

View Point

“Tunnel of Love” in Whipple — In the Pursuit of the Proposer

Utpal De¹, Kaushik Bhattacharya², Riya Agrawal³

“Tunnel of Love”(TOL) in Whipple surgery of Pancreatic Tumours is the cleavage plane over the superior mesenteric vein and behind the pancreas. While the term is well known in operative surgery textbooks since ages, the reason behind such a terminology and the creator of this term TOL has never been investigated or explored. This is probably the first initiative in surgical literature to decode the term TOL with various postulations.

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Key words : Pancreaticoduodenectomy, Tunnel of Love, Portal vein.

Pancreaticoduodenectomy for Periampullary Cancer is a challenging operation. One of the key steps for operability is the creation of a clear “Tunnel of Love” ie, the space behind the neck of pancreas and anterior to portal vein (Fig 1)¹. Successful creation of the tunnel is a key determinant for further progression and completion of the Whipple operation with complete clearance of the tumour. With the advancement in radiology and based on multi-detector Computed Tomography reports even borderline cancers are resectable wherein a portion of portal vein can be sacrificed and anastomosed. These are usually done in dedicated high volume centers. A review of the literature shows that the percentages of patients who underwent surgery at very low-, low-, high-, and very high-volume centres were 29%, 19%, 23%, and 29% respectively². So approximately 48% of the operations are performed in either a low volume or very low volume center where advanced radiology is inaccessible. Moreover, technical support and expertise of portal vein excision and reconstruction is inaccessible. So, surgeons have to rely on the safe dissection of “Tunnel of Love” as sole criteria for progress of the operation. But the question is how such a complicated operation with such a crucial step could be associated with the idea of “Love”. Further, a search of medical literature failed to identify the surgeon who named it or the reason behind naming that step as the ‘tunnel of love’ in pancreatic tumour surgery.

Possible Postulations :

- (A) Of the many meanings of 'love' according to Oxford dictionary includes intimacy or attachment³. It could have been named because of intimate relation between the portal vein and posterior pancreas. But how can one attribute its naming to making a tunnel which is akin to breaking love as love is inseparable and eternal. Neither is any structure created rather the tunnel is dismantled and laid open for further anastomosis.
- (B) It could have been named by some surgeon in the name of “Dr Love” posthumously, but a search of

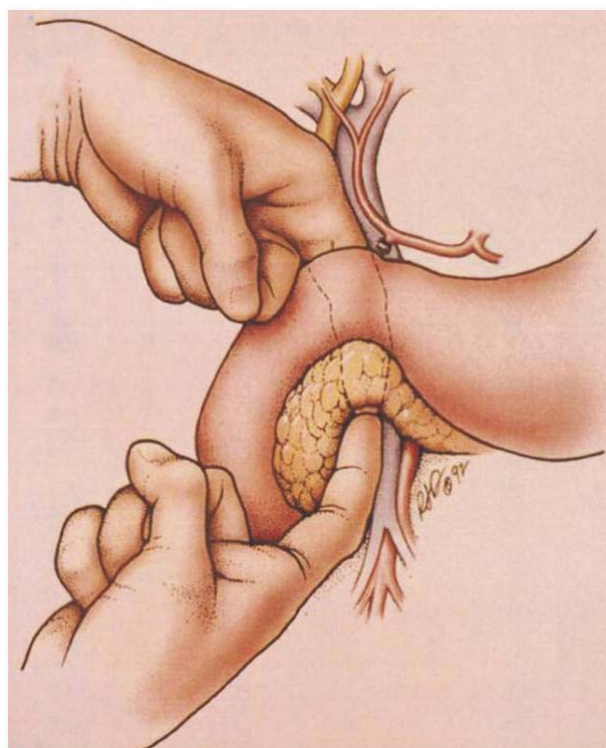


Fig 1 — Per-operative picture of “Tunnel of Love” during Whipple

Department of Surgery, Nil Ratan Sircar Medical College and Hospital, Kolkata 700014

¹MS, FAIS, FACS, FRCS, Professor and Corresponding Author

²MS, DNB, MNAMS, FAIS, FACS, FRCS, Associate Professor, Department of Surgery, Mata Gujri Memorial Medical College, Kishanganj, Bihar 855107

³MBBS, Postgraduate Student

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history of medical literature failed to provide any such possible evidence.

(C) A broad Goggle search with search words “tunnel of Love” reveals amusements rides to music albums but all of them are recent development long after pancreatico-deodenectomy was in vogue. The section of industrial railway located near Klevan, Ukraine, that links it with Orzhiv⁴. It is a railway surrounded by green arches and is three to five kilometres in length (Fig 2). It is known for being a favourite place for couples to take walks since trains pass thrice a day. The tunnel of trees is so dense it is difficult to see outside from within the structure and the natural light that penetrates the canopy from above makes the space soothingly dark. However, there is not much attention given to the tunnel as a tourist attraction despite the obvious potential and the fact it is a naturally occurring space. Tourist legends says that couples who ride together through the green tunnel and make a wish will get what they want. The Idyllic tunnel of love was created in collaboration by nature and man. The above explanation seems more realistic. “TOL” is obscure hidden behind the head of pancreas and once the two fingers meet (one from above and one from below) it’s for sure that in all probability the operation could be completed.

(D) Another probable reason of creating the term “Tunnel of Love” in Whipple surgery may be was to warn the surgeon and the assistants to be gentle and perform dissection with utmost care and love in that area to avoid any type of catastrophe, injury or bleed.

Conclusion :

Thus though the mystery behind the term “TOL” remains unsolved, it’s a mysterious excitement in the



Fig 2 — Picture of “Ukraine” Tunnel of Love

wild dreams of Pancreatic Surgeons holding back the adrenergic drive while traversing through this surgically challenging yet adventurous tunnel, each time thinking about the passionate “proposer”. It also speaks volumes about the humour and wit of the proposer. Like many other hidden and buried surgical history it is ardent that we unravel the truth behind the name and pay homage to the great surgeon who has paved the way for saving many lives of patients who are benefitting from Pancreaticoduodenectomy.

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