



Percutaneous Vertebroplasty

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Spinal compression fractures, or "collapsed backbones" are a common problem for people with osteoporosis or thinning of the bones. This is particularly common in elderly people, as well as those taking certain medications such as steroids or who have tumors of the spine. In these patients the weakened bone sometimes collapses from just the pressure of standing. Pain from these fractures is often severe and persistent. Until recently, there was little that could be done to treat this problem and relieve patients' pain other than bed rest, back braces and painkillers. A new procedure called Percutaneous Vertebroplasty offers new hope for people with painful compression fractures.

In this new procedure no open surgery is involved. Instead a special needle is inserted through the skin into the collapsed spinal bone (vertebra) while watching and guiding the needle with constant x-ray imaging. Once the needle is in place a special type of surgical bone cement (called methylmethacrylate) is injected into the bone to strengthen and stabilize the weakened bone. When the material hardens it provides permanent support that prevents further collapse of the bone, and relieves pain in over 90% of treated patients. Percutaneous Vertebroplasty is performed as an outpatient without hospitalization; patients lay flat for two hours after the procedure and then go home with just a Band-Aid over the small puncture site where the needle entered the skin.

Percutaneous Vertebroplasty (PV) was first developed in Europe about 10 years ago and has become increasingly common in the U.S. over the past several years. While on faculty at the University of New Mexico Medical Center, I was one of the first surgeons here to start performing this procedure. Subsequently, in Las Vegas, we have successfully treated a large number of patients with very good results. Although the procedure is not for everyone with terrible back pain, it is a very valuable new tool in the treatment of compression fractures, providing pain relief and allowing patients to return to normal activity.