THE PREDICTIVE VALUE OF VARIOUS PSYCHOLOGICAL FACTORS IN CHRONICITY OF LOW BACK PAIN

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Aim: to study the predictive value of various psychological factors in chronicity of low back pain.

PATIENTS: All participants had a radiologic diagnosis of prolapsed or protruded lumbar disc. The average patient age was 42 years, but patient ranged in age from 17 – 72years. About 60% of patients were males. Nearly half the affected disc were at the L5 – S1 level. Two thirds of the patients underwent surgery.

METHODS: The Beck Depression Inventory (BDI) was administered. The social parameters measured included social status, occupational setting, and time away from work. Patients were assessed at the time of discharge and 6 months later.

FINDINGS: Psychological variables, notably the degree of depressive mood and specific strategies for coping with pain, accounted for 38% of the variance in pain intensity at the time of discharge. Social support and social status also contributed to the early outcome. The degree of disc displacement was a key factor both at discharge and 6 months later. Scoliosis was a factor in the 6-months outcome. Strategies for coping with pain were important factors, as was social status. Whether patients had applied for early retirement at the 6 months follow-up was best predicted by depression and work- related stress.

CONCLUSION: An assessment of psychological and social status at the time patients are treated for acute lumbar back pain can help predict whether chronic symptoms and disability will ensue.