1	High degree of consensus achieved regarding diagnosis and treatment of ACJ instability among European	ł
2	Shoulder Surgeons	
3	Diagnosis and treatment of acromioclavicular joint dislocation. Consensus paper 2020	
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5	ABSTRACT	
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7	Purpose: 1 to develop a consensus on diagnosis and treatment of acromioclavicular joint instability.	
8	Methods: A consensus process following the modified Delphi technique was conducted. Panel members were selected	
9	among the European Shoulder Associates of ESSKA. Five rounds were performed between October 2018 and	
10	November 2019. The first round consisted of gathering questions which were then divided into blocks referring to	
11	imaging, classifications, surgical approach for acute and chronic cases, conservative treatment. Subsequent rounds	
12	consisted of condensation by means of an online questionnaire. Consensus was achieved when $\geq 66.7\%$ of the	
13	participants agreed on one answer. Descriptive statistic was used to summarize the data.	
14	Results: A consensus was reached on the following topics. Imaging: a true anteroposterior or a bilateral Zanca view	
15	are sufficient for diagnosis. 93% of the panel agreed on clinical override testing during body cross test to identify	
16	horizontal instability. The Rockwood classification, as modified by the ISAKOS statement, was deemed valid. The	
17	separation line between acute and chronic cases was set at 3 weeks. The panel agreed on arthroscopically assisted	
18	anatomic reconstruction using a suspensory device (86.2%), with no need of a biological augmentation (82.8%) in acute	
19	injuries, whereas biological reconstruction of coracoclavicular and acromioclavicular ligaments with tendon graft was	
20	suggested in chronic cases. Conservative approach and postoperative care were found similar	
21	Conclusion: A consensus was found on main topics of controversy in the management of acromioclavicular joint	
22	dislocation. Each step of the diagnostic treatment algorithm was fully investigated and clarified.	
23	Level of Evidence: V.	
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ha formattato: Inglese (Stati Uniti)

#### 28 INTRODUCTION

29

30 Injuries of the acromioclavicular (AC) joint are quite common, accounting for 3–12% of all shoulder injuries [7]. The 31 incidence even rises up to 40-50% when it comes to contact sports [12], with the highest prevalence in men in their 32 second or third decade of life [5]. It seems evident that diagnosis and management of acute and chronic AC joint 33 dislocations need to be well stated. However, although a plethora literature is available, a clear consensus has still 34 not been achieved. 35 Traditionally, AC joint dislocations has been diagnosed on radiographs, through bilateral standard anteroposterior 36 (AP) and Zanca views, and then classified according to the Rockwood classification. Conservative management is 37 usually preferred in low-grade injuries (Rockwood type I and II), whereas symptomatic high-grade injuries (types IV-38 VI) are routinely managed surgically. Management of acute type III injuries is still an ongoing subject of controversy 39 [16]. Decision making is often based on patient's work and sporting activity as well as surgeon's personal opinion and 40 experience. However, concerns have been raised on each step of the decision-making process. Even when it comes to 41 conservative management, best type and length of immobilization have not been defined yet [21]. Regarding surgical 42 therapy, the wide range of available new surgical procedures clearly reflects the lacking of a golden standard; each 43 technique is associated with limitations and, finally, none of them have been demonstrated to be superior to the others 44 with respect to clinical outcomes [4]. 45 Therefore, the European Shoulder Associates (ESA), section of the European Society of Sports Traumatology, Knee 46 Surgery and Arthroscopy (ESSKA), aimed to develop a consensus on the evaluation and management of AC joint 47 dislocation in order to provide a unified expert opinion on this topic. We hypothesized that there would be a high degree 48 of consensus in the diagnosis and the treatment of AC joint dislocations despite the plethora of literature on diagnostic 49 tools and treatment options. 50

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# 54 MATERIALS AND METHODS

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56	A consensus process with an international panel of experienced clinicians using the modified Delphi technique was
57	implemented [11].
58	The Delphi procedure is a systematic instrument, which aims to measure and develop consensus when empirical
59	evidence is lacking. The ESSKA- ESA followed the steps of this procedure in order to guarantee the quality of its work.
60	The process consisted of two consecutive phases: systematic literature reviews and consensus development.
61	
62	Systematic review
63	The systematic literature reviews of imaging and treatment were published in 2018 [15]. These publications were made
64	available for the questions of the Delphi consensus.
65	The results of the literature search were then allocated according to the three following items: imaging; classification;
66	and treatment. All search results not allocated to the above were not considered for further evaluation.
67	Consensus development
68	According to Hsu et al.[11], the Delphi consensus was developed. Criteria for not further asking a question in
69	the next round were: a) $\geq$ 66.7% of the participants agreed on one answer; b) The percentage of the answer
70	was steady between two rounds; c) If no consensus was found in round 5, this question was marked as having "no
71	consensus" for any of the answers.
72	In total, 5 rounds were performed within 18 months of the Delphi process (systematic reviews in May 2018, round 1 in
73	October 2018, round 5 in November 2019). Round 1 consisted of a panel meeting at the ESA closed meeting in Athens,
74	October 2018. Rounds 2 to 4 were based on online questionnaires. Round 5 was a panel meeting at ESSKA Specialty
75	Days, Madrid, November 2019.
76	If an answer had not reached consensus within one round, the panel was informed about the percentage on respondent
77	voting for the according answer. Suggestions for new answers were implemented in the next round in rounds 2 to 4.
78	Each round was prepared by the main and senior authors, who remained blinded to respondent identities when
79	reviewing responses.
80	
81	Nomination and selection of panel members
82	Panel members were selected among the members of ESA for rounds 2 to 4. For round 1 and 5 the panel was made up
83	by the auditorium willing to participate. For round 5, two participants were chosen to be vote counters. Respondents to

84 either of rounds 2 to 4 were considered panel members and were invited to participate in the final, fifth Delphi round.

85	
86	Round 1: Development of initial questions and answers (Q&A)
87	After systematically reviewing the current literature and evidence, important questions and possible answers regarding
88	the diagnosis and treatment of ACJ separation were gathered in and open panel meeting in round one.
89	the panel meeting and collected the Q&A. The panel was confronted with the current evidence. If an answer was
90	supported by current literature, it was noted for round two.
91	Round 2: Gathering additional Q&A
92	Round 2: Gathering additional Q&A
93	The Q&A of round one was entered into an electronic data-capture system (Google Forms, Google Inc., Alphabet Inc.,
94	Mountain View, CA, USA). The panel was able to review the current literature on each question and have an informed
95	answer on all the questions. Answers for open questions were noted to round three.
96	
97	Rounds 3 and 4: Condensing
98	Answers from round 2 were assessed by the core panel (CR, KB, FM, GM) for the above-mentioned criteria (agreement
99	$\geq$ 66.7% (consensus level) steady percentage between two rounds). If an answer reached the consensus level, it was
100	not asked again in the following round.
101	
102	Round 5
103	The answers that either did not reach consensus level or unclear questions were discussed in an open panel meeting. If a
104	consensus was found, it was noted accordingly.
105	
106	<u>Statistical</u> analysis
107	Survey data were transferred to SPSS Statistics 25 software (IBM Corp., Armonk, NY, USA) for standard descriptive
108	analyses. Consensus was achieved for a categorical response when it involved at least two-thirds of respondents. Final
109	adjudication after the fifth survey was made by the authors for a few questions that did not lead to clear consensus.
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112	RESULTS
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114	From this first round, members were asked to participate in the consensus process. In the second round, <u>28 out of 49</u>
115	(57%) responded, in the third round 29 (59%), and 30 (61%) in the fourth round. At the final
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116 round, which was again not online, 40 panel members were available for voting. Before opening the consensus questions, 117 the panel was asked about their frequency of annual AC-joint surgeries. About 54% treated between 10-50 AC joints, 118 whereas the other 46% treated less than 10 AC joints per year (Table 1). 119 Questions were divided into 5 blocks referring to the radiographic modalities to diagnose AC joint pathologies, the 120 classification systems to grade differences, the surgical approach for acute and chronic cases as well as the postoperative 121 treatment. 122 123 Radiographic evaluation 124 After the final round the panel reached a consensus regarding the radiological approach to diagnose and classify AC joint 125 dislocations. The consented radiographs are a true a.p. radiograph, as well as a panoramic view (bilateral Zanca

radiographs) without loading of the arm. To address the horizontal instability through radiographs no consensus was
reached. However, clinical override testing during body cross test was proposed by 93% of the panel members to identify
horizontal instability. In addition, a consensus was reached after the third round (79.3%), that no additional imaging is
needed for the assessment of AC joint instability (e.g. computed tomography, magnetic resonance or ultrasound, Figure
1).

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# 132 Classification

After round three there was a clear consensus regarding different classifications. The Tossy classification[23] and the Bannister classification [1]are not recommended to classify the type of AC dislocation (93.1% respectively 93,10% voted against using this classification). So far, the Rockwood classification is still the most valid classification. The ISAKOS statement (concerning grade III) was consented to be sufficient for a comprehensive classification (**Figure 2**).

137

### 138 Acute injury

After round four an acute case was defined as an AC joint dislocation presenting within the first 3 weeks after trauma.
Regarding the surgical treatment, an arthroscopically assisted anatomic reconstruction using a suspensory device
(synthetic augmentation) is recommended (86.2%), with no need of an additionally biological augmentation (82.8%)
(Figure 3).

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144 Chronic <u>injury</u>

As following the definition of acute cases, the panel defined a chronic case if the initial trauma occurred more than 3 weeks ago. There was an early (after round 3) consensus regarding the usage of biological augmentation in chronic cases,

147	with the need to address the AC capsule. Therefore, a tendon augmentation is recommended, wrapping the tendon around
148	the coracoid. Additionally, there is no recommendation for a distal clavicle resection in chronic cases (95%) and the panel
149	denied using this surgical approach (Figure 4).

151 Treatment

Postoperative treatment modalities differed depending on acute or chronic cases. The results showed no different
treatment strategy of conservative or postoperative treatment, in regard to "back-to-sports", weight restrictions or active
and passive mobilization. A shoulder sling is recommended for immobilization for 3 weeks after surgery. A high
consensus was reached (100%) with a limitation of range of motion with no activities of daily living for the first 6 weeks
and a free range of motion 6 weeks after surgery (100%) (Figure 5).

157 The mode to change from conservative to surgical treatment is defined by the patients' persistence of pain (93.3%).

158 Additionally, weight restrictions are cleared after 3-4 months (90%).

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# 163 DISCUSSION

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165	The most important finding of the present study was that finally a consensus could be found on several topics. True AP
166	view or a bilateral Zanca view were deemed sufficient for diagnosis, a separation line between acute and chronic was
167	set at 3 weeks from trauma, arthroscopically assisted anatomic reconstruction using synthetic augmentation has been
168	suggested in acute injuries, whereas the use of biological reconstruction with tendon graft was reserved to chronic
169	cases. Clarification on postoperative protocol and conservative management have also been made.
170	Since AC joint dislocations are plagued by limited evidence-based literature, the present consensus really shed light on
171	some controversial issues.
172	An emerging concept in the quest for a better understanding of AC joint pathology and improved clinical outcomes is
173	the complementary role of either coracoclavicular (CC) and AC ligaments. Decades ago, biomechanical studies have
174	clearly stated that CC ligaments are the main responsible for vertical stability, as well as AC ligaments and capsule are
175	the primary stabilizers in the horizontal plane [3, 9]. Since clinical data has shown a vast number of persistent
176	horizontal instability following modern arthroscopic AC joint reconstruction techniques [20], not only the surgical
177	management, but also the clinical assessment have been reconsidered.
178	It has been claimed that parameters assessable on AP and Zanca view do not allow for quantification of horizontal
179	instability, therefore, the use of new radiographic parameters in a single lateral Alexander view has been recently
180	recommended [26]. Anyhow, the ESA panel agreed that a true AP view or a bilateral Zanca view without loading the
181	arm are still adequate for a correct diagnosis, with no need of modified Alexander view to seek for horizontal
182	instability. On the contrary, the clinical evaluation was deemed sufficient to evaluate instability in the horizontal plane.
183	Similarly, recent papers called into question the reliability of the Rockwood classification [13, 18] and further stated
184	that, except for type IV, it does not assess horizontal instability [26]. Once again, the consensus clarified that the
185	Rockwood classification, recently modified by the ISAKOS statement [2], remains the most appropriate and
186	comprehensive classification to guide the treatment choice so far.
187	Moving forward, once the diagnosis has been made and the dislocation has been correctly classified, current literature
188	turned out to be unable to provide a clear demarcation line between acute and chronic dislocations. While some authors
189	considered acute dislocations those treated within 3 days after trauma [10, 24], some others still considered acute
190	injuries those treated up to 6 weeks after trauma [6, 14, 25]. The ESA panel unequivocally set the separation line at 3
191	weeks, but also defined a grey zone between acute and chronic ranging from 3 to 6 weeks. According to the ESA panel
192	this should be considered an important turning point when it comes to surgical management. Taking into account the

193 limited healing capacity of both CC and AC ligaments, definition of chronic setting clearly affects the surgical strategy.

194	As a matter of fact, a large consensus stated that arthroscopically-assisted reconstruction using a suspensory device
195	(synthetic) with no need for an additional biologic augmentation should be the treatment of choice in acute cases,
196	whereas biologic reconstruction to re-create not only CC ligaments, but also AC ligaments was deemed
197	necessary in chronic cases. In other words, the less healing response is expected, the more surgical stability, increased
198	by biological augmentation, is recommended. Moreover, biomechanical studies demonstrated that combined AC and
199	CC ligaments reconstruction provides better results than isolated CC reconstruction [8, 19].
200	Conservative treatment is once again an unclarified issue. It generally involves immobilization of the arm. Several type
201	of arm immobilizers have been proposed [22] ranging from a broadarm sling up to Kenny-Howard splint, taping and
202	casts. Immobilization can last from 3 days up to 3 weeks based on Rockwood type, subsiding pain and/or different
203	protocols available [17, 21]. Rehabilitation starts gradually after sling removal. Unfortunately, no previous studies
204	aimed to clarify whether one immobilizer is better than the other neither if a longer period of immobilization has a
205	biologic rationale, therefore the final decision is always up to the surgeon's experience. The ESA panel aimed to
206	summarize the current literature, thus providing a sort of reasonable guideline to follow and a consensus has been
207	reached on this topic. Conservative management of low-grade AC joint dislocations was unified with postoperative
208	management of high-grade AC joint dislocations. Three weeks of immobilization seemed a reasonable time to provide
209	an initial biological ingrowth, thus avoiding risks related to a longer immobilization period (e.g. shoulder stiffness).
210	However, 6 weeks are warranted before regaining full range of motion and activities of daily living. Sports activities are
211	not allowed before 4 months. Anyhow, according to the ESA panel, pain still remains the main criteria for return to full
212	activities as well as to switch a conservative management into a surgical one.
213	Nevertheless, some issues still remain controversial and represents limitations of the present study. One for all, outcome
214	measures to evaluate the management of ACJ injuries are not consistently reported in the literature, therefore they could
215	not even be included in the consensus process. Further, the lack of uniformity in reported outcomes and the abundance
216	of conservative treatment protocols as well as surgical techniques reported in the literature make any kind of
217	comparison difficult or somehow inconclusive.
218	Due to the lack of prospective randomized trials, this consensus statement is meant to be a guideline to get insight into
219	the complex topic of diagnosis and treatment of AC joint dislocations for the general orthopaedic surgeon and even for
220	shoulder specialists, respectively.
221	

222 CONCLUSIONS

224	A consensus was reached on main topics of controversy. True AP view or a panoramic view (bilateral Zanca			
225	radiographs) without loading of the arm was deemed sufficient for diagnosis. Horizontal instability can be identified			
226	through clinical override testing during body cross test. The Rockwood classification, as modified by the ISAKOS			
227	statement, is still considered the most valid so far. The separation line between acute and chronic cases was			
228	consensually set at 3 weeks. Arthroscopically assisted anatomic reconstruction using a suspensory device (synthetic			
229	augmentation) with no need of an additionally biological augmentation could be recommended in acute injuries,			
230	whereas the use of biological reconstruction with tendon graft should be preferred in chronic cases, with the need to			
231	address horizontal instability by reconstructing also the AC ligaments. Finally, the consensus showed no different			
232	treatment strategies between conservative and postoperative care of high grade ACJ dislocation, recommending			
233	immobilization for 3 weeks with a full range of motion activity allowed after 6 weeks.			
234	The ESSKA-ESA section tried to fully investigate and clarify each step of the diagnostic treatment algorithm, aiming to			
235	give surgeons insight into the current concepts suggested despite the large			
236	amount of literature.			
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309	Figure and Table Legends
310	
311	Table 1:
312	Description of panel of clinicians who responded to the survey.
313	
314	Figure 1:
315	Radiographic evaluation statements of the Delphi process which reached a consensus.
316	
317	Figure 2:
318	Classification statements of the Delphi process which reached a consensus.
319	
320	Figure 3:
321	Statements regarding treatment of acute AC joint seperatrions of the Delphi process which reached a consensus.
322	
323	Figure 4:
324	Statements regarding treatment of chronic AC joint seperatrions of the Delphi process which reached a consensus.
325	

- **326** Figure 5:
- 327 Statements regarding non-surgical treatment and postoperative rehabilitation of AC joint seperatrions of the Delphi

**328** process which reached a consensus.

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