

April 16, 2014

Editor, The Wall Street Journal  
1211 Avenue of the Americas  
New York, NY 10036

Dear Editor:

In the April 15 article by Joseph Walker, "When Spine Implants Cause Paralysis, Who Is to Blame," the author raises a valid point that spinal cord stimulators should be implanted by well-trained and educated physicians on carefully selected patients. The American Association of Neurological Surgeons (AANS) and the Congress of Neurological Surgeons (CNS) recognize, and have addressed, many of the concerns raised in this article.

Organized neurosurgery is dedicated to improving the safety and effectiveness of this therapy through training, research, and education in order to promote the highest quality of patient care. Throughout the year, the AANS and CNS collaborate with our colleagues at the North American Neuromodulation Society and the companies that manufacture these devices, sponsoring courses on spinal cord stimulation to teach proper technique and complication avoidance to new and seasoned implanters.

Although we believe the incidence of spinal cord and nerve root injury is low, because it is difficult to determine the true complication rates, we are also working to derive accurate patient outcomes data through our National Neurosurgery Quality and Outcomes Database. Certainly it is unfortunate that any patient would suffer neurologic deficit after spinal cord stimulation; however we remain committed to this therapy, which is safe and effective when done by qualified surgeons. Furthermore, the risks are lower or equal to repeat surgery, and the treatment reduces chronic opioid use.

Spinal cord stimulation is an exciting therapy which not only reduces pain and improves function, but also holds promise to facilitate walking in paraplegics. America's neurosurgeons are therefore committed to ensuring that this treatment option is appropriately used to improve patients' health status and quality of life.

Sincerely,

Julie G. Pilitsis, MD, PhD, Chair  
AANS/CNS Section on Pain  
Albany, New York

Robert E. Harbaugh, MD, President  
American Association of Neurological Surgeons  
Hershey, Pennsylvania

Daniel K. Resnick, MD, President  
Congress of Neurological Surgeons  
Madison, Wisconsin

Konstantin V. Slavin, MD, President  
American Society for Stereotactic and Functional Neurosurgery  
Chicago, Illinois