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Surgery to dry sweaty palms

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Primarily palmar hyperhidrosis (sweaty palms) is a condition characterised by over-secretion of the sweat glands of unknown etiology, resulting in heavy sweating in the palms. The sweating is characteristically disproportionate to that required for thermoregulation (regulation of body heat) and dissipation of

Minimal access surgery is a useful alternative to Botulinum toxin injections

body heat. It affects 0.6-1 per cent of the population.

Patients with palmar hyperhidrosis are distressed with cold and wet hands, which is not only uncomfortable but also often embarrassing, both socially and professionally. Because of its non-life threatening nature, it is often treated with non-surgical methods, with poor results.

The high morbidity and potential mortality of a thoracotomy (cutting open the chest) for sympathetic blockade makes it an unpopular procedure for hyperhidrosis.

Botulinum toxin injec-

tions have also been used, but these need to be repeated at regular intervals and are often inadequate. All these modalities of treatment often fail to give long lasting relief and surgery is a useful alternative in these patients.

The advent of safe and easy video-assisted thoracoscopic surgery (VATS) techniques has lowered the threshold for offering minimal access surgery as a treatment option to patients with moderate to severe hand sweating, with good results.

In addition, it offers all the benefits of a minimally invasive procedure as well, viz. reduced postoperative pain, shorter hospitalisation, earlier recovery and return to normal activity and work, reduced morbidity and mortality.

The procedure is performed under general anesthesia with single lung ventilation. This allows one lung to be collapsed fully to give good access to the sympathetic chain. Surgery offers immediate relief with the patient waking up from anesthesia with dry hands.

(Dr Avinash Katara is a consultant in the department of Minimal Access Surgery at P.D. Hinduja National Hospital. Last week's article on hernia was also authored by him.)