

ASHBY ADVISOR

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The rate of high risk complex back surgeries has increased 15 fold in the five year period 2002 – 2007.

The study looked at people over the age of 65 diagnosed with lumbar stenosis (a narrowing of the spinal canal or openings).

So what reasons are given for the increase?

Dr. Michael Schafer, Chicago orthopedist says it because of new technology and tools that allow more people to be eligible for surgery. Plus people are living longer and expectations of better lifestyle may drive it. It may reduce the need for future surgery.

Dr. Richard Deyo and Dr. Eugene Carragee on the other hand say there is no evidence to support this huge increase in the procedures. They point to well funded ad campaigns and promos @professional meetings. Plus the reimbursement is up to ten times greater for the doctor and three times greater for the hospital. And they warn that complications are much higher with these procedures.

So in another 5-10 years we'll see how this turns out. You can't do double-blinded studies on this one. Long term outcomes will need to be studied to see if the added risk and cost is justified.

Oh the differences in cost->simple decompression/fusion \$25,000 - \$35,000 versus \$80,000 - \$90,000, for complex surgery.

This explains why you see double digit increases in healthcare cost year over year.

What did you say? Greater Omega 3 and fish consumption is associated with a reduction in age related hearing loss according to the America Journal of Clinical Nutrition (June 9th, 2010).

With back to school don't forget to get the kids ready for sports with a good spinal function check up. Let's find any imbalances and weakness now before they lead to repetitive injury. Let's try to save those ankles, knees, hips and shoulders.

Quote of the email: Experience is a different teacher,
giving you the test first and the lesson after."