

Harry Farfan

Harry Farfan (1924-1994) was instrumental in bringing forth the new specialty of spine care and spine surgery. Although he was born in Trinidad, West Indies to a family of Spanish descent, the majority of his University, medical school and residency training were in Montreal where he spent most of his professional life. After obtaining his degrees in biochemistry and medicine at McGill University he spent three formative years in England tutoring under Norman Capener, Dennis Dunn and Sir Osmond Clarke. When he completed his orthopedic training, a common teaching was to avoid treating back problems because "no one ever got better." Today the greatest number of fellowships in Orthopedics and in Neurosurgery are in spine. This dramatic turn-around in attitude has reflected the great strides in diagnosis and treatment which have occurred over a relatively short period of time. Harry Farfan was one of the important pioneers in effecting this perceptual change. His clinical observations and laboratory studies on the role of spinal mechanics and the effect of accumulated "insult and injury" on human spines attempting to successfully ambulate on a high gravity planet served to promote interest and inquiry by others. The Farfan publications on rotational and compressional forces and the three-joint complex were important catalysts in initiating the present understanding of these subjects. Harry Farfan was also instrumental in influencing his colleagues in joining together to combine their talents for the purpose of advancing the then emerging specialty of spine care. He was the founder of the International Society for Study of the Lumbar Spine and was a key force behind the merging of the North American Lumbar Spine Association (NALSA) and the American College of Spine Surgeons (COLS) to form the North American Spine Society in Laguna Niguel, California on July 24, 1985. Harry Farfan served as the moderator of this conference and through his leadership talents he was able to bring the different physician specialists together in a harmonious joint endeavor. This effort was instrumental in allowing spine care, the "dog" of the past, to begin to assume its present role as the "darling" of orthopedics and neurosurgery today.

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