

BOOK REVIEW

Rehabilitation of the Spine: A Practitioner's Manual (2nd Edition)

CRAIG LIEBENSON, D.C.

Baltimore, MD: Lippincott, Williams and Wilkins, 2007, 972 pages, ISBN 0-7817-2997-1, \$99.95, hardcover with DVD.

A major paradigm shift is currently unfolding in the care of patients with musculoskeletal pain. Health disciplines including chiropractic, physical therapy, manual osteopathy, and physiatry are in the process of shifting primary emphasis from passive to active care once the acute stage of pain has passed. This sea change is driven in part by research supporting rehabilitative, exercise-based active care for subacute and chronic conditions, and in part by a diminishing willingness on the part of third-party payers to cover passive care for extended periods of time.

Craig Liebenson, a chiropractic physician from Los Angeles, is a leading educator and practitioner in the field of rehabilitation. In this second edition of his landmark text, *Rehabilitation of the Spine: A Practitioner's Manual*, Liebenson has assembled a superb group of contributors spanning all the relevant disciplines, including many of the world's leading researchers and clinicians in the fields of orthopedic surgery, chiropractic, physical therapy, manual medicine, exercise physiology, and more.

The book's content is divided into seven parts: overview, basic science, assessment, acute care management, recovery care management, practical application by region, and implementing the functional paradigm.

The four opening chapters, written by Liebenson, summarize the broad outlines of the paradigm shift toward active care and rehabilitation, with the biopsychosocial model of health care central to this approach. Though termed an overview, this section does far more than skim the surface, providing significant depth as well as breadth. Liebenson articulately describes the flaws in approaches that overemphasize coincidental diagnostic findings (mild to moderate spinal degeneration, disc bulges on magnetic

resonance imaging), which doctors often use as a springboard to convey to patients that they are structurally damaged.

Liebenson argues that once red flags such as fracture, infection, and malignancy have been ruled out, patient care must be driven by functional diagnosis in which physical performance deficits (i.e., strength, endurance, mobility, balance, and coordination) are evaluated; stability, strength, and flexibility are addressed; and doctors reassure patients about the essentially benign nature of their pain and the safety and value of resuming normal activities. Throughout, a key goal is to prevent both physical and psychological deconditioning. Passive care (adjustment/manipulation, medication) is seen as most valuable early in the process; active care (rehabilitation) plays an increasingly important role as recovery proceeds.

A key problem underlying much of the current confusion in low-back pain diagnosis and treatment, Liebenson asserts, is that almost 90% of low-back pain is categorized as "non-specific," and researchers have generally approached this category as if it were homogeneous, thus losing sight of potentially significant distinctions within this broad category. Individual differences in functional diagnosis (i.e., which movements are most challenging, which muscles weakest or most unbalanced) may provide an analytic framework that will allow clinicians and researchers to determine which patients will benefit from particular treatment approaches. Without the ability to sort out such subgroups, progress will prove far more challenging.

It is difficult to point to particular highlights in this text; the quality is exceptional throughout. Chapters where illustrations are most needed are the most densely illustrated; chapter authors do an excellent job of walking the reader through complicated diagnostic and treatment concepts and procedures; and the self-check audits for review of key points in each chapter are well-crafted.

The accompanying DVD is quite thorough if a bit fast-paced, covering a substantial range of diagnostic and treatment approaches in a way that still photos on a page cannot.

Rehabilitation of the Spine is an important work that should be read by all practitioners dealing with the treatment and rehabilitation of patients with musculoskeletal disorders.

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