

Case Report

Bypassing the Stiffness Cliff: Biological Impedance Matching for Shoulder Arthroplasty in the Metabolically Compromised Host

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Abstract

Patients with chronic kidney disease–mineral and bone disorder (CKD-MBD) present a biomechanical paradox: a high-demand joint environment coupled with a metabolically compromised skeletal substrate. In this high-entropy host bed, rigid glenoid implants can create a pronounced impedance mismatch (stiffness cliff) at the implant-bone interface, amplifying interfacial stresses and predisposing to early loosening. We report a hemodialysis patient with end-stage renal osteodystrophy and advanced glenohumeral arthropathy with substantial glenoid bone loss. During hemi-shoulder arthroplasty, the resected humeral head was contoured as a structural autograft to resurface the glenoid and restore containment. This in-situ reconstruction repurposed the resected bone as a biological impedance matcher, avoiding the introduction of a rigid metal-bone interface. At final follow-up, active forward flexion 110°, abduction 90°, external rotation 25°, and internal rotation to L5 were achieved with pain relief, and radiographs showed maintained graft position without lucency. Autologous humeral-head glenoid resurfacing reframes glenoid reconstruction as a physics-informed biological coupling strategy designed to smooth stress transmission across a metabolically fragile interface.

Keywords: Renal osteodystrophy; CKD-MBD; biological impedance matching; glenoid resurfacing; structural autograft; hemiarthroplasty

Introduction

Chronic kidney disease–mineral and bone disorder (CKD-MBD) produces heterogeneous high- and low-turnover bone states with cortical thinning and impaired mineralization, predisposing to fragility, implant loosening, and periprosthetic fracture. Shoulder arthroplasty in hemodialysis patients therefore occurs in a metabolically compromised substrate where standard assumptions of durable fixation and predictable remodeling are weakened. When glenoid bone loss is present, augmented polyethylene/metal-backed glenoid components or reverse shoulder arthroplasty baseplates are commonly considered; however, these constructs depend on reliable glenoid purchase that uremic bone may not provide. From a mechanics perspective, rigid implants seated on osteopenic cancellous glenoid bone introduce an abrupt modulus gradient—a stiffness cliff—that concentrates cyclic stresses at the interface. We therefore pursued an alternative biological impedance-matching strategy: in-situ reconstruction using the resected humeral head as a structural autograft to resurface the glenoid. By preserving a bone-on-bone interface, the procedure aims to restore joint containment and reset the glenohumeral system's load-transfer pathway through biological union rather than through a high-mismatch implant-bone boundary.

Case presentation

A middle-aged dialysis patient with long-standing CKD-MBD presented with disabling shoulder pain, stiffness, and functional loss. Radiographs and CT revealed humeral-head collapse with degenerative glenoid bone loss and osteophytes. After multidisciplinary discussion addressing dialysis vintage, secondary hyperparathyroidism, and malnutrition-inflammation complex, we elected hemi-shoulder arthroplasty with autologous glenoid resurfacing as a biological coupling strategy. Perioperative optimization followed KDIGO-aligned goals for calcium, phosphate, and parathyroid

hormone control. Intraoperatively, the humeral head was resected, sized, and contoured to match the glenoid concavity. The cancellous surface was apposed to bleeding glenoid bone and secured with two lag screws as a press-fit shell; a cemented humeral stem with a spherical head completed the construct. No allograft or metal augment was required.

Technical pearls

1. Prepare the glenoid as a shallow, uniformly bleeding bed to maximize graft contact area;
2. Fashion the autograft to replicate native glenoid radius of curvature;
3. Place screws perpendicular to the glenoid face to compress graft without articular violation;
4. Verify concentric tracking and stability after humeral reconstruction. Early protected motion with deltoid activation commenced on day 1.

Postoperative course and outcomes

Pain diminished within two weeks. At three-month assessment, active forward flexion 110°, abduction 90°, external rotation 25°, and internal rotation to L5 were recorded. Radiographs demonstrated maintenance of graft position and joint congruity without lucency. The construct achieved concentric tracking through patient-specific autograft prepared during the index procedure, providing a homogenous biological interface intended to smooth stress transfer in a metabolically compromised host.

Discussion

CKD-MBD alters bone microarchitecture, material properties, and turnover, complicating both fixation and healing. Guideline-directed management targets phosphate control, individualized calcium intake, vitamin D analogs, and parathyroid hormone modulation [1], yet even with optimization the uremic skeleton remains a high-entropy host in which arthroplasty failure is often driven by interface mechanics rather than implant

design alone. In this setting, metal-backed glenoid components and even reverse baseplates may fail through an impedance mismatch: a rigid construct seated on compliant cancellous bone creates a stiffness cliff, elevating interfacial shear and producing stress singularities that promote micro-motion and early loosening. Autologous humeral-head grafting addresses the same problem by converting the interface from implant-bone to bone-bone. Because the graft shares the host's viscoelastic and remodeling characteristics, it functions as an impedance matcher that smooths load transfer and shifts stability from transient mechanical interlock to progressive biological union. Conceptually, this resonates with the principles of bony augmentation in BIO-RSA [2], but here the graft is repurposed in situ

during hemiarthroplasty to restore glenoid containment while minimizing additional foreign material in a host with limited metabolic reserve. Even if the graft eventually resorbs or reshapes, it does so gradually, avoiding the catastrophic "crash" of implant loosening. This aligns with the principle of managing complex systems by guiding them into a "Pocket of Reducibility" rather than forcing them against a stiffness gradient. As we have previously demonstrated in the context of spinal instrumentation, the interface between a rigid implant and osteopenic bone behaves as a "stiffness cliff," creating a stress singularity that predisposes to failure [3]. Here, we apply the same first-principles logic to the glenohumeral joint, visualizing this trajectory in the phase portrait of renal shoulder reconstruction (Figure 5).

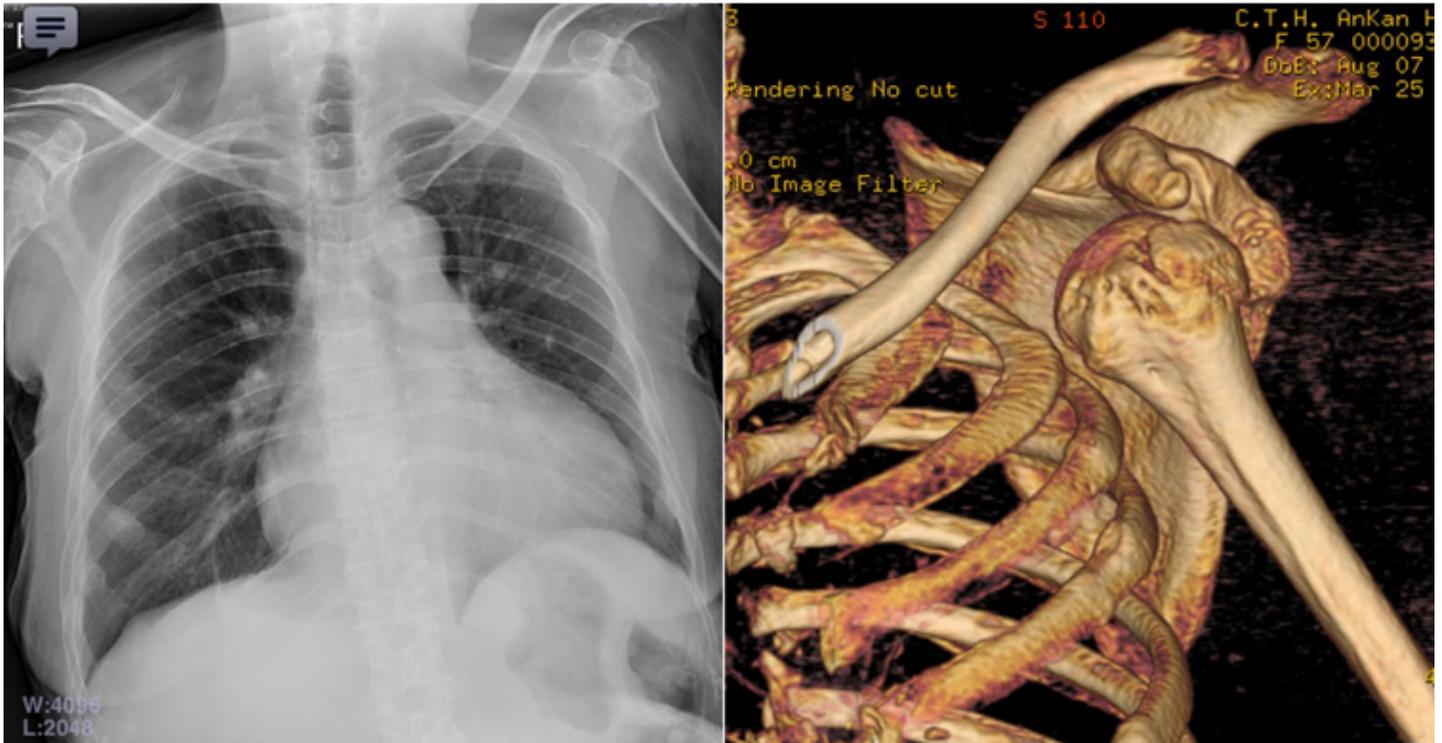


Figure 1. Preoperative imaging. AP chest/shoulder radiograph and 3D-CT showing humeral-head collapse with glenoid erosion in renal osteodystrophy.

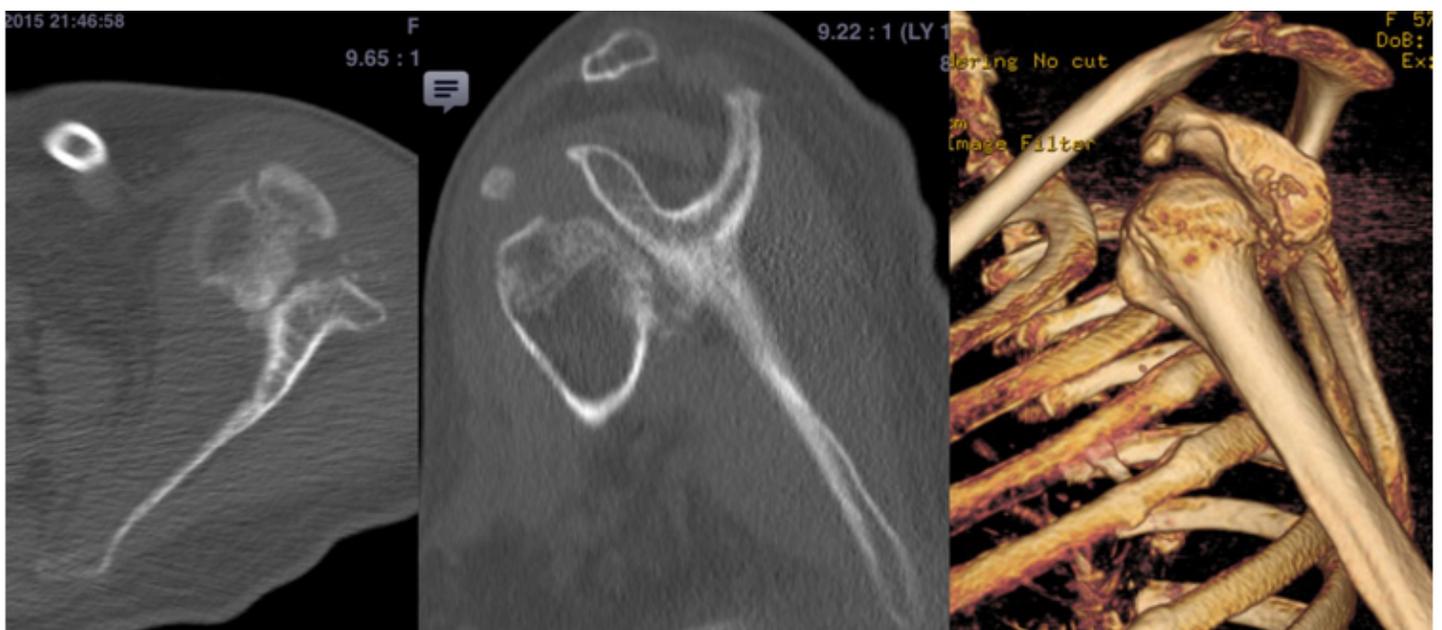


Figure 2. CT detailing cavitory glenoid loss and osteophytes (selected axial and coronal reconstructions with 3D rendering).

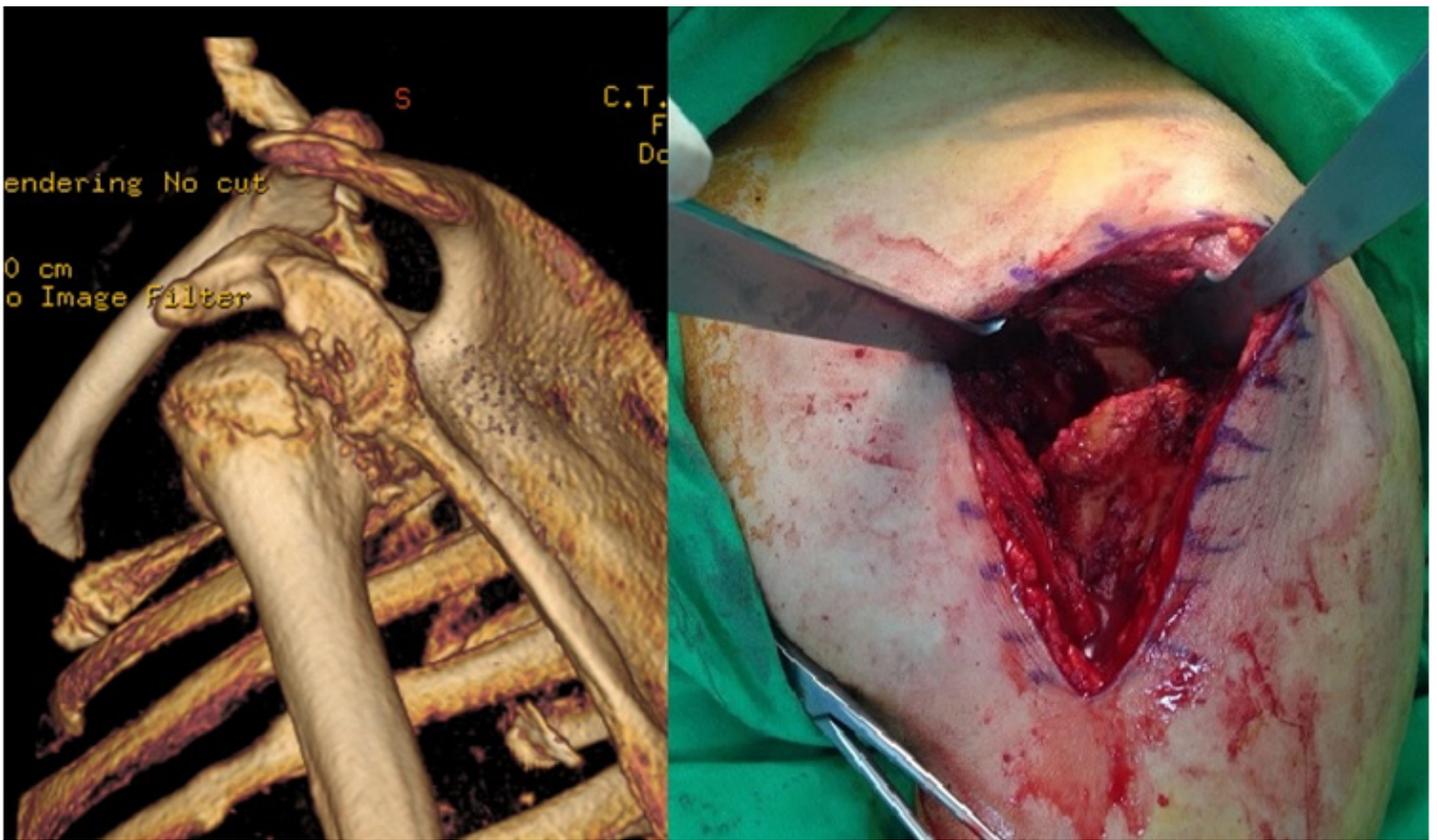


Figure 3. Intraoperative steps demonstrating the in-situ transformation of the resected humeral head into a structural autograft used as a biological interface matcher for glenoid resurfacing (3D planning view, left; graft inset onto the prepared glenoid, right).

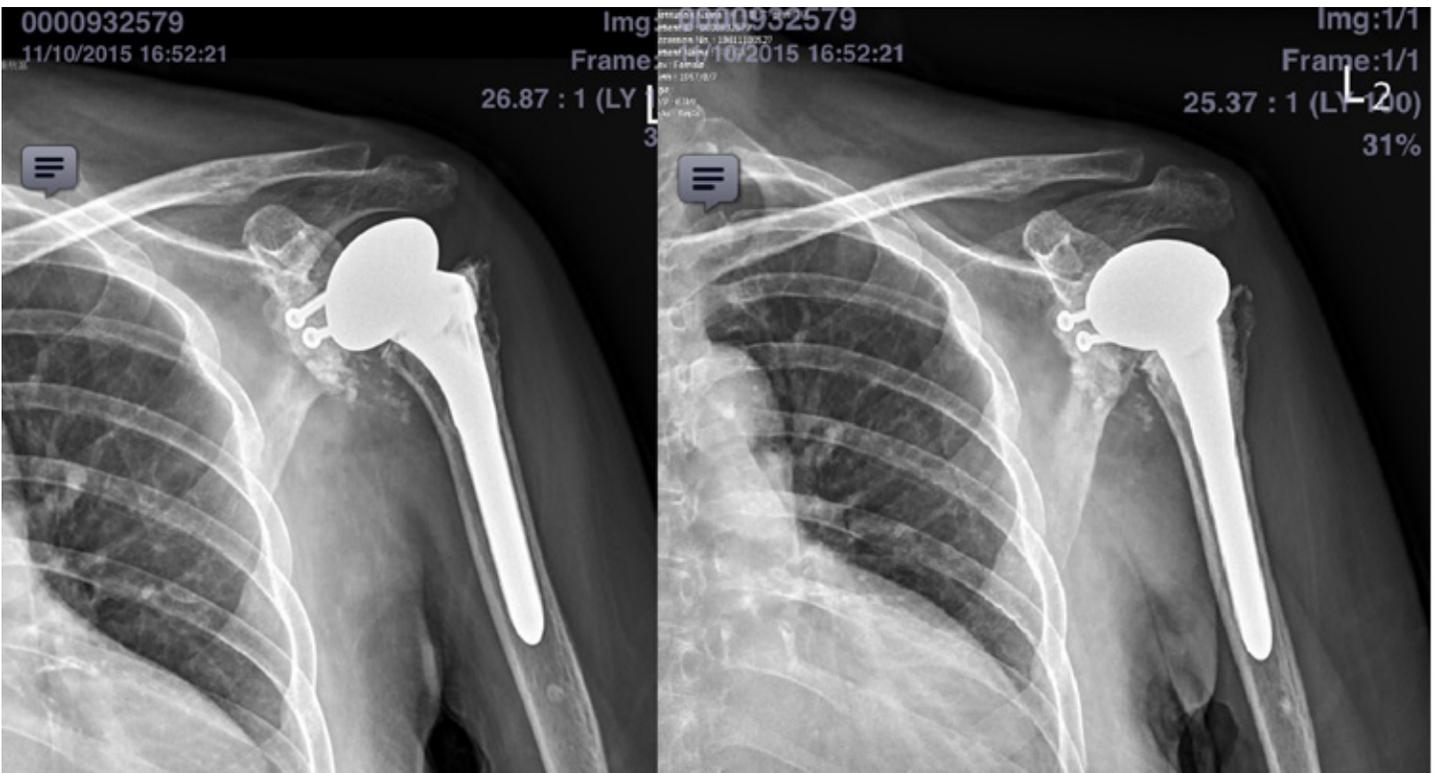


Figure 4. Postoperative radiographs demonstrating restoration of the joint fulcrum and concentric reduction via homogenous biological coupling after hemi-shoulder arthroplasty with autologous glenoid resurfacing, avoiding stress singularities associated with rigid metal fixation.

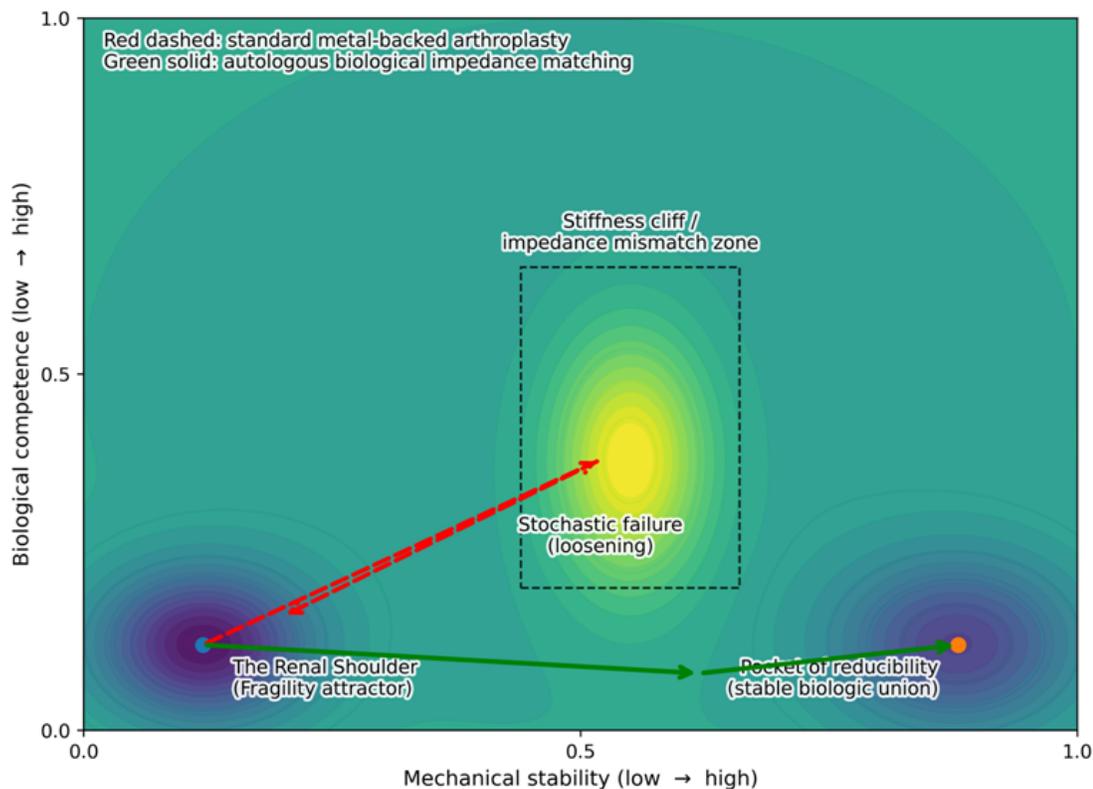


Figure 5. Conceptual phase portrait of the "Renal Shoulder" reconstruction strategies. The diagram maps the trajectory of surgical interventions within a state space defined by Mechanical Stability (x-axis) and Biological Competence (y-axis). (Red dashed path) Standard metal-backed arthroplasty attempts to force stability against a high stiffness gradient. In the metabolically compromised host, this creates an impedance mismatch, leading to a "stiffness cliff" where stress singularities cause stochastic loosening and a return to the fragility attractor. (Green solid path) The autologous biological resurfacing strategy accepts the low biological competence but optimizes impedance matching. By utilizing a structural autograft with identical viscoelastic properties, the intervention follows a "low-entropy path," bypassing the stiffness cliff and guiding the joint into a deterministic "pocket of reducibility" (stable biological union).

Ethics/Consent

Per the handling journal's guidance for de-identified case reports and institutional policy, written informed consent for publication was not required; all images and clinical descriptors have been fully anonymized to preclude identification.

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