

# Spinecare Introduction

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It is critical that you play an active role in your surgical care. If you have been told that you are a good surgical candidate you must begin searching for a good spine physician, more specifically a good spine surgeon. This process can be tedious and frustrating. If you have to go to many doctors it can also be quite expensive. The following guidelines will help you choose a good spine surgeon and help improve your surgical outcome.

#### Obtaining More Information

You can obtain information about a spine surgeon from a variety of sources that include:

**Your attending family or primary care physician:** He or she should be able to provide you with two or three referrals and with an opinion as to how the different surgeons might approach your condition. Your attending physician can also let you know what each of the surgeon bedside manner is like. They should inform you about each surgeon's willingness to review available non-surgical and surgical therapeutic options and whether they will take time to educate you.

**Family members or friends:** Personal family members or friends may be able to provide a recommendation for a physician or surgeon who has provided them with care associated with a favorable outcome

**Physician referral service:** Many local hospital and university settings provide a physician referral service. They generally only provide names of physicians who are on staff or have a strong affiliation with their facilities.

**Online healthcare Directory:** There are numerous online physician directories. The benefit of an online directory is that you can quickly research a large geographic area. You can compare physicians' background and experience. Many online directories allow for a search by specialty. There are also specialty directories limited to physicians who meet designated criteria. The other advantage of doing a search on a directory is that many offer a profile or background page about the doctor. They may also provide a link directly to their practice website. This gives you an opportunity to review the services they offer. Some physicians will have a biography attached to their profile page and/or website. A physician's practice website will provide you with an idea of their commitment to education. The website can offer various types of educational services.

**National Organizations:** For information about a medical specialty and the various approaches they might use to care for the spine go to a national organization. Professional organizations will have a highly visible presence on the World Wide Web (Internet). Many national organizations have a directory or provide for the user to do a search for a list of specialists in your area. For example the American Academy of Spine Physicians (AASP) has a link to the National Directory of Spine Physicians

providing a list of members who are either a licensed chiropractic physician or neurosurgeon. Organizational websites will generally have news about leading-edge approaches to care. This can provide the user with a unique opportunity to find facilities and/or physicians who are renowned in various areas of spine care and spine surgery.

### **Picking the Right Surgeon**

After obtaining a list of surgeons, the next step is choosing the right one. There are a number of things you should take into account when making this decision. You should consider the surgeon's credentials, their experience, their specialty and your option after meeting with them. You should also consider their standing with state and professional organizations. You should consider the surgical procedure they recommend. You want to choose a surgeon that will take an interest in post-operative care.

**The Approach:** The ideal spine surgeon will make you feel very comfortable and will work to establish and maintain a good rapport. The ideal surgeon will also not be threatened by your questions and will strive to educate you about your condition and any procedure being recommended. They should be resourceful and able to provide you with printed materials or direct you to an online source of information about the spine, your condition and the spine care approaches being recommended. The right surgeon will also take considerable time to discuss different treatment options with you. This should include both surgical and non-surgical options. The review of treatment should not be limited to medical approaches but should also include conservative alternatives such as chiropractic care when appropriate. Make sure that your surgeon is considering your general well being and is not only focused on your spine.

**The Specialty:** Always consider the background and training of the spine surgeon you select. Many neurosurgeons and orthopedic surgeons have a general practice through which they perform a wide variety of different procedures on different parts of the body. For example an orthopedic surgeon may spend most of his or her time doing surgery on the extremities and perform occasional spine surgery.