Georg-Schmorl-Prize of the German Spine Society (DWG)

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Georg Schmorl

Everyone who deals with the spine knows the Schmorl's nodes, which can often be identified in the X-rays or by CT as irregularities or notches in the endplates of the vertebral bodies [1–3]. These are protrusions of nucleus material probably through weak areas in the endplate [4]. Sometimes, they are called vertical disc herniations. They can lead to inflammation and necrosis, but they are often asymptomatic [5]. Therefore, their significance for back pain is discussed controversially [6].

Schmorl's nodes can mainly be found in the thoracic and lumbar spine and they are common in the spines in the elderly, but their frequency is similar in the younger population [7] and are often a manifestation of Scheuermann disease, which is known to enhance premature disc degeneration [8–10].

They were first described in 1927 and named by a German pathologist, Christian Georg Schmorl. Christian Georg Schmorl was born on May 2, 1861 in Saxony [11]. He started to study mathematics for 1 year in Freiburg and changed then to medicine school in Leipzig where he finished his doctor thesis about eclampsia in 1892. In 1894, he became director of the Pathology–Anatomy Department in Dresden-Friedrichstadt. He died on August 14, 1932 from blood poisoning, in consequence of a finger injury during a section. Schmorl is remembered for his work in histology and his studies of the human skeleton. He created a histological stain especially designed to show the canaliculi and lamellae in sections of the bone. Shortly before his death, Georg Schmorl published together with Herbert Junghanns “Die Gesunde und Kranke Wirbelsäule” (The Healthy and Sick Spine).

In memoriam of Georg Schmorl, the former German Spine Research Society has awarded in the year from 1963 to 2001, the Schmorl-Prize to outstanding contributions in spine research. In 2006, the German Spine Research Society has fused together with the German Society for Spine Surgery, which was the foundation of the German Spine Society. Last year, the German Spine Society has decided to continue with this tradition, and the prize was given again for the first time on the last annual meeting in Bremen in December 2010. The award winning paper is “Autografts for spinal fusion: osteogenic potential of laminectomy bone chips and bone shavings collected via high speed drill.”, which is published in this issue [12]. With this editorial, the European Spine Journal and the German Spine Society congratulate Claudia Eder and her co-authors for winning this award and would also like to encourage everybody to submit outstanding contributions to the German Spine Conference. Further information can be found on the homepage of the German Spine Society (DWG.org).

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