

Orthopedics

This Week

The 28 Top Spine Surgeons in North America

OTW STAFF

Who do spine surgeons want to see when they or a loved one need treatment? Find out here. We asked leading spine surgeons to select the best of their peers.

Here is that list. It isn't the be-all and end-all list—but a list of the finest spine physicians, teachers, investigators or administrators in the country. This information was obtained via a telephone survey of thought leaders in the field. The information in quotes is what we heard about these surgeons.

Todd J. Albert, M.D. is the Richard H. Rothman Professor and Chairman of the Department of Orthopaedic Surgery at Thomas Jefferson University in Philadelphia. He is also president of the Rothman Institute and serves as Co-Director of Reconstructive Spine Surgery and the Spine Fellowship Program at Thomas Jefferson University Hospitals. He is past president of The Cervical Spine Research Society (CSRS). “He is a go-to spine surgeon for any kind of procedure. He is also an outstanding leader and talented researcher.”

Howard S. An, M.D. is an orthopedic surgeon with Midwest Orthopaedics at Rush in Chicago. Dr. An is the Morton International Endowed Chair, Director of Spine Surgery and Director of the Spine Fellowship Program at Rush University Medical Center. He is a past president of the International Society for the Study of the Lumbar Spine. “He has made great advances in cell biology and has been a real leader in trying to understand the



Image created by RRY Publications, LLC / Photography by Andrew Huth

basic science behind a lot of the common spine problems.”

Sigurd H. Berven, M.D. is associate professor in Residence in the Department of Orthopaedic Surgery at the University of California, San Francisco. “He is a true health outcomes guru who is always thinking of cost effectiveness. He is an ‘outside-the-box’ thinker, and is an exceptionally nice guy.”

Mark H. Bilsky, M.D. is a neurosurgeon with Memorial Sloan-Kettering in New York City. He is also Director of Memorial Sloan-Kettering multi-disciplinary spine tumor team. “He is an exceptional tumor surgeon who has developed novel techniques for complex surgeries. He

really thinks about the entire patient and is very knowledgeable about both operative and nonoperative care.”

Christopher M. Bono, M.D. is Chief of Spine at Brigham and Women's Hospital and assistant professor in the Department of Orthopedic Surgery at Harvard Medical School. “He is a leader in the politics of spine surgery, and is helping to define the future of spine by working with the government and other relevant parties.”

Keith H. Bridwell, M.D. is the J. Albert Key Distinguished Professor of Orthopaedic Surgery at Washington University School of Medicine, and he is Chief of Pediatric and Adult Spinal

Surgery in the Orthopaedic Department at Washington University in St. Louis. He is a former president of the Scoliosis Research Society. “He is a great surgeon, teacher, and researcher who has done groundbreaking work on the surgical management of spinal deformities.”

Bradford L. Currier, M.D. is Professor of Orthopedics at Mayo Clinic in Minnesota. He is President of the Lumbar Spine Research Society (LSRS) and past president of The Cervical Spine Research Society. “He has made many strong contributions to the literature and has trained numerous prominent spine surgeons. He is exceptional at taking someone through difficult cases, working at their level, and having them improve throughout the year. He is extremely ethical and very well respected.”

Jason Eck, D.O. is an orthopedic spine surgeon with the Center for Sports Medicine and Orthopedics in Chattanooga, Tennessee. “He has written a series of seminal textbooks on spine surgery, and is consistently contributing to the field via his research.”

Michael G. Fehlings, M.D., F.A.C.S., F.R.C.S.C., Ph.D. is a professor of neurosurgery at the University of Toronto, and is the Krembil Chair in Neural Repair & Regeneration at the Toronto Western Hospital in Ontario. Dr. Fehlings is a past president of the CSRS. “He is a top-notch researcher, as well as an excellent clinician. He has done a great deal of pioneering work in spinal cord injury.”

Charles G. Fisher, M.D. is a surgeon at the Combined Neurosurgical and Orthopedic Spine Program at Vancouver General Hospital, University of British Columbia. “He is a great role model who has a great deal of common sense, as well as a sense of how to balance industry relationships and science. He is a thought leader in epidemiology and spine.”

Jeffrey S. Fischgrund, M.D. is Professor of Orthopaedic Surgery at Oakland

University, William Beaumont School of Medicine in Rochester, Michigan. He is also Fellowship Director of Spinal Surgery at William Beaumont Hospital in Royal Oak, Michigan. Dr. Fischgrund is currently editor-in-chief of the *Journal of the American Academy of Orthopaedic Surgeons*. He is president-elect of the LSRS. “He is a well known authority in spine, especially when it comes to degenerative lumbar conditions.”

Steven Garfin, M.D. is Chair of the Department of Orthopaedic Surgery at the University of California, San Diego; he is also Chief of the UC San Diego Spine Program. “He is a brilliant mentor, a fearless surgeon, and is indefatigable... nobody outworks Garfin. He is probably best known for his work in spine trauma and revision spine surgery.”

Ziya L. Gokaslan, M.D. is professor of Neurosurgery, Orthopedic Surgery and Oncology at Johns Hopkins; he is the Donlin M. Long Professor of Neurosurgery. He is also director of that institution's spine center. “He is known for his tumor work and for complex reconstructions. He knows the importance of working with a team to reconstruct major segments of the spine, and has developed new ideas for these segmental problems. He has a meticulous surgical technique.”

James S. Harrop, M.D., F.A.C.S. is professor of Neurosurgery and Division Director for Adult Reconstructive Spine at Thomas Jefferson University in Philadelphia. “He is one of the most thoughtful cervical spine and trauma surgeons in the United States. He is a technical expert, is editor of *Congress of Neurological Surgeons* quarterly, and his opinion is extremely well respected.”

John G. Heller, M.D. is the Baur Professor of Orthopedic Surgery and spine fellowship director at Emory University. He is the past-president of the Cervical Spine Research Society. “He is one of the first surgeons in the country

to perform laminoplasty; he championed this operation and it has steadily gained in popularity. He is an excellent spine surgeon and a mentor to many young surgeons.”

Harry N. Herkowitz, M.D. (deceased June 2013) was Chairman of Department of Orthopaedic Surgery at William Beaumont Hospital and professor at Oakland University, William Beaumont School of Medicine. He was a director of the American Board of Orthopaedic Surgery. “Dr. Herkowitz was clearly one of our ‘greats.’ He was a visionary leader, and was named president of many of our spine organizations. His devotion to the field was enormous, and his high standards for orthopedic education and training were a hallmark of his career.”

Serena Hu, M.D. is the David S. Bradford Endowed Professor and Vice Chair of Orthopedic Surgery at the University of California, San Francisco (UCSF). She is also co-director of the UCSF Spine Center. “She is a top female spine surgeon, and is very talented with handling deformity surgery. She is also known for being a great teacher and communicator.”

Lawrence J. Lenke, M.D. is the Jerome J. Gilden Distinguished Professor of Orthopaedic Surgery and professor of Neurological Surgery at Washington University School of Medicine in Saint Louis, Missouri. He is also Chief of Spinal Surgery, Director of the Complex Spinal Deformity Institute and Fellowship at that institution. Dr. Lenke is a past president of the Scoliosis Research Society. “He is renowned for his work with patients who have severe spinal deformities. He pays extra attention to the issue of maintaining safety with respect to neurologic issues. He is detailed oriented, an honest reporter of his data, and is exceptionally hardworking.”

Frank M. Phillips, M.D. is professor of Orthopaedic Surgery and co-director of the Spine Fellowship at Rush University Medical Center. He is also Rush University

Medical Center Head of the Section of Minimally Invasive Spine Surgery. Dr. Phillips is past president of the Society of Minimally Invasive Spine Surgery. "What a great MIS surgeon. He has done superb clinical and biomechanical research, and is a wonderful teacher and innovator."

John M. Rhee, M.D. is associate professor of Orthopaedics at Emory. "He has done a lot of work in cervical spine disorders and is a wonderful surgeon. He is a terrific lecturer who puts a lot of effort into explaining things (and he doesn't just recycle old talks)."

Laurence D. Rhines, M.D. is professor in the Department of Neurosurgery and director of the Spine Program at The University of Texas MD Anderson Cancer Center in Houston. He is also adjunct professor in the Department of Neurosurgery at Baylor College of Medicine. "He has great judgment, and knows how to make complicated concepts straightforward. He is one of the few people in the U.S. that does En bloc spondylectomy from a posterior approach."

K. Daniel Riew, M.D. is the Mildred B. Simon Professor of Orthopedic Surgery, is a professor of neurological surgery, the Chief of the Surgical Spine Center and Director of the Cervical Spine Institute. "He is an outstanding surgeon, teacher, and researcher. He is a leader in the cervical spine world, has done great research in this area, and has great vision."

Rick C. Sasso, M.D. is a founding member, and the president of Indiana

Spine Group. He is also clinical associate professor and Chief of Spine Surgery at the Indiana University School of Medicine, Department of Orthopaedic Surgery. "He is a seminal researcher in cervical spine injuries. His innovations in arthroplasty have moved our field forward. In addition, he is a talented teacher."

James D. Schwender, M.D. is an orthopedic surgeon with the Twin Cities Spine Center in Minneapolis, Minnesota. He is a past president of the Society for Minimally Invasive Spine Surgery. "He is quite an innovator in the realm of minimally invasive techniques. Technically, he is excellent and has great clinical judgment; he is also a gifted teacher."

Christopher I. Shaffrey, M.D. is the Harrison Distinguished Professor of Neurological and Orthopaedic Surgery at the University of Virginia. He is also director of the Spine Division at that institution. "He is double boarded as an orthopedic surgeon and a neurosurgeon. This gives him rare insight into the structural mechanics of bone and bone biology *and* into neuroanatomy and neurostructures. He is the go-to-guy on the East Coast, and is real innovator."

Daniel J. Sucato, M.D., M.S. is Chief of Staff at Texas Scottish Rite Hospital for Children and associate professor in the Department of Orthopaedic Surgery at The University of Texas Southwestern Medical Center at Dallas. He is also director of the Sarah M. and Charles E. Seay/Martha and Pat Beard Center for Excellence in Spine Research. "He

is a great pediatric deformity surgeon who has developed new procedures for scoliosis treatment."

Alexander R. Vaccaro, M.D., Ph.D. is a spine surgeon with the Rothman Institute in Philadelphia. He is also vice chairman of the Department of Orthopaedics at Thomas Jefferson University. He also serves as co-director of Reconstruction Spine Services at the Rothman Institute and as co-director of the Spine Fellowship at Thomas Jefferson University. Dr. Vaccaro is president of The Association for Collaborative Spine Research. "You won't find a better spine surgeon around. He is meticulous and thoughtful, and consistently expands the field with his research."

Thomas A. Zdeblick, M.D. is professor and chair at the University of Wisconsin Department of Orthopedics and Rehabilitation, and director of the University of Wisconsin Spine Center. He is past president of the LSRS and the CSRS. "He is best known for anterior lumbar interbody fusion and anterior spinal column reconstruction. He is particularly innovative with regard to spinal fixation products (his background in mechanical engineering comes into play here). He is creative, thoughtful, meticulous, and has a high degree of emotional intelligence."

