

Neurosurgeon or orthopedic spine surgeon: Which specialty does your case call for?



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When a patient has problems in the neck or lower back, it can be frightening and confusing. Finding out surgery is necessary to correct the problem can make it even more overwhelming.

The first step is just choosing the right type of doctor to go to; and then, what specific doctor is best for the problem. For instance: When does a patient need an orthopedic spine surgeon and when is a neurosurgeon needed? The right choice can mean the difference between a successful outcome or something much worse. The right surgeon doing the right procedure can help reduce or eliminate pain, improve one's quality of life and, in some cases, save lives.

According to **Dr. Daveed D. Frazier**, medical director of **New York City Spine Surgery PLLC**, with offices in New Jersey and New York, in most cases, the patient will find that an orthopedic spine surgeon and a neurosurgeon will do the same procedure for any particular problem and no choice will be necessary. "In my training, I worked with both orthopedic and neurosurgeons and I currently train both at courses I give. Therefore, the answer is that you just want to find the best spine surgeon you can," says Dr. Frazier. "After your research, go with the doctor in whom you have the most confidence.

"Approximately 90 percent of surgeries done by an orthopedic spine surgeon and a neurosurgeon are the same. The difference between spine surgeons is more commonly associated with where they've trained and what their experience is with different surgeries," Dr. Frazier notes. "However, depending on the practice, in 10 percent of the cases, a distinction will have to be made.

"For instance, if you have a tumor inside the spinal cord, you'll need a neurosurgeon or a neurosurgeon working with an orthopedic spine surgeon," Dr. Frazier says. It also is equally important that no matter what specialist you choose, that they are sub-specialized in your particular

problem. "You do not want to go to a neurosurgeon who does primarily brains or an orthopedic spine surgeon who also does hips. You want someone who specializes in the spine and does this kind of surgery all the time."

For patients, the distinction between an orthopedic spine surgeon and a neurosurgeon might seem difficult to understand. Both types of surgeons work on backs and necks. Dr. Frazier explains "the distinctions in terms of the spine, between the specialties has lessened in the last decade. In many places, the training programs have merged.

"Both orthopedic spine surgeons and neurosurgeons deal with bones and nerves of the spine. It is more common however, that if you need an extensive spinal reconstruction such as is in scoliosis with screws, rods and plates, that an orthopedic spine surgeon might have more experience. On the other hand, if you have a tumor within the spinal cord, a neurosurgeon might have more experience. At times, these two specialties might work together," says Dr. Frazier. "In my practice, politics or financial issues never interfere with patient care. I am a perfectionist and will work with whomever is needed to ensure the best outcome for my patients; that sometimes includes neurosurgeons and vascular surgeons."

At New York City Spine Surgery PLLC, many spine disorders are treated without surgery. However, if surgical intervention becomes necessary, the physicians are world-class and deliver the most advanced minimally invasive procedures and treatment options available. Dr. Frazier emphasizes that the main doctors are fellowship-trained orthopedic spine surgeons. However, they work with neurosurgeons, vascular surgeons, pain-management doctors, physiatrists, chiropractors, physical and occupational therapists, neurologists and other ancillary personnel to achieve the best patient outcomes. "We are driven and our goal is to have excellent outcomes while treating our patients the way we'd like someone to treat a member of our own family," says **Dr. Frazier**. "When it comes to your spine, the stakes are high. You don't want to settle for anything less than the best. The difference between great spine surgery and mediocre spine surgery can sometimes be catastrophic. Do your best to make an informed decision."

- Jeffrey Cohen

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