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Spinal Endoscopy

Introduction by Topic Editor, Maurice M. Smith, M.D.

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Recent advances in optics and technology have revolutionized the field of endoscopic surgery. In general surgery, endoscopic approaches to a variety of procedures, such as cholecystectomy, have become the standard of care. In similar fashion, endoscopic approaches to meniscectomy have replaced older, "tried and true" orthopedic techniques. Endoscopy has clearly changed the field of surgery.

An endoscopic approach allows for a less invasive exposure, while permitting the surgeon to achieve the same operative goals as the standard open procedure. Conventional microsurgical techniques, used in open surgery, are now being used endoscopically. Smaller incisions and less tissue trauma result in less pain, shorter hospitalization, and faster recovery for the patient.

In spinal surgery, there is extensive morbidity associated with the soft-tissue dissection necessary to gain adequate exposure to the spine. Endoscopic approaches to the spine reduce this morbidity substantially. Minimally invasive techniques that can achieve the same operative goal as conventional open surgery will become the standard of care, just as they have in other fields of surgery. Although endoscopic developments in the field of spinal surgery have lagged behind those in other specialties, rapid progress is being made. The articles in this edition of **Neurosurgical Focus** highlight some of these developments.

Of course, newer is not always better. Appropriate caution is in order while we await randomized, prospective studies to validate these new techniques. Nonetheless, advances in the field of minimally invasive spinal surgery are interesting and deserve careful inspection.

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