The 28 Top Spine Surgeons in America

By OTW Staff

Who are the best surgeons, clinicians, investigators and administrators in spine? We’ve seen the lists—including in the magazine on the airlines that are often our second homes. But how reliable are these lists? Is this like the Who’s Who racket where, for a mere couple of hundred dollars, you can be listed?

We took a different approach. Over the years, we have compiled a fairly comprehensive list of contacts in orthopedics. Who better to pick the top spine physicians than their own colleagues? So we decided to ask leading spine surgeons to select the best of their peers.

It didn’t matter to us if we came up with five names or fifty. All we asked was, who among your peers do you think is at the top of your profession? Time and again the same names rose to the top. And we compiled a list of those people who were mentioned most consistently.

Here is that list. It isn’t the be-all and end-all list—but a list of who are arguably 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.

Tell us what you think.

In alphabetical order, then, here are the top 28 spine physicians in America.

**Todd Albert, M.D.**
Dr. Albert is president of the Rothman Institute in Philadelphia and chair of the Department of Orthopaedic Surgery at Thomas Jefferson University.

“An incredibly talented surgeon and administrator.”

**Howard An, M.D.**
Dr. An is the Morton International Endowed Chair Professor of Orthopaedic Surgery, as well as the director of the Division of Spine Surgery at Midwest Orthopaedics at Rush in Chicago.

“A really wonderful surgeon who is very compassionate.”

**Scott D. Boden, M.D.**
Dr. Boden is professor of orthopedic surgery and director of the Emory
Orthopaedics and Spine Center. “An accomplished researcher and superior clinician.”

**Christopher Bono, M.D.**
Dr. Bono is chief of spine at Brigham and Women’s Hospital and assistant professor at Harvard Medical School. “A great thinker and clinical researcher; an honest man.”

**Darryl Brodke, M.D.**
Dr. Brodke is professor of Spinal Disorders and director of the Spine Center at the University of Utah School of Medicine. “A great biomechanical researcher and administrator.”

**Jens Chapman, M.D.**
Dr. Chapman is chair of the Department of Orthopaedic Surgery at University of Washington in Seattle. He is also director of the Spine Service. “A consummate traumatologist and spine surgeon.”

**Mark Dekutoski, M.D.**
Dr. Dekutoski is associate professor of orthopedics at Mayo Clinic in Minnesota. “A great clinician and leader who is very aware of the literature.”

**Frank Eismont, M.D.**
Dr. Eismont is chairman and chief of the Department of Orthopaedic Surgery at Jackson Memorial Hospital in Miami. “Known for his terrific trauma and cervical work.”

**Sanford Emery, M.D., M.B.A.**
Dr. Emery is professor and chair at the Department of Orthopaedic Surgery at the West Virginia University. “An amazing surgeon, leader, and clinical researcher.”

**Steven Garfin, M.D.**
Dr. Garfin is chair of the Department of Orthopaedic Surgery at UC San Diego; he is also chief of the UC San Diego Spine Program. “Thoughtful, incredibly diligent, and a passionate teacher.”

**Robert A. Hart, M.D.**
Dr. Hart is associate professor at the Oregon Health and Science University; he is also director of that institution’s orthopedic residency program. “Does solid basic science and clinical research and is a great individual.”

**Harry Herkowitz, M.D.**
Dr. Herkowitz is chair of the Department of Orthopaedic Surgery at Beaumont Health System in Michigan. Additionally, he is a director of the American Board of Orthopaedic Surgery. “He is a true pioneer.”

**John Heller, M.D.**
Dr. Heller is professor of orthopedic surgery at Emory University. “He is very compassionate and is a technically gifted surgeon.”

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H Alan Hilibrand, M.D.
Dr. Hilibrand is professor of Orthopaedic Surgery and Neurosurgery at the Rothman Institute in Philadelphia. He is also Director of Medical Education for the Department of Orthopaedic Surgery at the Rothman Institute and Jefferson Medical College. “An amazing person who is a talented researcher and leader.”

H Serena Hu, M.D.
Dr. Hu is professor of clinical orthopaedics at the University of California, San Francisco Medical Center. “A top spine surgeon who is tough and smart.”

H James D. Kang, M.D.
Dr. Kang is vice chairman of the Department of Orthopaedic Surgery at the University of Pittsburgh Medical Center. He is also director of the Ferguson Laboratory for Spine Research. “He is a terrific surgeon and basic science researcher.”

H Joon Yung Lee, M.D.
Dr. Lee is assistant professor of Orthopaedic Surgery at the University of Pittsburgh Medical Center. “Known for his quality basic science research; a great clinician.”

H Lawrence Lenke, M.D.
Dr. Lenke is co-chief of Adult and Pediatric Spinal, Scoliosis and Reconstruction Surgery at Washington University School of Medicine and Director of Spinal Surgery at Shriner’s Hospital for Children in St. Louis. “A real leader in scoliosis surgery who has developed the Lenke classification system which surgeons everywhere use daily.”

H Robert McGuire, M.D.
Dr. McGuire is the chair of orthopedic surgery at the University of Mississippi Medical Center. He is also director of the orthopedic residency at that institution. “A wonderful clinician and leader.”

H Daniel B. Murrey, M.D.
Dr. Murrey is the CEO of OrthoCarolina. “He does an amazing job running what amounts to the largest orthopedic practice in the country.”

H Pierce Nunley, M.D.
Dr. Nunley is the director of the Spine Institute of Louisiana and an assistant professor of orthopedic surgery at the Louisiana State University Health Sciences Center. “He has developed important spine technologies, and is a truly accomplished private practice surgeon.”

H Frank Phillips, M.D.
Dr. Phillips is professor of orthopedic surgery and director of Minimally Invasive Spine Surgery at Midwest Orthopaedics at Rush in Chicago. “A superb innovator and clinician.”

H Dan Riew, M.D.
Dr. Riew is Chief of the Surgical Spine Center and Director of the Cervical Spine Institute at the Washington University School of Medicine in St. Louis. “If someone says, ‘cervical spine surgery,’ you think of Dan.”

H Rick Sasso, M.D.
Dr. Sasso is a founding member, and the president of Indiana Spine Group. “Phenomenal technical surgeon and a minimally invasive world leader.”

H Daniel Sucato, M.D., M.S.
Dr. Sucato is chief of staff at Texas Scottish Rite Hospital for Children. He is also director of the Sarah M. and Charles E. Seay/Martha and Pat Beard Center for Excellence in Spine Research. “A pediatric surgeon who does great scoliosis work and who runs important deformity study groups.”

H Alexander Vaccaro, M.D., Ph.D.
Dr. Vaccaro is a spine surgeon with the Rothman Institute in Philadelphia. He is also vice chairman of the Department of Orthopaedics at Thomas Jefferson University. “The most prolific clinical researcher in spine.”

H Jeffrey Wang, M.D.
Dr. Wang is the chief of the orthopedic spine surgery service at the David School of Medicine at the University of California, Los Angeles. Additionally, he is professor in the departments of orthopaedic surgery and neurosurgery. “A fantastic researcher and surgeon.”

H Thomas Zdeblick, M.D.
Dr. Zdeblick is professor and chair at the University of Wisconsin Department of Orthopedics and Rehabilitation. “An innovative genius, a researcher of significant renown who has unimpeachable ethics.”

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