Author's response to reviews

Title: A Diagnosis-Based Clinical Decision Rule for Patients with Spinal Pain. Part 1: Theoretical Model

Authors:
Donald R Murphy (rispine@aol.com)
Eric L Hurwitz (ehurwitz@hawaii.edu)

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We are resubmitting the first part of a 2-part paper presenting a novel approach to the diagnosis and management of patients with spinal pain, as well as a novel approach to research in spinal pain. You may recall that we had submitted these papers and you recommended that the first part would be appropriate for consideration as a hypothesis paper (although you recommended reducing the word count, which we have done). You recommended that the second part was not appropriate for consideration in the form originally submitted, but suggested that if it were a systematic review, rather than a narrative review, it may be appropriate for consideration. We are in the process of performing a formalized search process to change that paper to a systematic review and will submit it at a later time.

The approach presented in this hypothesis paper attempts to respond to the dire need for improved diagnosis and management of the common and disabling problem of spinal pain. It also attempts to respond to the dire need for research in the field of spinal pain that is useful in answering the plethora of questions clinicians have with regard to the best ways to understand and help their spinal pain patients. Our purpose is to present the conceptual model of the approach, starting with the diagnostic strategy and following with a management strategy that can be derived from the diagnostic process.

Various publications can be found that discuss research related to specific aspects of the diagnosis and management of patients with spinal pain. However, we have not found anywhere in the literature a culmination of this research, and a presentation of the data in a cohesive form that allows for the generation of hypotheses regarding an integrated model of diagnosis. This paper attempts to accomplish this. We feel that this approach will ultimately make a significant impact on the clinical management of patients with spinal pain. However, this first step of presenting the approach as well as discussing what needs to be done to further investigate it is essential. We would like the paper to be considered a hypothesis, from which further debate, discussion and investigation, including the subsequent systematic review of the literature, will develop.

Thank you for your consideration.

Donald R. Murphy, DC
Eric L. Hurwitz, DC, PhD