Therapies for Spinal Cord Injury: On the Cutting Edge of Clinical Translation

CHARLOTTESVILLE, Va. (Aug. 31, 2012) — The Journal of Neurosurgery (JNS) Publishing Group is proud to announce publication of the North American Clinical Trials Network (NACTN)/AOSpine North America (AOSNA) Focus Issue on Spinal Cord Injury, a supplement to the September issue of the Journal of Neurosurgery: Spine. Sponsored by AOSpine North America, the supplement is available in print and online, with the online version available free to the public at http://thejns.org/toc/spisup/17/1.

The focus of this special supplement — which was spearheaded by Michael Fehlings, MD, PhD, FAANS, Professor of Neurosurgery at the University of Toronto and Medical Director of the Krembil Neuroscience Centre at the Toronto Western Hospital — is the development of cutting-edge translational research in the treatment of spinal cord injury (SCI). SCI is an often-devastating injury that affects 2.5 million people worldwide, many of whom are first faced with it in early adulthood. The topic is addressed in a variety of forms in 17 articles and several editorials.

Many of the studies presented in the supplement for the treatment of SCI were conducted by members of the NACTN, a consortium of 10 neurosurgery departments supplemented by a data management center and a pharmacological center. The principal investigator for the NACTN is Robert Grossman, MD, FAANS, Chairman of the Department of Neurosurgery at The Methodist Hospital in Houston. Funded by the Christopher and Dana Reeve Foundation and the U.S. Department of Defense, the NACTN was established to move molecular- and cell-based discoveries in the protection and regeneration of neuronal pathways from the laboratory to the clinical setting.

The supplement brings together papers focused on a variety of subjects related to identifying and evaluating different types of SCI, as well as developing therapeutic strategies for dealing with the disabilities that attend the injury. Graded assessments used to define the scope and extent of injury are presented and reviewed. Clinical and imaging predictors of neurological and functional outcomes, complications, and survival after SCI are identified and assessed. Original clinical studies and review articles on current and potential drug-based therapies are presented. Issues surrounding quality of life in patients with SCI are addressed. The cost-effectiveness of surgery in injured patients is examined and validated. Finally, the goals and progress of the NACTN in the transition of therapeutic strategies from preclinical to clinical settings are described.

Some interesting papers include the following:

- “Clinical prediction model for acute inpatient complications after traumatic cervical spinal cord injury: a subanalysis from the Surgical Timing in Acute Spinal Cord Injury Study” by Jefferson Wilson, MD, and colleagues. Although most reports focus on complications occurring during the chronic stages of SCI, these authors set out to create a model to predict the development of acute complications based on clinical variables present at initial hospitalization. The authors found that as older patients aged, high-energy injury mechanism, more severe neurological injury, comorbid illness, and lack of steroid medication were consistent with a greater chance of developing complications during the acute stage of SCI.
- “Riluzole for the treatment of acute traumatic spinal cord injury: rationale for and design of the NACTN Phase I clinical trial” by Michael Fehlings, MD, PhD, FAANS, et al. As the title indicates, this paper focuses on riluzole, a benzothiazole drug that conveys neuroprotection by blocking sodium channels and mitigating glutamatergic
toxicity. The authors review preclinical and clinical findings on the use of riluzole, describe the Phase I trial, and suggest possible future investigations.

- “Is surgery for cervical spondylotic myelopathy cost-effective? A cost-utility analysis based on data from the AOSpine North America prospective CSM study” by Michael Fehlings, MD, PhD, FAANS, et al. In this paper, the authors examine the cost-effectiveness of this surgery by looking at cost as it relates to the patient’s gain in quality-adjusted life years. They found an acceptable cost-utility ratio.

- “Translational potential of preclinical trials of neuroprotection through pharmacotherapy for spinal cord injury,” by Charles Tator, MD, PhD, MA, FAANS, and others. The focus of this article is on major deficiencies in the movement of pharmacological agents with the potential for providing neuroprotection to the injured spinal cord from preclinical discovery to testing of drug safety and efficacy in the clinical setting. In a detailed study, the authors thoroughly review reports of preclinical testing of glyburide, magnesium sulfate, minocycline, nimodipine and riluzole, and recommend a strategy for creating a new scoring system that could be used to evaluate preclinical results and determine the translational readiness of neuroprotective pharmacological agents.

Spinal cord injuries arise from a two-fold assault. First, there is the initial mechanical injury to the spinal cord, which kills neural cells in the immediate vicinity of the injury, and breaks neuronal pathways between the brain and other parts of the body. Second, there is a cascade of new biochemical, cellular and vascular events that damage axons and lead to the death of previously uninjured neural cells, expanding the area of injury and leading to further neurological compromise. This special supplement to the Journal of Neurosurgery: Spine offers a unique look at current research involving the diagnosis, assessment and treatment of patients with SCI.

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For additional information, please contact:
Ms. Gillian Shasby, Director of Publications–Operations
Journal of Neurosurgery Publishing Group
One Morton Drive, Suite 200
Charlottesville, VA 22903
E-mail: gshasby@thejns.org
Telephone (434) 924-5503
Fax (434) 924-5782

The Journal of Neurosurgery: Spine is a monthly peer-reviewed journal focused on neurosurgical approaches to treatment of diseases and disorders of the spine. It contains a variety of articles, including descriptions of preclinical and clinical research as well as case reports and technical notes. The Journal of Neurosurgery: Spine is one of four monthly journals published by the JNS Publishing Group, the scholarly journal division of the American Association of Neurological Surgeons ([http://www.AANS.org](http://www.AANS.org)), an association dedicated to advancing the specialty of neurological surgery in order to promote the highest quality of patient care. The Journal of Neurosurgery: Spine appears in print and on the Internet ([http://www.thejns.org](http://www.thejns.org)).

Founded in 1931 as the Harvey Cushing Society, the American Association of Neurological Surgeons (AANS) is a scientific and educational association with nearly 8,200 members worldwide. The AANS is dedicated to advancing the specialty of neurological surgery in order to provide the highest quality of neurosurgical care to the public. All active members of the AANS are certified by the American Board of Neurological Surgery, the Royal College of Physicians and Surgeons (Neurosurgery) of Canada or the Mexican Council of Neurological Surgery, AC. Neurological surgery is the medical specialty concerned with the prevention, diagnosis, treatment and rehabilitation of disorders that affect the entire nervous system including the spinal column, spinal cord, brain and peripheral nerves. For more information, visit [www.AANS.org](http://www.AANS.org).

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