Levels of Evidence for Clinical Studies

Select the level of evidence for this manuscript. A brief description of each level is included. If you are unsure of your manuscript’s level, please view the full Levels of Evidence For Primary Research Question, adopted by the North American Spine Society January 2005.

- **Level I:** High quality randomized trial or prospective study; testing of previously developed diagnostic criteria on consecutive patients; sensible costs and alternatives; values obtained from many studies with multiway sensitivity analyses; systematic review of Level I RCTs and Level I studies.

- **Level II:** Lesser quality RCT; prospective comparative study; retrospective study; untreated controls from an RCT; lesser quality prospective study; development of diagnostic criteria on consecutive patients; sensible costs and alternatives; values obtained from limited studies; with multiway sensitivity analyses; systematic review of Level II studies or Level I studies with inconsistent results.

- **Level III:** Case control study (therapeutic and prognostic studies); retrospective comparative study; study of nonconsecutive patients without consistently applied reference “gold” standard; analyses based on limited alternatives and costs and poor estimates; systematic review of Level III studies.

- **Level IV:** Case series; case control study (diagnostic studies); poor reference standard; analyses with no sensitivity analyses.

- **Level V:** Expert opinion.