Surgeons’ Accuracy in Achieving Their Desired Acetabular Component Orientation

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Background: Wide variability in cup orientation has been reported. The aims of this study were to determine how accurate surgeons are at orientating the acetabular component and whether factors such as visual cues and the side of operating table improved accuracy.

Methods: A pelvic model was positioned in neutral alignment on an operating table and was prepared as in a posterior approach. Twenty-one surgeons (9 trainers and 12 trainees) were tasked with positioning an acetabular component in a series of target orientations. The orientation of the component was measured using stereophotogrammetry, and the difference between the achieved orientation and the target orientation was calculated. Tasks included stating the surgeon’s preferred orientation and thereafter placing the cup in that orientation, reproducing visual cues (transverse acetabular ligament and alignment guide), altering orientation by 10°, and estimating orientation while on the assistant’s side.

Results: The preferred inclination was 42° and the preferred anteversion was 21°. On average, surgeons decreased the inclination by 4° and increased the anteversion by 11° when tasked with replicating their desired orientation. The variability (defined as 2 standard deviations) in achieving a target orientation was 14°. The use of visual cues, such as the transverse acetabular ligament or the alignment guide, significantly improved accuracy to 1° for anteversion (p < 0.001) and −3° for inclination (p = 0.003). In addition, the use of an alignment guide reduced the variability by one-third. Trainees and trainers had similar accuracy and variability. There was greater variability in assessing cup inclination when standing on the assistant’s side compared with the surgeon’s side of the table, which has implications for training.

Conclusions: Surgeons overestimate operative inclination and underestimate anteversion, which is of benefit, as this, on average, helps to achieve the desired radiographic cup orientation. Although the use of visual cues helps, conventional techniques result in a large variability in acetabular component orientation. New and better guides and methods for training need to be developed.

Peer review: This article was reviewed by the Editor-in-Chief and one Deputy Editor, and it underwent blinded review by two or more outside experts. It was also reviewed by an expert in methodology and statistics. The Deputy Editor reviewed each revision of the article, and it underwent a final review by the Editor-in-Chief prior to publication. Final corrections and clarifications occurred during one or more exchanges between the author(s) and copyeditors.

Disclosure: One author (D.W.M.) received a grant from Stryker for this study; funds were used to pay for supplies. On the Disclosure of Potential Conflicts of Interest forms, which are provided with the online version of the article, one or more of the authors checked “yes” to indicate that the author had a relevant financial relationship in the biomedical arena outside the submitted work and “yes” to indicate that the author had other relationships or activities that could be perceived to influence, or have the potential to influence, what was written in this work.
Acetabular component (cup) orientation is an important determinant of outcome following hip arthroplasty. It can influence range of movement, dislocation, wear, functional outcome, and implant survival. Although surgeons aim to achieve optimal cup orientation, many studies demonstrate their inability to consistently achieve this. Evidence suggests that there is ±15° of variability in cup orientations, even by experienced surgeons. It is generally thought that ±10° is acceptable. More recent evidence suggests that to decrease the dislocation rate, ±15° is required, whereas to optimize clinical outcome, a zone as small as ±5° may be necessary.

Factors that may contribute to this large variability include patient anatomy, positioning, and movement during the surgical procedure. An important factor is the surgeon’s ability to correctly orient the cup at implantation. Although some surgeons aim for a given cup orientation, others utilize anatomical cues, such as the transverse acetabular ligament, aiming to reproduce native acetabular version.

The ability of surgeons to estimate uniplanar angles has been tested in spinal and deformity surgical procedures, with reported errors of around 5° and a variability of 10°. However, cup orientation angles are complex, three-dimensional angles that are measured in different ways depending on whether the angles are assessed operatively, radiographically, or anatomically. The accuracy with which surgeons can achieve specific cup inclination and anteversion angles and the accuracy to which surgeons can assess these angles have not previously been studied, to our knowledge.

The study’s primary aim was to determine the accuracy with which surgeons can achieve cup orientation angles. The secondary aims were to investigate whether anatomical and visual cues influence the accuracy, to evaluate whether trainees or trainers are more accurate, and to determine whether standing on the assistant’s side of the table affected the ability to estimate cup orientation.

Materials and Methods

Setting and Subjects
This in vitro study was undertaken in an operating suite of a university teaching hospital. Institutional review board approval was obtained, and all participants gave informed consent. The participants (n = 21) included arthroplasty attending surgeons and orthopaedic trainees or residents. Consultants had been appointed for at least 5 years and had performed between 800 and 6,000 hip arthroplasties to date, with a current annual rate of at least 30 cases. Post-fellowship surgeons had performed over 150 arthroplasties. To be eligible for inclusion, each trainee had to have completed at least an arthroplasty placement fellowship. Surgeons had performed over 150 arthroplasties to date, with a current annual rate of at least 30 cases. Post-fellowship surgeons included arthroplasty attending surgeons and orthopaedic trainees or residents. Consultants were considered as trainers, but residents were considered as trainees (n = 12).

Measurement Technique
Measurements of cup orientation were made using a validated stereophotogrammetry protocol with an accuracy of 1° (see Appendix). Stereophotogrammetry allows the spatial measurement of three-dimensional objects from a stereopair set of images. Common points are identified on each image, and if the location of each camera relative to the image plane is known, the three-dimensional coordinates and hence location can be determined. A custom application, Fotop, written in MATLAB (R2011; The MathWorks) was developed to perform the measurements.

The object of interest was the cup introducer, and its three-dimensional location was captured. The resulting measurements allowed determination of cup orientation. A stereopair of images were captured following each of the tasks, with the introducer still attached to measure the three-dimensional location of the cup introducer. Knowledge of the three-dimensional location of the cup introducer relative to the operating table enabled calculation of the operative cup inclination and anteversion.

Benchtop Hip Model
A SAWBONES hemipelvis model of the Encapsulated Hip with Proximal Femur (ERP 1174) was used. The model has a hemipelvis articulating with the proximal part of a femur and includes the articular capsule, acetabular labrum, and simulated gluteus maximus and medius muscles. The acetabular size of the model used was 48 mm. The model was prepared with a posterior approach to the hip as this is the most commonly performed approach in our institution. The approach was performed by two of the coauthors; the distal insertion of the gluteus maximus was released to expose the capsule (there are no external rotators in the model), and a T-capsulotomy was performed. The hip was then dislocated and the femoral neck was cut as per standard practice. The exposure allowed 360° visualization of the acetabulum without any soft-tissue impingement during the tasks. Furthermore, it allowed visualization of the whole osseous rim and the transverse acetabular ligament, which was represented by a different colored tape.

Cup Orientation Tasks
A standard operating table (Schaerer) was used and was placed in the center of the laminar flow enclosure of the operating suite. The hemipelvic model was secured to the operating table in a neutral position with all three planes of the

Fig. 1
A photograph showing the setup including the model, calibration object, and operating room enclosure.
model positioned orthogonal to the operating table and suite (Fig. 1). The anterior superior iliac spine and the pubic symphysis were equidistant from the edge of the operating table; therefore, the anterior pelvic plane relative to the operating table was 0°. The model was then draped and the table was set at the desired height for each subject. The operating space was calibrated and subjects were asked to perform several tasks. All tasks involved placing a 48-mm Trilogy cup (Zimmer), mounted on its introducer, in the requested operative orientation within the model’s unreamed acetabulum. Prior to the tasks, the subjects were informed of the hemipelvis’ neutral position relative to the table and operating room enclosure and identified all anatomical features required for acetabular preparation and cup implantation. Thereafter, they stood where the operating surgeon stands, an assistant provided good exposure of the field, and they were provided with the cup on its introducer. During the tasks, subjects were photographed when they were satisfied that they had achieved the desired cup orientation for that particular task. The stereopair of images obtained was used to capture the cup’s introducer, enabling calculation of the operative cup orientation (Fig. 2).

Five tasks were performed: four tested subjects as the primary surgeon and one tested them as the assistant (standing on the opposite side of table, that is, the anterior surface of the hemipelvis). In between successive tasks, subjects were asked to remove the cup from within the hemipelvis. The tasks were the following.

**Task 1: Preferred Compared with Measured Cup Orientation**

The subject states what his or her preferred cup inclination and anteversion are; the subject then positions the cup in this orientation and a stereopair of photographs is captured. Thereafter, the intended, preferred orientation was compared with the measured (actual) orientation.

### TABLE I Orientation Measurements for Tasks 1 and 5

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Measurements*</th>
<th>Intended or Estimated</th>
<th>Measured or Operative</th>
<th>Difference†</th>
<th>Radiographic</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Task 1 (lead‡)</strong></td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inclination</td>
<td>42 ± 3 (40 to 50)</td>
<td>38 ± 6 (29 to 52)</td>
<td>−4 ± 4 (−11 to 7)</td>
<td>43 ± 7 (33 to 62)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anteversion</td>
<td>21 ± 5 (15 to 30)</td>
<td>33 ± 7 (17 to 47)</td>
<td>11 ± 5 (2 to 20)</td>
<td>23 ± 4 (14 to 28)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Task 5 (assistant‡)</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inclination</td>
<td>43 ± 9 (33 to 70)</td>
<td>37 ± 6 (24 to 50)</td>
<td>−6 ± 7 (−20 to 6)</td>
<td>41 ± 7 (25 to 54)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anteversion</td>
<td>22 ± 7 (10 to 40)</td>
<td>30 ± 10 (12 to 46)</td>
<td>8 ± 6 (−2 to 19)</td>
<td>21 ± 6 (8 to 30)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*The values are given as the mean and the standard deviation, with the range in parentheses, in degrees. †These were the differences in orientation measurement. ‡Lead refers to the lead’s side of the table and assistant refers to the assistant’s side of the table.

Fig. 2

Stereopair photographs of a trainee surgeon, simulating the component at the desired cup orientation.
Task 2: Effect of Anatomical Cues on Actual Compared with Intended Inclination
This task orients the cup parallel to the model’s transverse acetabular ligament with an inclination of the subject’s preference.

Task 3: Ability to Achieve a Given Orientation and Alter It by Small Amounts
This task orients the cup (freehand) at an estimated angle of 40° inclination and 15° anteverision (Task 3a) and then increases the anteverision by 10° to achieve an orientation of 40° inclination and 25° anteverision (Task 3b) and then also increases the inclination by 10° to achieve an orientation of 50° inclination and 25° anteverision (Task 3c).

Task 4: Instrumented Cup Placement (Replicating Alignment Guide)
This task uses the alignment device with the impactor to achieve the predetermined orientation of the device relative to the pelvic plane and axis of the table. The alignment guide is an X-bar type with a predetermined angle of 45° inclination and 20° anteverision.

Task 5: Effect of Operator Compared with Assistant Perspective
In this task (assistant task), the operator positions himself or herself on the assistant’s side and estimates the cup angle when held in position by another surgeon.

Analyses
Each task was analyzed separately. Variability was defined as 2 standard deviations. The measurements obtained were the operative inclination and anteverision. These measurements were converted to radiographic measurements using the Murray equations. The optimum cup orientation zone was defined as having a radiographic angle of 45° inclination and 15° anteverision and a size of ±10°.

The differences between measured operative values and intended values were defined as \( \Delta \text{orientation} \) and were calculated as: \( \Delta \text{orientation} = \text{Measured operative inclination} - \text{Intended inclination} \). These differences were compared with all other tasks.

Subanalyses
To identify whether reproducing visual cues aided surgical accuracy, \( \Delta \text{orientation} \) of Task 4 (reproducing alignment guide inclination) was compared with all other tasks and \( \Delta \text{anteverision} \) of Tasks 2 and 4 (use of transverse acetabular ligament and alignment guide) was compared with all other tasks. To assess whether surgical experience affected accuracy, the ability of trainers was compared with that of operators.

### TABLE II Orientation Measurements for Tasks 2 to 4

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Measurement</th>
<th>Intended or Estimated*</th>
<th>Measured or Operative†</th>
<th>Difference†</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Task 2</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anteverision</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>34 ± 7 (17 to 45)</td>
<td>0 ± 7 (−17 to 11)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Task 3a</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inclination</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>35 ± 6 (18 to 44)</td>
<td>−5 ± 6 (−22 to 4)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anteverision</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>27 ± 7 (12 to 36)</td>
<td>12 ± 7 (−4 to 21)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Task 3b</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inclination</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>35 ± 5 (24 to 43)</td>
<td>−5 ± 5 (−16 to 3)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anteverision</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>36 ± 9 (16 to 53)</td>
<td>11 ± 9 (−9 to 28)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Task 3c</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inclination</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>43 ± 5 (33 to 51)</td>
<td>−7 ± 5 (−17 to 1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anteverision</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>36 ± 8 (21 to 53)</td>
<td>11 ± 8 (−4 to 28)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Task 4</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inclination</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>42 ± 5 (24 to 49)</td>
<td>−3 ± 5 (−21 to 4)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anteverision</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>23 ± 5 (13 to 35)</td>
<td>3 ± 5 (−7 to 15)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*The values are given as the mean in degrees. †The values are given as the mean and the standard deviation, with the range in parentheses, in degrees.
compared with that of trainees. Lastly, the influence of surgeon location relative to the operating table on the ability to estimate angles was tested by comparing findings between Tasks 1 and 5.

Statistical Analysis
Statistical analyses were performed with use of SPSS Statistics version 19 (IBM). Nonparametric statistical tests (Mann-Whitney U, Kruskal Wallis) were used. The chi-square test was used for cross-tabulated data; significance was defined as \( p \leq 0.05 \).

Results

**Task 1: Preferred Compared with Measured Cup Orientations**
The preferred orientation had a mean inclination (and standard deviation) of 42° ± 3° (range, 40° to 50°) and a mean anteverision of 21° ± 5° (range, 5° to 30°) (Table I). The measured operative orientation had a mean inclination of 38° ± 6° (range, 29° to 52°) and a mean anteverision of 33° ± 7° (range, 17° to 47°) (Fig. 3). Mean \( \Delta \) inclination was −4° ± 4° (range, −11° to 7°) and mean \( \Delta \) anteverision was 11° ± 5° (range, 2° to 20°). The calculated radiographic orientation had a mean inclination of 43° ± 7° (range, 33° to 62°) and a mean anteverision of 23° ± 4° (range, 14° to 28°). Mean \( \Delta \) radiographic was 1° ± 6° (range, −7° to 17°) for inclination and 1° ± 4° (range, −7° to 8°) for anteverision. Fifteen cups (71%) were within the target orientation zone.

**Task 2: Cup Anteverision Relative to Transverse Acetabular Ligament**
When surgeons were asked to reproduce the transverse acetabular ligament’s anteverision, the mean operative anteverision was 34° (range, 17° to 45°) (Table II). Mean \( \Delta \) anteverision was 0°, but variability was 14°.

**Task 3: Ability to Increase Orientation by Small Amounts**
When asked to increase anteverision by 10°, the mean increase achieved was 9° ± 4° (range, 1° to 17°) (Fig. 4). Similarly, when asked to increase inclination by 10°, the mean increase achieved was 9° ± 3° (range, 3° to 17°).

**Task 4: Ability to Achieve Orientation of 45° Inclination and 20° Anteverision with Alignment Guide**
Use of the alignment device improved both accuracy and variability; the mean operative inclination was 42° ± 5° (range, 24° to 49°) and the mean operative anteverision was 24° ± 5° (range, 13° to 35°). Using the alignment device, the mean calculated radiographic inclination was 45° ± 5° (range, 28° to 51°) and the mean calculated anteverision was 16° ± 4° (range, 10° to 25°). Twenty cups (95%) were within the orientation zone (Fig. 5).

**Task 5: Ability to Estimate Orientation When on the Assistant’s Side**
When asked to estimate cup orientation while standing on the assistant’s side, mean \( \Delta \) inclination was −6° ± 7° (range, −20° to 6°) and mean \( \Delta \) anteverision was 8° ± 6° (range, −2° to 19°). Subject position relative to the operating table bore no significant influence on the mean ability to estimate cup.
inclination ($p = 0.6$); however, when subjects were on the assistant’s side, they were better in determining anteversion by $3^\circ$ ($p = 0.03$), which is probably not clinically important. The variability in estimating cup inclination was $14^\circ$ on the assistant’s side compared with $8^\circ$ on the surgeon’s side (Task 1) (Fig. 6).
Subanalyses

Use of the alignment guide significantly reduced (p = 0.007) Δinclination (mean, $-3^\circ \pm 5^\circ$ [range, $-21^\circ$ to $4^\circ$]) compared with all other tasks (mean, $-6^\circ \pm 5^\circ$ [range, $-24^\circ$ to $7^\circ$]) (Table III and Fig. 5). It similarly reduced Δanteversion (mean, $3^\circ \pm 5^\circ$ [range, $-7^\circ$ to $15^\circ$]) compared with all other tasks (mean, $8^\circ \pm 8^\circ$ [range, $-17^\circ$ to $28^\circ$]) (p < 0.001). Use of the transverse acetabular ligament and alignment guide significantly reduced Δanteversion (mean, $1^\circ \pm 6^\circ$ [range, $-19^\circ$ to $15^\circ$]) compared with all other tasks (mean, $11^\circ \pm 7^\circ$ [range, $-9^\circ$ to $28^\circ$]) (p < 0.001). There were no significant differences in any Δorientation results between trainers and trainees, except for Tasks 3 and 5 (Table IV). Trainees showed greater accuracy in reproducing the orientation using the guide and in estimating operative anteversion when on the assistant’s side.

Discussion

To our knowledge, this is the first study to investigate the ability of surgeons to estimate cup orientation angles. This was assessed in terms of both Δorientation and variability, with the Δorientation being the mean difference between the orientation angle the surgeons aimed to achieve and the actual angle they achieved and the variability being 2 standard deviations of this measurement (i.e., about 95% of times orientations were within the quoted variability). We confirmed that surgeons were inaccurate, despite them knowing that their accuracy was being assessed. The Δorientation was commonly about $10^\circ$ for anteversion and $5^\circ$ for inclination. The variability was also large, being about $\pm 15^\circ$ for anteversion and $\pm 10^\circ$ for inclination. The errors are large and need to be understood so that they can be addressed.

The final position of the acetabular component depends on many factors, not just the cup orientation at implantation. Surgeons may at times adjust cup orientation to account for pelvic position at the time of impaction. Furthermore, factors such as body habitus, the appearance of the acetabulum and its edges (surgical exposure), and the presence of a patient’s thigh can all affect a surgeon’s estimation of cup orientation. A standardized pelvic model was used to eliminate the above factors that potentially influence accuracy. Therefore, this study showed the best accuracy possible in estimating cup orientation.

We measured cup orientation using the surgeons’ reference system (operative definitions). Clinically, cup orientation is assessed on postoperative radiographs using a different reference system (radiographic definitions). Interestingly, although the Δorientation using the operative definitions was large (Δinclination of approximately $-5^\circ$ and Δanteversion of approximately $10^\circ$), there was no Δorientation using the radiographic definitions for Tasks 1 and 5 (ΔRinclination of $1^\circ$ and ΔRanteversion of $1^\circ$). The radiographic definitions are what matter, as the target orientation is assessed with these definitions. It is difficult to explain why there is no Δorientation with the radiographic definitions: it may be that surgeons have, through trial and error, appreciated that, to achieve a given radiographic orientation target, they should reduce operative inclination and should increase operative anteversion. Whatever the reason, as there is no Δorientation relative to the radiographic definition, we do not necessarily need to develop methods to alter the Δorientation. What really matters is the variability.

Use of an alignment guide improved variability in anteversion by one-third (Fig. 5). It would therefore seem sensible to routinely use alignment guides. However, it was surprising that, even with the alignment guide, variability was still about $\pm 10^\circ$. The alignment guide is a mechanical device and it would seem likely that the design could be improved to reduce variability. With the guide, there was minimal Δorientation in achieving the required operative angles (Δinclination was $-3^\circ$ and Δanteversion was $3^\circ$), but what is needed is the appropriate radiographic angles. As previously highlighted, most current cup
TARGETS
perhaps not enough anteversion to achieve radiographic
alignment guides have too high an operative inclination and
implanted the cups in signi
found that, although they were aiming for the same target, they
vic orientation has less effect on cup orientation (especially
if the tabular ligament is used, the variability is such that the pel-
pelvic orientation at impaction increases the variability in
plantation. If an alignment guide is used, the variability in
anteversion resulted in the same variability as freehand im-
the table helping an inexperienced surgeon on the surgeon
fore suggest caution for trainers when on the assistant
erence guides. There was greater variability in the ability to

could possibly be improved by new teaching methods and ref-
der the task at an interval of time to establish repeatability. How-
obtain the ideal cup position. Lastly, we were unable to pro-
of surgeons to estimate angles, not necessarily the ability to
showed comparable ability of the tested guide compared with
one as the cup may catch on one side when impacted. Third,
we only tested one alignment guide and hence results may not
be generalizable to other guides. However, Minoda et al.31
showed comparable ability of the tested guide compared with
other guides in the market. Fourth, this study tested the ability
of surgeons to estimate angles, not necessarily the ability to
obtain the ideal cup position. Lastly, we were unable to pro-
vide rapid feedback regarding the measurements or to repeat
the task at an interval of time to establish repeatability. How-
ever, the critical role of feedback has previously been high-
lighted by Gofton et al.33, who demonstrated that real-time
feedback using computer navigation can result in improve-
ment of cup positioning by surgical trainees in a simulated
in vitro environment.

In summary, surgeons overestimate operative inclination
and underestimate anteversion, which is of benefit as this, on
average, helps to achieve the desired radiographic cup orienta-
tion. However, there was large variability in cup orientation
angles, which was helped slightly with alignment guides. New
and better guides and methods for training need to be
developed.
Fig. 7
Box-and-whisker plots showing variability of Δorientation for the different surgeons for inclination (Fig. 7-A) and anteversion (Fig. 7-B). Note that 14 of 21 surgeons had variability of 10° (i.e., within the target) for inclination target, but 4 of 21 surgeons had variability of 10° (within the target) for anteversion. The box indicates the 25 and 75 percentiles, the line within the box represents the median, the whiskers indicate the data with 1.5 standard deviation of the box, and the clear circles indicate outliers.
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References


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