

Summary of the November, 2012 Program

Back Pain: Zero In On The Problem

Speaker: Troy D. Lowell, MD

The subject of our November program was Back Pain: Zero In On The Problem,” presented by Troy D. Lowell, MD, of Ocala Orthopedic Care.

Dr. Lowell explained the origins of back pain – back versus hip – and further explained the makeup of the spine and its vertebrae, joints and discs, flexibility and the sciatica (“tailbone” in layman’s language). He went on to say that 90% of what is called “back pain” usually resolves itself spontaneously in four to twelve weeks.

The doctor’s “Six (And-A-Half) Step” program includes (1) rest with a change in daily activity, (2) medication when thought to improve comfort, (3) physical therapy, (4) braces, (5) injections, (6) surgery and (here’s where the “half” comes in) alternative choices of acupuncture, chiropractor, etc.

Our speaker described pain as acute versus chronic – sudden versus gradual – trauma versus no trauma – sciatic versus sciatic/central. The physician’s examination and the patient’s answers to the physician’s questions are key to determining the steps taken initially.

An X-ray can eliminate cancer as a cause of pain, but an immediate MRI is not necessarily essential. Dr. Lowell cautions that all scans are extremely sensitive; he noted that bulging discs can be revealed in most results since the test is done when a person is lying down. Bulging discs are also problematic as we age, but even then 75 percent of herniated discs do not require surgery.

There are a variety of options available for evaluation by the doctor and the patient after the cause of the back pain is determined, but it should also be noted that there are also a number of procedures promoted by organizations which are not medically substantiated.

Dr. Lowell’s premise of not rushing to judgment is very important to polio survivors. (Did you know that 90% of back surgeries are done to treat pain which is a subjective complain? Ask yourself – can I live with the pain???) Age-related pain issues such as the natural process of tissue becoming drier, narrowing of the spinal canal, arthritis, etc. will NOT be alleviated by surgery.

As you might expect, many questions came from the floor during the question and answer segment of the program following Dr. Lowell’s presentation. He made it a point to answer every single question.

by Joyce Snyder for the North Central Florida Post-Polio Support Group.