Multilevel Osteodiscitis and Epidural Abscess after Lumbar Interspinous Spacer Placement

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BACKGROUND

Interspinous spacers **limit extension** to indirectly decompress lumbar stenosis.[1]

Outcomes are **similar to open decompression**,[2] with fewer infections[3] but high reoperation rates.

SURGICAL SITE INFECTION RATE[3]

Interspinous spacer
0.6–0.8%

Open decompression
3.1%

Infections that do occur raise mortality, **especially epidural abscess**.[4]

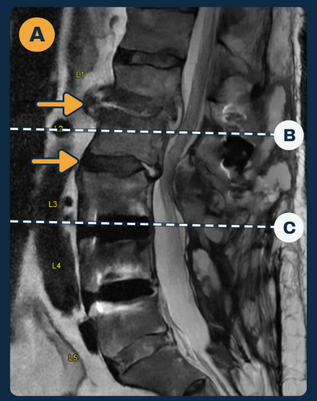
THE PATIENT

63-year-old man, chronic back pain

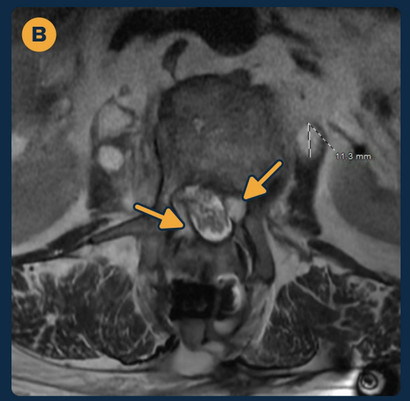
2020 L4–5 PLIF
2022 L3–S1 fusion
2024 Spinal cord stimulator

WHAT THIS CASE SHOWS

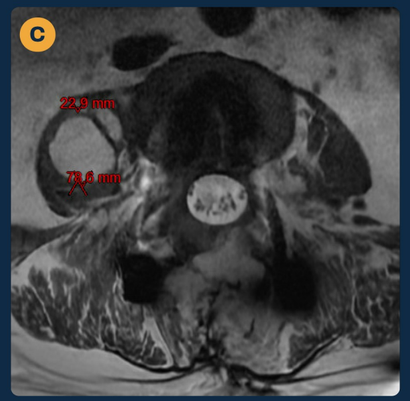
An infected spacer **spread through the lumbar spine.** With no neuro deficits, it was managed **without removing hardware.**



SAGITTAL T2
L1–L2 & L2–L3 discitis



AXIAL T2 · L2
Epidural phlegmon (arrows)



AXIAL T2 · L3–L4
Large right psoas abscess

ALSO ON MRI

Bilateral septic facet arthritis, arachnoiditis, and a rim-enhancing collection around the spacer.

MANAGEMENT

NEUROSURGERY

No surgery. No bowel or bladder change, weakness, numbness or claudication.

SPINAL CORD STIMULATOR

Left in place. Not involved; his remote switched it to MRI mode.

INPATIENT PAIN SERVICE

Severe thigh cramping (arachnoiditis): pregabalin, baclofen, oxycodone → oral hydromorphone.

TAKEAWAYS

- Hardware infections can **spread fast**: discs, facets, epidural space, psoas.
- Neuro intact? **Hardware removal is not mandatory.**
- Uninvolved SCS with *S. aureus* bacteremia: **explant vs. close watch** is a shared decision.[5]
- Opioid tolerant? Pain team for **multimodal care + opioid rotation**.

HOSPITAL COURSE

Days counted from admission

INDEX — L1–L2 spacer placed at outside hospital

~4 WK PRIOR — Wound infection → washout

DAY 1 — Cough, hypoxia, MSSA bacteremia → transfer

DAY 2–4 — CT and MRI: multilevel spinal infection

DAY 6 — IR aspirates right psoas abscess: *S. aureus*

DAY 14 — Gouty olecranon bursitis → debridement + flap

DAY 32 — **Home** on IV dalbavancin + oral rifampin

REFERENCES