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Journal of Back and Musculoskeletal Rehabilitation 9 (1997) 5-6

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Journal of  
Back and  
Musculoskeletal  
Rehabilitation

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## Introduction

# Proceedings of the 25th anniversary meeting of the Society for Back Pain Research

The Society for Back Pain Research was founded in 1971 at a meeting of scientists and clinicians who came together with a common purpose: to understand the complex nature of back pain with the aim of being able to prevent and treat it. The focus was to be on research, whether clinical or basic science, and the Society was, and perhaps still is, unique among Learned Societies studying the spine by having pain in its title and as its overarching theme within which this research was to be understood. One result of this emphasis is that, far from being open only to a narrow group of specialists, the Society rejoices in welcoming researchers from any and every discipline who have proved their research interest in back pain by presenting their results to the Society. This breadth of interest can be both a strength and a weakness. A strength when it opens our minds to alternative ways of seeing the same problem, a weakness when we become intolerant of what we may feel to be 'softer sciences'. However, we are still learning. Learning to apply rigorous scientific methods whatever form our study may take; learning to be critical in our appraisal of our own, not just others, work; learning to understand each other's terminology and appreciate others' training so that we meet more as equals faced with a common task.

Since then, of course, back pain disability, as reflected in Government statistics throughout the western world, has increased exponentially. This

is despite our deeper understanding of the biomechanics, biochemistry and neurophysiology of the spine itself, which indicates to us some of the possible causes and sources of pain. We have increasingly become aware of the complex nature of pain perception and the psychological and sociological factors that influence this, and it is perhaps here that the greatest advances are to be made in controlling the current epidemic of back pain. However, in a fractured society in which individuals are not at peace with themselves or with each other, it is perhaps inevitable that this will be expressed in more concrete forms of which back pain is but one manifestation.

The 25th anniversary meeting presented an opportunity to look back at from where we had come and catch a glimpse of to where we might be going. The presentations reflected everything, from a very personalised reminder of how we actually began through to some results from current research programmes reflecting, without any manipulation, the breadth of interest within the Society referred to above. It concluded with a debate between two very well known researchers into back pain who, starting from adversarial positions, ended by agreeing that we had learned and solved little! This debate was recorded and transcribed for these proceedings. No attempt was made to edit it into formal papers and it therefore carries with it the lingering flavour of the debate.

**Acknowledgements**

The Society gratefully acknowledges the generous support of the Arthritis and Rheumatism Council, not only for this meeting but from the inception of the Society, and the Wellcome Trust. We also thank the following companies for contributing exhibition stands: Aesculap Ltd., APM

Ltd., Corin Spinal Systems Ltd., Fry Surgical International, Smith and Nephew, Stratec Medical Ltd., Stryker UK, Surgicraft Ltd.

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4th October, 1996