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Steering Them Away from Surgery: 4 Scalpel-Free (and Injection-Free) Ways To Treat Your Back Pain Patients

Spine Surgeon Kamshad Raiszadeh believes that spine operations are greatly over-utilized. Below, he explains why surgery usually isn't the best option for back pain sufferers, and urges physicians to educate patients on natural healing techniques instead.

San Diego, CA (September 2016)—America is in the throes of a back pain epidemic. Primary care physicians, you know this better than anyone. These patients can be time consuming, and it is often very difficult to guide them in the direction you know would be best for them. If you're like many doctors, you may send back pain patients to a pain management physician or a surgeon, *especially* when they're practically begging for a referral. But according to spine surgeon Kamshad Raiszadeh, MD, it's best to steer patients away from intervention—especially surgery—whenever possible, and to educate them on more effective, natural pain relief remedies instead.

“In most cases, spine surgery is not warranted,” asserts Dr. Raiszadeh, author of the new book *Take Back Control: A Surgeon's Guide to Healing Your Spine Without Medications or Surgery* (OptiFit Publishers, 2016, ISBN: 978-0-9975918-0-4, \$24.95). “Overall, patients fare much better when they allow their spines to heal through nonsurgical approaches—not to mention the fact that surgery is costly and often does not even cure chronic back pain.”

Dr. Raiszadeh, who is also the founder of SpineZone, an integrated medical fitness program based in San Diego, says primary care physicians are uniquely positioned to help patients navigate the healthcare system with an eye toward safer, more natural alternatives to surgery. Through his decade-long experience with non-operative care, Dr. Raiszadeh has proven the benefit of factual messaging and addressing the fears of this chronic neck and back population. Keep reading for some tips to help you learn how to counsel your patients on a better approach to treating their chronic back pain.

Make sure your patients know the truth about their back pain. Many patients (wrongly) focus on MRI abnormalities and believe that surgery is the only permanent fix for back pain and herniated discs. This is especially true at a time when overly optimistic fads like “minimally invasive laser surgery” are touted on every street corner. As a primary care doctor, it is up to you to stop this myth in its tracks.

“Patients should never assume that their pain is permanent,” insists Dr. Raiszadeh. “More than 70% of disc herniations improve within three months, and 90 % improve within six months without surgery. Further, disc generation occurs in almost 40% of 20 year-olds and in almost 100% of 80 year-olds without causing *any* pain whatsoever.”

Refocus your healing philosophy on natural treatment. Dr. Raiszadeh is a big believer in personal empowerment, lifestyle change, and simple daily habits that promote wellness. For most back patients, this involves a “slow medicine” approach that emphasizes core strengthening, flexibility, and postural awareness. This approach, he says, often heals back pain far more effectively than injections or addictive opioids—especially when the changes are made in conjunction with medically supervised exercise. He wants physicians to spend more time emphasizing the “live healthy” message.

“I know that physicians are pressed for time and often must resort to writing prescriptions,” he says. “It’s tough. But we need to find ways to get patients thinking ‘prevention’ before ‘pills.’ We have this incredible opportunity to help inspire real change in our patients’ lives. Well-chosen words from a doctor can be a powerful force.”

Align with other like-minded, non-operative practitioners in your area. Find other physicians, physical therapists, chiropractors, and pain management specialists in your region who are able to work together to create a cohesive treatment plan for the patient. A system of collaborative care, with the patient and his or her unique needs at the center, can yield great clinical outcomes for the patient.

“Physicians can identify and work with with pain management physicians who limit narcotic medication and injections to only the more severe cases to avoid patient dependence,” says Dr. Raiszadeh. “You can work with physical therapists who, instead of passive modalities like ice, heat, and massage, focus mostly on functional exercises to kick-start the strengthening, flexibility, and postural education that lead to natural recovery.”

“Of course, there are group exercise classes in most regions that can foster a base of increased activity for back pain patients,” he adds. “Finally, a well-reasoned, prescription home exercise program can yield therapeutic gains that transcend progress the patient could achieve on their own at the gym.”

Find a surgeon you trust for referrals. Sometimes, of course, you will have to refer patients to a surgeon. Unless you are certain that the patient needs surgery, what you don’t want is to do is send them to one who believes that “a chance to cut is *always* a chance to cure.” It’s important to refer patients to conservative, compassionate surgeons who will help ensure that all other treatments have been explored before proceeding with surgeries that may not be worth the risks.

“Get to know many surgeons and ask questions to get a sense of their philosophies,” urges Dr. Raiszadeh. “Find out how many patients they see a day, how many cases they perform a year, who they work with for non-operative treatment, and what their indications are for surgery. This information will help you determine whether they will encourage patients who may not need surgery to hold off on and try some natural remedies first before going under the knife.”

Never forget: as a patient’s first point of contact, primary care doctors are in a powerful position to correct the misconceptions surrounding spine health and treatment options.

“Our bodies know how to heal themselves, but many patients don’t realize it,” notes Dr. Raiszadeh. “The cultural message is ‘have surgery’ or ‘take a pill.’ It’s up to all healthcare professionals to counteract that. By promoting natural healing methods, we not only help alleviate the back pain, we serve as a catalyst to help the patient change his or her entire life for the better.

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About the Author:

Kamshad Raiszadeh, MD, is the author of *Take Back Control: A Surgeon’s Guide to Healing Your Spine Without Medications or Surgery*. He has an unusual perspective for a spine surgeon. Early in his career, he realized that for most chronic back and neck pain patients, surgery is *not* the best solution. He and his team set about designing, developing, and perfecting a program to prevent unnecessary procedures and medications. Infused with an emphasis on strengthening, education, and self-empowerment, SpineZone has helped close to 7,000 patients enjoy full and lasting recoveries.

For more information, visit www.takebackcontrol.com, or email info@takebackcontrol.com.

About the Book:

Take Back Control: A Surgeon’s Guide to Healing Your Spine Without Medications or Surgery (OptiFit Publishers, 2016, ISBN: 978-0-9975918-0-4, \$24.95) is available at bookstores nationwide and from major online booksellers.