

Supporting Spine Health in Manitoba

By Shelley Sargent BSC BMRPT MSc

There are many reasons why you may be experiencing spinal symptoms. Low back pain or dysfunction can result from acute injuries or develop over time from degenerative changes effecting the spine, other medical conditions, lifestyle and even psychological factors can influence spinal health. But whether you live in chronic pain or experience temporary flare-ups from time-to-time, help is available.

HSC Winnipeg's Spine Assessment Clinic was necessitated by growing wait times to see a spine surgeon in Manitoba, and by the knowledge that many of those referred for consultation do not require surgical intervention. With the prevalence of spine related disability impacting more Manitobans each year, it has become increasingly important to provide timely assessment and appropriate management options.

In the Spine Assessment Clinic, physiotherapists assume the role of a surrogate surgical assessor, reporting their findings on each patient to one of six surgeons involved with the program. This role is one in which physiotherapists excel because of their detailed knowledge of spine pathology, their skilled clinical assessments, and their familiarity with conservative management strategies.

Those that work within the Spine Assessment Clinic have received detailed mentorship on the interpretation of spinal imaging and are additionally supported with regularly scheduled rounds with the surgical team. Their primary role is to review complicated cases and to discuss unique conditions or surgical considerations with the skilled

multidisciplinary team of orthopaedic surgeons and neurosurgeons.

Since its inception in 2015, the Spine Assessment Clinic has evaluated over 5000 patients. 12.7 percent of patients examined have been referred back to the surgeon's office for consultation, with the majority of patients managed by a number of non-operative strategies such as physiotherapy and spinal injections. Over the past five years, the clinic has expanded to include two full-time physiotherapists and two administrative support team members - indicative of the impact the clinic continues to have on the spine surgery wait times in Manitoba.

Further, when surveyed, 92 percent of all patients reported a high level of satisfaction with their clinic evaluation. In addition, preliminary data on patient outcomes indicates that clinically important change is being achieved for a number of spinal populations upon completion of their recommended conservative management strategies.

The Spine Assessment Clinic is an innovative example of a physiotherapist's ability to excel in a non-traditional role, and to collaborate with other disciplines to provide an efficient service delivery model to Manitobans coping with spine related disability.

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Shelley Sargent BSC BMRPT MSc is a Clinical Service Leader at Rehab Physiotherapy HSC Winnipeg. You can find her and many other great physiotherapists at mbphysio.org.

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