

Preface



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Guest Editor

Neck and back disorders are pervasive medical problems in our society. These disorders are seen in every neurologist's practice and occur in every neurologist's family. It was estimated in 1997 that \$25 billion per year was spent in the United States on medical care for back pain and an additional \$50 billion was spent for disability and lost productivity. It has been stated that low back pain is the second leading cause for medical visits. Patients go to chiropractors, family practitioners, internists, rheumatologists, physiatrists, orthopedists, neurosurgeons, and neurologists for their spine disorders.

Over the last 10 to 20 years, clinical, neuroradiologic, and surgical and nonsurgical interventional approaches to the diagnosis and treatment of spine conditions have proliferated, and thousands of articles have been published on these subjects. The number of careful scientific studies on these topics remains relatively small, however. For the practitioner, it is difficult to find the "best" strategy for a given patient, because so many experts recommend so many different approaches. In addition to the traditional medical treatments, alternative approaches have entered the mainstream. Complementary treatments, such as spinal manipulation, massage therapy, and acupuncture, are reimbursed by several medical insurance providers. However, the little scientific scrutiny that has been applied to assessing their effectiveness has not been widely publicized to the professions or lay public.

The purpose of this issue is to review the current understanding and practice of the neurologic care of spinal disorders. Wherever possible, systematic reviews and controlled studies have been highlighted to aid in the analysis of

the effectiveness of current diagnostic and therapeutic approaches. Covered topics include basic anatomic concepts, elements of an appropriate history and examination, diagnostic modalities, such as imaging and electromyography, specific treatment approaches, and chronic pain assessment and management.

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