Reviewer's report

Title: Treatment of distal tibial fractures with the Ilizarov external fixator A prospective observational study in 39 consecutive patients

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Reviewer: Boris Zelle

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The authors suggest a short study of 39 patient with distal tibial fractures undergoing fixation with circular frames. I believe that the authors address an important topic and apply an interesting method. However, I have some concerns that I would like to outline in my review:

Background:
1) misspelling "Allgower"
2) The references are in a little bit of disarray. Ruedi and Allgower did not suggest a staged treatment protocol, but they suggested the key steps for successful open reduction and internal fixation procedures of pilon fractures.
3) Some references are listed twice in the bibliography 8+13, 9+15
4) spelling: "metaphyseal"
5) Circular frames certainly have less blood loss, but certainly the main potential advantage is less surgical dissection

Methods
In this series, the authors only include 2 type C3 fractures, which are typically the challenging injuries. These are the fracture types that previous authors have investigated and have found significant problems with soft tissue complications. Reporting successful results using circular frames in a patient population that only includes 5% of type C3 fracture does not really allow any reference to previous case series that looked at high energy injuries.

Results
I am curious to hear more about the operating times. 352 minutes for application of a circular ring?

Discussion
1) Again, many patients in this series seem to be low-energy injuries and probably would not have required a staged protocol. Thus, avoiding a staged protocol does not quite seem to be an advantage.
2) para 2, I assume that the authors mean hardware complications?
3) I would not discuss application of Rh BMP-7. I think it is beyond the scope of this manuscript

**Level of interest:** An article of limited interest

**Quality of written English:** Not suitable for publication unless extensively edited

**Statistical review:** No, the manuscript does not need to be seen by a statistician.

**Declaration of competing interests:**

I declare that I have no competing interests.