

COST CONTAINMENT USING THERMOGRAPHY

by Charles E. Wexler, M.D.

The thermogram can evaluate sensory nerve damage, and soft tissue injury in general, and offers the following advantages:

- *Documents objectively the absence of sensory nerve damage, or soft tissue injury, in general; or documents the presence of it for evaluation and future comparison — even in the absence of neurologic deficit.*
- *Shortens hospital stays by hastening a valid diagnosis.*
- *Avoids more expensive, risky and invasive procedures.*
- *Determines the physiologic significance of abnormal findings on other tests — for example, a “bulging” disc on a CAT scan.*
- *Sets a post-operative baseline for future comparison.*
- *Sets a pre-employment/employment baseline for evaluation/future comparison.*

The thermogram can demonstrate graphically the effects of irritation of sensory nerve fibers! As such, it is a test of physiology and presents unique information that is not otherwise easily obtained (Table I). As a test of physiology, it basically answers the question, “What is going on,” but it does not explain why.

The CAT scan and myelogram usually only evaluate the area of the central spinal canal and nerve roots. They may show a lesion but cannot

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predict if it is physiologically significant. The source of irritation may be outside this area or within the root or a nerve fiber itself, such as scarring or disruption of the chemical impulses from some other cause, such as a minute tear in the posterior longitudinal ligament.

Technique — General Overview

The procedure should be objective and be able to stand on its own merit independent of any other test or finding. As such, it should be reproducible when properly performed in the hands of any examiner, assuming no change has occurred in the patient's status. Proper technique is, therefore, essential.^{2,3} Parameters included in the procedure