

Do these results apply to the ‘intervention naive’ patient?

Benjamin John Floyd Dean

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I read the study by Albert et al. [1] with great interest and the authors must be commended for their excellent piece of work. I do, however, feel there is a danger in applying these results to all patients with chronic low back pain and vertebral bone oedema (Modic type 1 changes). The reason for this is that around 50 % of the study patients had had previous disc herniation surgery and the results may not apply to ‘intervention naive’ spine. There is also little solid evidence that *Propionibacterium acnes* (*P. acnes*) is likely to be highly prevalent in the ‘intervention naive’ patient who has received neither local injections nor surgery. The earlier study by Albert et al. [2] links *P. acnes* with Modic changes, but does not mention how many patients had had previous local injections other than an epidural. It is also arguable that other work linking *P. acnes* with sciatica [3] and shoulder osteoarthritis [4] may well have been confounded by previous injections. I would therefore urge caution before applying these results to the ‘intervention naive’ patient.

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Conflict of interest None declared.

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B. J. F. Dean (✉)
Nuffield Department of Orthopaedics, Rheumatology and
Musculoskeletal Sciences (NDORMS), Botnar Research Centre,
Institute of Musculoskeletal Sciences, Nuffield Orthopaedic
Centre, Windmill Road, Oxford OX3 7LD, UK
e-mail: bendean1979@gmail.com