at baseline, at the end of the treatment and at month 3. Tinel and Phalen signs were tested in all patients. Patients were evaluated for such clinical parameters as functional status scale (FSS), visual analogue scale (VAS), symptom severity scale (SSS) and grip-strength. However, electrophysiological examination was performed on all hands. Results were given with descriptive statistics and confidence intervals between group means at 3 months adjusted for outcome at baseline and for the difference between unadjusted group proportions.

RESULTS: clinical and electrophysiological parameters were similar at baseline in both groups. Improvements were significantly more pronounced in the LLLT group than placebo group. A comparison between groups showed significant improvements in pain score and functional status scale score. Group mean differences at 3 months adjusted at baseline were found to be statistically significant for pain score and functional status scale score. The 95% significant confidence intervals were [-15 - (-5)] and [-5 - (-2)] respectively. There were no statistically significant differences in other clinical and electrophysiological parameters between groups at 3 months.

CONCLUSIONS: our study results indicate that LLLT and placebo laser therapy seems to be effective for pain and hand function in CTS. We, therefore, suggest that LLLT may be used as a good alternative treatment method in CTS patients with RA.