

Letter to the Editor

Methods of treatment for back pain and sciatica.

Sir,

Back pain is more common among males than females and is the most common cause of disability. Seventy to 80% of the world population below the age of 45 suffer from spinal pain during their life.^{1,2} The nerve block treatment together with infiltration give good results, but is not widely used. In America among a sample of 1000 patients, 1400 days sick leave were registered annually, thus representing a considerable burden on the national economy.

During the past ten years (1988-1998) 507 patients have reported to Douma Specialized Hospital, Damascus, Syria who were suffering from spinal back pain from between 1 month to 5 years. They were referred to us from clinics such as neurosurgery, orthopaedy surgery or neurology. They were asked to undergo the following tests: radiography for cervical or lumbar vertebral column, magnetic resonance imaging (MRI) and computerized tomography (CT) of cervical or lumbar vertebral column. Patients were selected if examination showed cervical and lumbar disc narrowness of the interspace of the vertebral column with inter-spinal anatomical lordosis and scoliosis or prolapses of the inter-spinal discs³ with or without osteophytes. The patients were classified in the following three groups: cervical disc, thorical disc and lumbar disc (Table 1).

The nerve blocking treatment is based on the use of lignocaine 1% (2-15ml) with depomedrol 40mg. If after seven days no improvement has been recorded then an injection of 5ml lignocaine 1% with depomedrol 80mg with infiltration above the defective zone be given. Over a period of one month treatment the patient should be kept under observation and progress should be recorded. Side effects were disturbance of sensation, paresis of the leg on which nerve block was applied, dizziness and vertigo. All these complications were transient and disappeared within 1-2 days.

Table 1 - All patients.

	Male	Female	Total
Cervical Disc	103	100	203
Thorical Disc	5	2	7
Lumbar Disc	250	47	297
	358	149	507

Amongst the 507 patients, 149 were female (29%) and 358 were male (71%). The average age of the patients was 32.5 years. Patients were found to suffer from the following symptoms, pain, paresthesia without atrophy in muscles of the limbs. Using the PAIN scale criteria for assessment of patient's response to treatment, we found that cervical disc treatment was successful in 95% while the other disc treatment was 85% successful.

In conclusion, back pain is more common among males. Nerve block and infiltration gives good results and we suggest that this treatment be recommended to be applied because it is quick, simple, safe and free from any serious complications.

Mohammad Z. Zawahri
*Neurology Department
Hospital Douma
PO Box 1706
Damascus
Syria*

References

1. Douglas S. Sciatic pain and piriformis syndrome. *J Nurse Pract* 1997; 5: 166-168.
2. Zwart JA, Garseth M, Sonnewald U, Dale LG, White LR, Aasly J et al. Nuclear magnetic resonance spectroscopy of cerebral spinal fluid from patients with low back pain and sciatica. *J Spine* 1997; 22: 2112-6.