



By Trevor D. Bardarson, PT, OCS

Delayed Return to Work and Waddell's Nonorganic Signs

In the 1980 March/April issue of *SPINE* magazine, Gordon Waddell (pronounced waddle), John McCulloch, Ed Kummell and Robert Verner published, *Nonorganic Physical Signs in Low Back Pain*. These signs collectively became known as the “Waddell Signs.” The purpose of the study was to design a set of standardized clinical tests that would allow the health care practitioner to quickly identify patients requiring a more detailed psychosocial assessment.

The Waddell tests are standardized and can be performed in a short period of time. They allow the examiner to screen the patient to determine if psychosocial factors may be influencing their behavior. They have been found to be valuable in predicting the outcome of treatment. Dr. McCulloch based his assessment on nonorganic signs and found them to be useful in predicting outcomes in an invasive procedure for prolapsed intervertebral discs. What was the result? Individuals with the same indication for the procedure—Negative Waddell signs—74% success rate. Positive Waddell signs 11% success rate.

As a result, it is critical that Waddell signs are reviewed and reported upon during the FCE process (as well as during routine physical therapy). The presence of positive Waddell signs indicate a strong psychosocial component (i.e. non-physical component) to the individual's reports of pain and disability and suggest a probable poor outcome if only the physical components are addressed. Some examples of psychosocial issues can be secondary gain, dissatisfaction with the work environment, fear avoidance, drug seeking, and many others.

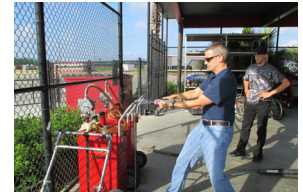
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Dr. Bunch is founder and CEO of ISR Institute. He is a nationally renowned professional speaker, author and consultant on the topics of wellness, ergonomics, injury prevention and injury management.



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Trevor is a Board Certified Orthopedic Specialist and Certified Behavioral Based Ergonomic Specialist. He is also Certified in Mechanical Diagnosis and Therapy of the Spine by the McKenzie Institute USA, is a Certified Strength and Conditioning Specialist, and is currently the Training Director for the Worksaver FCE Protocol. Mr. Bardarson is also the Vice President of Clinical Operations for Industrial Safety and Rehabilitation Institute and Clinic Director/Partner of ISR Physical Therapy of Houma, LLC.



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Marc completed his Masters of Physical Therapy at Emory University in 2001. He has had the opportunity since his graduation to work with a variety of orthopedic conditions and is experienced in FCEs, work conditioning, sports injuries as well as back and neck injuries.