REVIEW

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HEGENBERGER RETRACTOR: IS IT HELPFUL FOR PERINEAL REPAIR?



The **Hegenberger Retractor,** manufactured by **Hegenberger Medical** (Abingdon, United Kingdom) is available for purchase in the United States through **Rocket Medical.** A video that I find particularly useful for explaining its use is available here: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=p-jilXgXZLY

Background. About 85% of women having a vaginal birth experience some form of perineal trauma, and 60% to 70% receive stitches for those spontaneous tears or intentional incisions. As such, repairing perineal lacerations is a requisite skill for all obstetricians and midwives, and every provider has developed exposure techniques to perform their suturing with the goals of good tissue re-approximation, efficiency, minimized patient discomfort, reduced blood loss, and safety from needle sticks. For several millennia, the most commonly used tissue retractor for these repairs has been one's own fingers, or those of a colleague. While cost-effective and readily available, fingers do have drawbacks as a vaginal retractor. First, their use as a retractor precludes their use for other tasks. Second, their frequent need to be inserted and replaced (see drawback #1) can be uncomfortable for patients. Third, their limited surface area is often insufficient to appropriately provide adequate tissue retraction for optimal surgical site visualization. Finally, they get tired and typically do not appreciate being stuck with needles. Given all this, it is surprising that so many centuries have passed with so little innovation for this ubiquitous procedure. Fortunately, Danish midwife Malene Hegenberger thought now was a good time to change the status quo.

Design/Functionality. The **Hegenberger Retractor** is brilliant in its simplicity. Its unique molded plastic design is smooth, ergonomic, nonconductive, and packaged as a single-use sterile device. Amazingly, it has a near-perfect pliability balance, making it simultaneously easy to compress for insertion while providing enough retraction tension for good visualization once it has been re-expanded. The subtle ridges on the compression points are just enough to allow for a good grip, and the notches on the sides are a convenient addition for holding extra suture if needed. The device has been cleared by the US Food and Drug Administration (FDA) as a Class 1 device and is approved for sale in the United States. In my experience with its use, I thought it was easy to place and provided excellent exposure for the repairs I was doing. In fact, I thought it provided as good if not better exposure than what I would expect from a Gelpi retractor without any of the trauma the Gelpi adds with its pointed ends. Smile emoji!

Innovation. In the early 1800s, French midwifery pioneer Marie Boivin introduced a novel pelvimeter and a revolutionary 2-part speculum to the technology of the day. Why it took more than 200 years for the ideas of another cutting-edge midwife to breach the walls of the obstetric technological establishment remains a mystery, but fortunately it has been done. While seemingly obvious, the **Hegenberger Retractor** is the culmination of years of work and 88 prototypes. It looks simple, but the secret to its functionality is the precision with which each dimension and every curve was designed. The device has been cleared by the FDA as a Class 1 device and is approved for sale in the United States.

Summary. There are a lot of reasons to like the **Hegenberger Retractor.** I like it for its simplicity; I like it for its functionality; I like it for its ability to fill a real need. On the downside, I do not like that it is a single-use plastic device, and I am not happy about adding cost to obstetric care. Most of all, I *hate* that I did not invent it.

Is the **Hegenberger Retractor** going to be needed to repair every obstetric laceration? No. Will it provide perfect exposure to repair every obstetric laceration? Of course not. But it is an incredibly clever device that will be very helpful in many situations, and I suspect it will soon become a mainstay on most maternity units as it gains recognition.

FOR MORE INFORMATION, VISIT www.rocketmedical.com

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References

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