

American Back Society Focuses on the "Industrial Back"

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Having been invited to succeed Dr. Robert Anderson in writing a quarterly column for Dynamic Chiropractic about the American Back Society (ABS), I thought it might be appropriate to first introduce the society and then myself. The ABS describes itself as follows in these remarks taken from its quarterly newsletter:

"The American Back Society was founded in Oakland, California in 1982. ABS was created to furnish a forum for health care professionals and scientists interested in relieving pain and diminishing impairment through proper diagnosis and treatment of patients suffering from spinal pathology. Through periodic meetings, the American Back Society invites exchanges of ideas, constructive criticism, and educational opportunities to all disciplines involved. The goals of these interchanges are to assure improved expertise, greater interchange of professional contributions, and ensure ethical practice and economic benefits for the patient and society.

"ABS is composed of orthopedic and neurological surgeons, osteopathic physicians, physical therapists, chiropractors, neurologists, psychiatrists, radiologists, rheumatologist, internists, occupational therapists, occupational medicine specialists, nurses, and other health care professionals. There are currently 13 committees composed of these specialties, whose aims are to further the quality of education and knowledge of the ABS membership and health care community, with the ultimate goal of improving back care.

"Fellows and members are encouraged to become active in the ABS and to participate in committee activities, attend educational symposia, and contribute articles for publication in our quarterly ABS Newsletter. Membership in the ABS offers you an opportunity to participate in educational symposia, committee activities, and business meetings. Membership also entitles you to a substantial discount for our educational symposia in addition to a complementary subscription to our quarterly ABS Newsletter."

The ABS presents two major symposia a year: a fall meeting held in San Francisco, and a spring meeting in an Eastern city, the next meeting to convene in May in Buffalo, New York. Both of these next two meetings will emphasize industrial themes, featuring a new format that will consist mostly of intensive workshops that deal with a wide variety of industrial issues.

Although I can't usually make it to the spring symposia, fortunately I have been able to attend every San Francisco meeting the past several years. These meetings have been very important to me, both as a chiropractic practitioner in Oakland, California, and as an educator; I teach three courses at Palmer College of Chiropractic-West. It's not merely that I learn a great deal from the presentations, or that I have the pleasure of seeing old friends and making new ones. All of that's true, but what additionally happens for me at ABS meetings is that I am reminded in a very profound way that the patient should and can be the driving force, the central concern of clinicians. This should go without saying, but all too often the more limited and sometimes pedestrian needs of health care professionals -- income, distinction, professional recognition, etc. --

seem to come first. At the ABS symposia, I leave the meeting with a sense of belonging to a very large and talented community, united not by titular distinctions, but rather by shared purpose.

Chiropractors, medical doctors, physiotherapists, nurses, and other allied health professionals may arrive at the meeting seeing themselves somewhat as separate practitioners, but leave with a renewed sense of kindred commitment to a single task: better patient care. The American Back Society takes no political positions, accepting under its umbrella any health professional who would add to the science and practice of spinal care. With the American health care industry under increased scrutiny and management, with more jockeying about than usual in order to be well-situated if and when a national health care system comes in, it may become increasingly difficult to keep the central focus on clinical care. For several months after each meeting I remain less perturbed by the highly politicized climate, exacerbated by the current economic decline, in which health care providers must function these days.

ABS meetings keep me focused. I am always gratified by the lack of concern for distinctions based on rank or degree, motivated by the cross-disciplinary respect for achievement, and inspired by the example of the leading figures among the related fields freely sharing their individual and professional limitations in a democratic open forum. This point is driven home during the Grand Rounds presentation, which, for many, is the highlight of the scientific portion of the proceedings. Although it would certainly be possible to set up Grand Rounds so that superstar doctors would be cast in the role of throwing brilliant diagnoses at obscure conditions, in fact, the ABS generally has the participants confronted with relatively common conditions in which they often wind up agreeing on the value of interdisciplinary care.

The San Francisco meeting, titled the "Industrial Back," marks the 10th anniversary of the American Back Society. It will run from Wednesday, December 9, through Saturday, December 12, 1992. This symposium differs from previous meetings in that there is a much greater emphasis on workshop presentations, the logistics of which allow registrants considerable opportunity for interaction with the course instructors. These workshops cover a vast array of clinical topics presented by medical doctors, osteopaths, chiropractors, physical therapists, and attorneys. All ABS faculty are recognized authorities in their fields.

The Wednesday opening session features presymposium special events free of charge to symposium registrants. These include: an on-site visit to the San Francisco Spine Center; the McKenzie protocol; the myofascial release approach; aquatic rehabilitation; spinal anatomy; pain management; communication in injured worker situations; and exercise physiology. The Thursday morning scientific program, moderated by Dr. Rene Cailliet, encompasses a myriad of injured worker issues, from back pain to malingering, from the Americans with Disabilities Act, to salvage surgery in workers' compensation cases. The Friday morning scientific program, moderated by Dr. Edward H. Simmons, focuses on pain issues and then leads into Grand Rounds. It is a relatively abbreviated session, as compared with previous symposia, in order to accommodate this year's greatly expanded workshop program.

The workshops follow the Thursday and Friday scientific presentations, and continue into Saturday morning. Each afternoon workshop is presented twice, allowing registrants two opportunities to attend. This still leaves registrants with some difficult choices to make, but as always audiocassettes will be made available for missed scientific and workshop sessions.

For further information, you may mail, phone, or fax: American Back Society, 2647 E. 14th St., Suite 401, Oakland, California 94601, Tel (510) 536-9929, Fax (510) 536-1812.

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