



# theVoice

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## INSIGHT Guest Perspective



### Surgical advancements = more productive workers Minimally invasive surgery

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The numbers are compelling – back pain is one of the leading causes of missed work days. According to the American Academy of Orthopaedic Surgeons, more than 93 million work days are lost every year due to back pain, resulting in \$5 billion in health care costs.

As a surgeon, I recognize the need for patients to get their lives back and return to work as soon as possible following surgery. And I realize the importance for employers to have their employees in the most productive shape possible. The good news is that advancements in surgical procedures are helping to do that. In the past 10 years, there has been an evolution in spine surgery that is helping to decrease healthcare costs and increase productivity.

Historically speaking, people have avoided neck and back surgery at all costs because of the traditional and popular opinion that it is a painful and risky surgery with a long recovery time. While there are some complex cases requiring extensive spinal reconstruction, much of spine surgery has evolved over the years, such that new surgical techniques and technologies have allowed us to perform more minimally invasive procedures, often on an outpatient basis.

Despite these advances, it must be emphasized that every successful treatment plan hinges on the making an accurate diagnosis, which can be challenging with spinal disorders. The majority of spinal conditions can be managed non-operatively, and patients should be afforded every opportunity to do so. Even a small surgery should be left as a last resort. However, many patients find it comforting to know that when they have had enough, surgery provides an effective solution.

As an employer, some of your staff may be struggling with back and neck issues and trying to deal with it without seeking spine surgery because they fear for their jobs and cannot afford the time

off. The result is many sleepless nights and a loss of focus at work – potentially leading to an increase in sick days. While employees are dealing with the pain, employers are struggling with the loss incurred to their bottom line.

#### Containing costs

Minimally invasive outpatient surgery has become an attractive option, typically involving smaller incisions (often ½-inch long, or smaller than the patient's fingernail), less pain, less recovery time, and therefore, less overall expense. We all are well aware of rising health care costs. Minimizing hospitalizations help to contain these costs. Furthermore, decreasing a patient's time off from work helps to minimize the loss in productivity and strain on family or support systems. Many patients will only take one to two days off from work after minimally invasive surgery, especially if they have a desk job, are self-employed or extremely motivated. It's a win for everyone involved.

So in our current economic and health care environment, there appears to be a convergence of needs. Employers and employees alike are prioritizing cost-effective solutions that require minimal recovery time with maximal benefit. Employers should take steps to educate their employees about physicians and facilities that offer minimally invasive options. The extra effort to obtain the best available care can pay dividends in the long run.

*Dr. Michael Roh is a fellowship-trained spine surgeon at Rockford Spine Center. He performs many minimally-invasive techniques and is considered a regional expert on these types of surgery.*

*The views expressed are those of Dr. Roh's and do not necessarily represent those of the Rockford Chamber of Commerce.*

## Common Back Surgery Myths

**Myth:** Back surgery is done for back pain.

**Fact:** Most back surgery actually is done for cases of intense and excruciating leg pain, numbness, weakness or pain that limits one's quality of life.

**Myth:** You should never let anyone operate on your back.

**Fact:** Spinal care has evolved through the years and outcomes are very positive when the proper diagnosis is made — paired with the appropriate treatment. Check that the surgeon you choose is fellowship trained in spine surgery.

**Myth:** Back surgery requires a long and painful recovery.

**Fact:** Many back surgeries now can be done using minimally invasive techniques. With a smaller incision, surgeries often are outpatient with less pain and a shorter recovery time.

**Myth:** Back surgery is only done by neurologists or neurosurgeons.

**Fact:** Neurosurgeons can treat spinal conditions, but they also treat aneurysms and brain tumors. Orthopedic spine surgeons specialize in the treatment of the spine and spend 100 percent of their time focused on the spine.