

# Kenneth Heithoff

Ken Heithoff was not the developer of spine imaging nor the inventor of the MRI. He was, however, a real pioneer in identifying what this imaging actually demonstrated so that those who have dedicated themselves to studying the pathophysiology of the spine (such as [William Kirkaldy-Willis](#)) and those attempting to make specific diagnoses in order to treat patients intelligently could have objective information upon to base their decisions. Even today there are only a handful of radiologists who are uniquely expert in spine imaging. This situation has been particularly unfortunate in the failure of many radiologists to identify congenital genomic spine disorders. Heithoff and associates were the very first to publish a clinical study on Juvenile Discogenic Disease. His continuing efforts to clarify this condition have extended to genomic investigations in spine patients, their siblings, and parents. In the old west it was the pioneers who received most of the arrows. When Heithoff first began to report radiologic entities other than just herniated discs and spondylolisthesis he was accused of "playing into the surgeon's hands" as a means of justifying unnecessary spine surgery. To his great credit he persisted despite the obstacles placed in his path.

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