Ultrasound-based vertebral landmark localization using deformable spine models

Zachary Baum¹, Tamas Ungi¹, Andras Lasso¹, Ben Church¹, Christopher Schlenger², Gabor Fichtinger¹
1. Laboratory for Percutaneous Surgery, School of Computing, Queen’s University
2. Premier Chiropractic, Stockton, California, U.S.A.

Introduction

- Identifying vertebral landmarks in ultrasound (US) images is non-trivial
- Landmarks are difficult to locate in US images of patients with diseased spines (Ungi, 2014)
- Easily identifiable vertebral landmarks often scanned and segmented first, though these landmarks not clinically relevant
- With only half of all vertebral landmarks identified, accurate models can be created (Church, 2017)

Methods

Proposed Solution

- Take easily identifiable landmarks, and every subsequently identified one, digitally overlay updating “visual aid” on ultrasound images (Fig. 1)
- Visual aid can orient the clinician in further scanning and landmark segmentation in clinically relevant regions

Implementation

- Spatially tracked US system used to acquire images for study (Fig. 2)
- Tracking information and ultrasound images captured in real-time

Experimental Design

- Six operators identified transverse processes in US images independently.
- Operators randomly assigned two series of images
- One where landmarks identified using only US images, one where landmarks were identified using visual aid and US images (Fig. 1)

Results

- Mean identification rate (p=0.001, n=6), time to completion (p=0.047, n=6) both significantly higher with visual aid than US only (Fig. 3)
- Issues reported in distinguishing landmarks from ribs in thoracic region
- Difficulties occurred most notably between T6 and T12 in US-only
- Using visual aid in these regions operators repeatedly attained higher identification rates

Conclusion

- 3D visual aid developed to assist in vertebral landmark identification
- Operators found deformable spine visual aid useful for landmark identification
- Operators identified significantly more landmarks with visual aid than without
- Demonstrated effectiveness of 3D visual aid in US landmark identification

References