The neurovascular contents of a unilateral double mandibular canal: A case study

KRISTEN R. RAMIREZ
NYU School of Medicine | CUNY Graduate Center | New York Consortium in Evolutionary Primatology

Background

Previous radiographical studies have documented an incidence of bifid mandibular canals at or below approximately 1%–4. The presence of two distinct mandibular canals, each originating from its own mandibular foramen, is less common and has been recorded in the literature only sparingly.4

Variation in mandibular canal quantity and morphology has been related to the formation of the inferior alveolar nerve and the process of mandibular ossification.3

The embryological origins of the inferior alveolar nerve (IAN) as three distinct neurological components can explain the presence of a bifid or trifid mandibular canal following incomplete fusion of the nerves during prenatal development.6

Ossification of the mandible begins at the mental foramen and progresses posteriorly.7 During this process, the neurovascular bundle is surrounded by the ossifying bone, which forms the mandibular canal around the bundle. Multiple canals would form in cases of incomplete fusion.6 Additionally, a bifid canal may not contain multiple components of the inferior alveolar neurovascular bundle but may instead reflect isolation of the nerve and artery into separate canals.4

Materials and Methods

Cadaver

The cadaver was of a 92-year-old female.

Preservation

After isolating the carotid artery, two small incisions were made 1 cm apart. A cannula was inserted into each incision, the superior oriented cranially and the inferior oriented caudally. Twenty liters of embalming solution (1.86% formaldehyde, 10% phenol, 1% alcohol, 10% propylene glycol) were pumped into the body.

Timeline

Following embalming the cadaver was placed in cold storage for 12 months. Superficial projection of the cadaver occurred over a four-month period prior to the gross anatomy course where the cadaver was dissected over a two-month period. Images were taken at the conclusion of the course.

Dissection

To liberate the masseter superiorly, the zygomatic arch was cut medially from the most anterior aspect and laterally just anterior to the mandibular condyle using a Morpec autopsy saw. The masseter was removed from the mandibular ramus and reflected inferiorly to the gonial angle. The saw, as well as a hammer and chisel, were then used to remove the mandibular ramus, leaving behind the inferior alveolar neurovascular bundle. The facal aspect of the cranial corpus was preserved to expose the course of the two mandibular canals and their neurovascular contents through the corpus of the mandible to the level of the mental foramen.

Typical Morphology

- The posterior division of the mandibular nerve (CN V3), gives 3 branches: auriculotemporal, inferior alveolar, and lingual nerves (Fig. 2)
- The maxillary artery gives an inferior alveolar branch which joins the inferior alveolar nerve (Fig. 1)
- The inferior alveolar artery and nerve course through a single mandibular canal which begins at the mandibular foramen on the deep surface of the ramus and terminates at the mental foramen where those structures become the mental nerve and artery (Fig. 1)
- The inferior alveolar nerve gives the nerve to the mylohyoid prior to entering the mandibular canal (Figs. 1-2)

Cadaveric Study

This Case

- The posterior division of the mandibular nerve (CN V3), gives 4 branches: auriculotemporal, inferior alveolar, lingual, and mental nerves (Fig. 3)
- The maxillary artery gives an inferior alveolar branch which then gives 2 branches (Fig. 4)
- Two mandibular canals are present, each originating from their own mandibular foramen. The superior canal contains the inferior alveolar nerve and artery, and diminishes anteriorly within the corpus which is commonly observed.7,10 The inferior mandibular canal contains the mental nerve and artery and remains defined from the mandibular foramen to the mental foramen (Figs. 3-4)
- The mental nerve gives the nerve to the mylohyoid prior to entering the mandibular canal (Figs. 3-4)

Discussion and Conclusions

Presented here is the first documented case of independent inferior alveolar and mental nerves in the infratemporal region. Each branch of the posterior division of the mandibular nerve (CN V3), courses through one of two mandibular canals with a branch of the inferior alveolar artery (Figs. 3-4).

The mechanism of this variant is not related to the embryological development of the inferior alveolar nerve and mandible. The superior canal contained a sizeable nerve with a presentation similar to that of 40% of cadavers in two mandibular canal variation studies8–10. The separation of the two nerves occurs proximal to the mandible and therefore is unlikely to reflect non-fusion of the components of the inferior alveolar nerve prior to mandibular ossification.

Given the variation in the contents of a bifid or accessory mandibular canal, radiographic identification of osteological anatomical variants is not informative for predicting potential complications during surgeries. Caution must be taken prior to any dental or surgical procedure involving the mandible or mandibular dentition. While radiographs can show the presence of this osteological variant, further imaging is recommended to ascertain the contents of the various canals prior to surgery.

Acknowledgements

Thanks are given to George Lew for the creation and documentation of the cadaver including the photographs used in this presentation, and to my colleagues: Dr. Brian Shearer, Dr. W. Michael O’Ginn, Dr. Jean-Pierre Simon, and Dr. David Howard. Special thanks are given to the students assigned to the cadaver for dissection: Valentina Gueli (Università degli Studi di Bologna, Italy); Malvina Menegatti (Università degli Studi di Padova, Italy); Eleonora Nardone (Università degli Studi di Udine, Italy); Sian Fennell (University of Leeds, UK); and Federico Sgambati (Università degli Studi di Bologna, Italy).

References


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