

Short Communication

# SPINE20 – A global advocacy group to reduce disability and improve function of spine patients

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## 1. Introduction

The Global Burden of Diseases (GBD) studies have estimated that low back pain is one of the costliest ailments worldwide (1). After the GBD publications, leadership of the four largest global spine societies agreed to form SPINE20 in 2019.

This article introduces the concept of SPINE20, the recommendations, and the future of this global advocacy group linked to G20 annual summits. SPINE20 seeks to change awareness, prevention, and treatment of spine ailments by supporting local projects that implement value-based practices with healthcare policies that are culturally sensitive based on scientific evidence (<https://spine20.org/event/>).

The founders of SPINE20 advocacy group coordinated with G20 Saudi Arabia to conduct the first SPINE20 summit in 2020. The summit was intended to promote evidence-based recommendations to use the most reliable information from high-level research. Eight areas of importance to mitigate spine disorders were identified through a voting process of the participating societies. Twelve recommendations were discussed and vetted.

The areas of immediate concern in 2020 were “aging spine,” “future of spine care,” “spinal cord injuries,” “children and adolescent spine,” “spine-related disability,” “spine educational standards,” “patient safety,” and “burden on economy.” Twelve recommendations were created and endorsed by 31/33 spine societies and two journals globally during a vetted process through the SPINE20.org website and during the virtual inaugural meeting held on November 10<sup>th</sup>–11<sup>th</sup>, 2020 in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia from the G20 platform (2).

This was the first time that international spine societies have joined to support actions to mitigate the burden of spine disorders across the globe.

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On September 17–18, 2021, SPINE20 held its second summit in Rome, Italy prior to the G20. Prior to the meeting, the SPINE20 created six proposed recommendations. These recommendations were uploaded to the SPINE20 website 10 days before the meeting and opened to the public for comments. The recommendations were discussed at the meeting allowing the participants to approve, object and provide comments.

Twenty-seven global societies endorsed the following recommendations delivered to the G20 countries. The recommendations were to:

- (i) expand telehealth for the access to spine care, especially considering the current situation with COVID-19;
- (ii) adopt value-based interprofessional spine care as an approach to improve patient outcomes and reduce disability;
- (iii) facilitate access and invest in the development of a competent rehabilitation workforce to reduce the burden of disability related to spine disorders;
- (iv) adopt a strategy to promote daily physical activity and exercises among the elderly population to maintain an active and independent life with a healthy spine, particularly after COVID-19 pandemic;
- (v) engage in capacity building with emerging countries and underserved communities for the benefit of spine patients; and
- (vi) promote strategies to transfer evidence-based advances into patient benefit through effective implementation processes (3).

SPINE20's recommendations will make governments and decision-makers aware of efforts to reduce needless suffering and costs from disabling spine pain throughout the world.

## 2. The SPINE20 Initiative

Disorders of the spine with its multiple pathologies and trauma are the number one cause of disability that put enormous burden on the economy, back ailments can lead to extreme pain, inability to function, and subsequently job loss. Advocacy, education, and government policies are urgently needed to provide a value-based spine care where standardized practice based on best available evidence while controlling the healthcare cost.

SPINE20 is an advocacy group founded in 2019 by the Saudi Spine Society (SSS), EUROSPINE, the North American Spine Society (NASS), and the German Spine Society (DWG) in an effort to improve spine care on a global level through recommending policies in the G20 countries and beyond that help alleviate the burden of spine disease through various means including stimulating better spine health, improved access to spine care, advance spine research, enhancing spine innovation pathways, improving evidence in spine care and treatments through polices and support from governments.

SPINE20 is a think tank that would also be able to provide governments with the expertise needed to improve spine care around the globe by developing a clear calendar of activities and forming task-force groups to make evidence-based policy recommendations. The goal is to optimize spine care options for communities and patients worldwide by making recommendations to G20 members and Sherpas. SPINE20 summit is held just prior to the G20 Summit to make the recommendations available to the G20 members (Riyadh, Saudi Arabia 2020, Rome, Italy 2021, Bali, Indonesia 2022, Delhi, India 2023, and Brazil 2024). The SPINE20 advocacy group is participating in the G20 nonofficial groups such as C20, B20, and others as well as collaboration with WHO.

### 3. How Can SPINE20 Help Governments Alleviate the Burden of Spine Disease and Disability?

There are five pillars of importance for SPINE20:

- (i) Serve as resource for governments and larger institutions (national or international) in spine-related healthcare and prevention.
- (ii) Advocate for the prevention of spinal disorders, for example, exercise and education.
- (iii) Stimulate innovation to promote spine health.
- (iv) Advance spine research through advocacy for funding to improve our ability to care for patients.
- (v) Facilitate access to spine care and treatment to improve function and decrease disability, improve function and well-being of spine patients.

### 4. What Sets SPINE20 Apart from Other Medical Societies?

Opening doors for international advocacy, few other medical society groups have been so proactively engaged in fostering this kind of international advocacy for all spine care providers and decision-makers. Improving spine healthcare on a global scale, SPINE20's advocacy could result in some significant benefit for our members in various countries and the spine patients we serve.

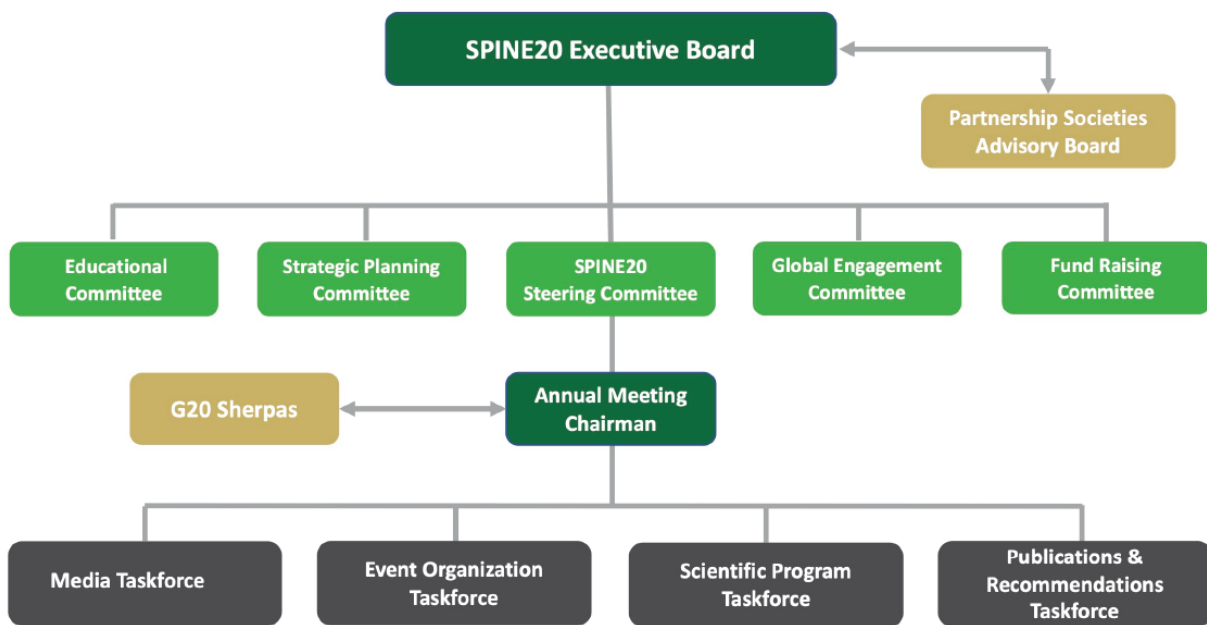
*The mission of SPINE20 is to "Optimize treatment in the global community to ensure patients have access to the best spine care possible in their respective regions."*

*The vision of SPINE20 is "A world where appropriate spine care helps minimize global disability and dramatically improve the lives of those suffering from*

*spine problems so their families and communities can thrive."*

The collective objectives for SPINE20 have been formulated to create awareness and actions of spinal disorders and ailments. They are:

- (i) Educating all levels of healthcare practitioners in the global community on appropriate evidence-based spine care.
- (ii) Educating spine patients and their families and communities by providing high-quality adapted educational materials.
- (iii) Enhancing local support and economic conditions for spine practitioners by partnering good spine health policies within health ministries and governmental programs across the globe.
- (iv) Improving global research funding for spine care (including public health, prevention, treatment alternatives and prevention of disability from spinal disorders).
- (v) Serving as a resource for governmental agencies and G20 Sherpas for establishing improved access and spinal care globally and within each Party's home country using an extensive global network of spine societies.
- (vi) Serving as an advocacy group globally and nationally through this identified SPINE20 initiatives.
- (vii) Improving access to spine care and spine specialists globally through advocacy within the global community and within the Societies' home countries.
- (viii) Establishing a minimum standard for training of care and prevention of spinal disorders globally for all those who treat spine patients, including nurses, chiropractors, physical therapists, osteopaths, exercise physiologists, general



**Figure 1.** The SPINE20 organization as an advocacy group.

exercise physiologists, general practitioners, surgeons, and other spine specialists at the highest levels

The goals of SPINE20 are global and important. It is estimated that about half a billion people suffer from disability and loss of function only from common low back pain, this number does not take into account spinal deformities, spinal cord injuries, and other ailments. The cost of low back pain treatment alone reaches for the 10 billion GBP and 134 billion US\$ (4) not counting the loss of productivity. SPINE20 believes that creating awareness and a global community to foster decision-makers will make an impact. By working together in a global community, SPINE20 can improve the function and productivity of people with spine ailments and decrease the cost, two important concepts for G20.

The goals and interventions must be adapted to cultural differences, the need may vary in different countries and should be based on epidemiological, care, and cost studies.

## 5. SPINE20 Organization

The SPINE20 is a very stable growing organization. It was founded in 2019 by the four founding societies – the Saudi Spine Society (SSS), the EUROSPINE, the German Spine Society (DWG), and the North American Spine Society (NASS). The following Societies that joined are the – the Italian Spine Society (SICV & GIS; Host 2021), the Indonesian Spine Society (ISS; Host 2022), the Association of Spinal Surgeons of India (ASSI; Host 2023), and the Japanese Society for Spine Surgery and Related Research (JSSR), that is the chair of the Partnership Advisory Board (PAB). The Brazilian Spine Association (BSS; Host 2024) will join the Executive Board as an incoming partner and replace Italy. The founding documents are made by legal councils, approved by the SPINE20 Executive Board. The committees (see above) are running over few years and the taskforces are appointed each year for the country assigned by G20 organization. The host for SPINE20 works closely with the G20 Sherpa to increase awareness of spine disorders for the G20 group and beyond. This is novel and needs

attention as SPINE20 is educating the Sherpas and G20 group, who has many other global problems in this increasingly complex world.

## 6. The Future of SPINE20

Spine Societies around the world have been incredibly supportive of SPINE20. The creation of the SPINE20 Partnership Societies Advisory Board will allow all Spine Societies to apply for membership (<https://spine20.org/event/partner-society-application/>). The SPINE20 Executive Board is very efficient and has accomplished all requirements to today.

All committees and taskforces have been working extremely hard to make SPINE20 a success that it is. SPINE20 will become a global society and the future may indicate the interest to join from more global spine societies and societies interested in spine care, prevention, access to care, and evidence-based care and implementation.

SPINE20 is a young organization supported by spine societies around the world. Societies interested in spine ailments are equally welcome

to join. All societies must be approved by the PAB. The criteria for joining SPINE20 can be found at <https://spine20.org/event/partner-society-application/>.

SPINE20 as an advocacy group is inclusive to reflect the many care providers, patients, basic scientists, researchers, economists, policymakers, and others.

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