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NASS Assists and Responds to ProPublica’s “Surgeon Scorecard”
Medical Society Offers Hope and Resources for Patients and Spine Care Professionals

Burr Ridge, IL—The North American Spine Society (NASS) applauds efforts of ProPublica journalists to bring transparency to health care, from its ongoing “Dollars to Doctors” feature to the newly-released “Surgeon Scorecard” database that offers complication rates for more than 17,000 surgeons throughout the United States.

NASS leadership worked with ProPublica reporters to identify appropriate elective spine procedures, define “complications” and offer ongoing risk-adjustment guidance and research for the “Surgeon Scorecard” project.

“When ProPublica approached NASS for assistance on this effort in 2013, there was no doubt that we would actively participate and offer what assistance we could,” said Charles Mick, MD, an orthopedic surgeon and former NASS president. “It is our hope that the data released will help patients ask questions and make informed choices when surgery is required and help physicians and hospitals to identify and offer the highest quality care to patients.”

Dr. Mick counseled that while this database offers helpful information, patients should consider it as only one piece of data in their health care decision-making. They should be consulting with their primary care physician, spine specialists and the people who know them well—their family and friends—to make important health care decisions. To help patients get information on spine care conditions and treatments, NASS offers www.KnowYourBack.org, a free web site that provides credible, trustworthy, evidence-based information to the public, without any advertiser or promotional influence.

Despite the variability of complication rates even within the same medical facility, Dr. Mick still finds reason for significant hope. “While there are some very troubling examples of surgical complications, it is gratifying that the authors found the aggregate rates of harm were quite low nationwide,” said Charles Mick, MD. “This data underscores the importance of health care professionals taking advantage of professional development and support offered by their hospitals, government agencies and specialty medical societies such as NASS.”

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To help spine specialists provide the very best in care, NASS offers many services and products, including:

- Evidence-based training and guidelines regarding the diagnosis and treatment of spinal disorders.
- Appropriate Use Criteria (AUC) to define reasonable care of spinal disorders to assist in the delivery of optimum, efficacious treatment and functional recovery.
- Continuing medical education and networking opportunities, including online and in-person courses and an annual international meeting.
- Education, comment and representation in the performance measurement arena.
- The Sign, Mark & X-ray (SMaX) campaign to help prevent wrong-site spinal surgery.
- SpineConnect, an online forum that offers spine care professionals the opportunity to post cases and images, share knowledge and ask questions of thousands of spine experts from around the world.
- A pilot, diagnosis-based outcomes data registry that will use a web-based platform to collect and analyze spine care treatment and outcomes data.
- Spine Safety Alerts which are sent to the spine care community to make them aware of recalls and drug and device warnings.
- The Spine Journal, an international and multi-disciplinary journal that publishes original, peer-reviewed articles on research and treatment related to the spine and spine care, including basic science and clinical investigations.
- SpineLine, a bimonthly magazine that provides readers with the very latest in clinical spine care.

The North American Spine Society is a multidisciplinary medical organization dedicated to fostering the highest quality, evidenced-based and ethical spine care by promoting education, research and advocacy. NASS is comprised of more than 8,000 members from several disciplines, including orthopedic surgery, neurosurgery, physiatry, neurology, radiology, anesthesiology, research and physical therapy.

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