Editorial

Myelomeningocele

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The last collection of papers dedicated to the care of patients with spina bifida published nearly 10 years ago was a collaborative effort by the Pediatric Orthopedic Society of North America and the Shriners Hospitals for Children entitled, “Caring for the Child with Spina Bifida” [1]. The topics were assembled in a multidisciplinary approach with contributions from the fields of basic science, orthopaedics, urology, neurosurgery, and developmental pediatrics.

The impetus for this current symposium was the First World Congress of Spina Bifida Care and Research sponsored by the Spina Bifida Association (SBA) in March 2009. Over 300 professionals involved in the care of children with spina bifida attended the 3-day meeting. In addition to separate sessions involving individual disciplines, plenary sessions were held to bring together the relevant healthcare professions to stimulate cross-discipline discussion. The major themes generated from the orthopaedic session included the increasing use of gait analysis, the need for evidence-based literature (as supported by the lack of random clinical trials for orthopaedic intervention in spina bifida), and the awareness and prevention of musculoskeletal problems encountered by patients transitioning into adulthood. Spina bifida is no longer a “disease in childhood” as this unique patient population transitions into adulthood. The coordination of care to promote independence must begin long before adulthood is reached, and orthopaedic intervention during childhood may have long-term implications and impact quality-of-life issues as an adult.

Fig. 1 Lee S. Segal, MD, is shown.

The goal of this symposium in Clinical Orthopaedics and Related Research was to maintain a similar multidisciplinary approach presenting research from other musculoskeletal-related disciplines that may influence our approaches to the care of children with spina bifida. The other intended goal of the symposium is to stimulate and promote future research. Several of the papers presented at the First World Congress of Spina Bifida Care and Research are included in this current symposium. Many of the invited speakers presented reviews and updates on selected orthopaedic conditions related to spina bifida such as spinal deformities. These presentations were important in the exchange of knowledge both within and across other disciplines. Unfortunately, the levels of evidence (Level V [3]) of these presentations did not meet the requirements of this symposium. John V. Banta, MD, provided a historical perspective in his lecture entitled, “The History of Orthopaedic Care and Spina Bifida.” Dr Banta, whom I have admired as a leader in pediatric orthopaedics and spina bifida, noted the innovations and advances in surgical care

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of spina bifida have depended on the close collaboration among orthopaedics, neurosurgery, and urology.

The classic paper selected for this symposium also provides further historical perspectives in the evaluation and pathologic features of spina bifida occulta first described by von Recklinghausen in 1886, in which he described the constellation of a midline hairy patch (lumbosacral hypertrichosis), clubfoot, and neurogenic ulcer caused by a tethered cord (myofibrolioma) of the spinal cord. It is in this historical paper that references to Hahn and Virchow initially raised the association of neural tube defects and mythological figures such as the satyr describing the hairy tail in the area of the lumbar spine with the “cloven foot...and associated with ailments linked with spina bifida” [2].

We continue to make advances in the care of patients with spina bifida. I hope that one of the intended goals of

the symposium, to stimulate further research in this patient population, will occur and these research efforts translate into future advances that will enable individuals with spina bifida to have a better quality of life through adulthood. I would like to thank all of the authors and reviewers who contributed their time and efforts on behalf of this symposium.

References

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