

DRAFT – not for distribution. Review and reply with any suggestions for improvement by January 6, 2026

Section on Interdisciplinary Spine Care

Mission Statement

The **Section on Interdisciplinary Spine Care** is dedicated to interdisciplinary spine care by advancing education and collaboration across the healthcare professions involved in spine care. The Section supports high-quality education, fosters interprofessional engagement, and promotes models of care that improve outcomes before, during, and after surgical intervention. The section focuses on multidisciplinary and interprofessional best practices and evidence-based care to enhance diagnosis, treatment, and overall patient outcomes. Our section strives to advance the quality, value, and patient-centered nature of spine care by providing opportunities for extensive interdisciplinary care collaboration and education.

What is Interdisciplinary Spine Care?

Interdisciplinary spine care is defined as an approach to spine care, in which a team of healthcare professionals collaborates to develop and implement a comprehensive treatment plan for spine conditions. This integrated model involves collaboration among team members, including surgeons, pain management specialists, neurologists, nurses, physical therapists, and other health professionals, to provide a full spectrum of spine care. The goal is to use a combined perspective to ensure the most effective, individualized treatment and achieve the best possible outcome for the patient.

Interdisciplinary spine care is essential because it unites the strengths, perspectives, and problem-solving skills of multiple health professions to address patient needs more completely and effectively. Spine surgery is at the heart of spine care, but does not exist in isolation. Interdisciplinary care helps break down silos, resulting in more accurate and responsive care plans that address the complexities of real-world health issues. This collaborative approach reduces care gaps, minimizes errors, and ensures patients receive coordinated, evidence-based support rather than fragmented services. Ultimately, interdisciplinary care elevates both quality and efficiency, leading to better outcomes and a more patient-centered healthcare experience.

Background of the Section on Interdisciplinary Spine Care

The Section on Interdisciplinary Spine Care was originally founded as the Allied Health Section, and served as a critical home for NPs, PAs, nurses, rehabilitation clinicians, and other non-surgical care providers. Over time, its scope broadened, but its core identity remained anchored in team-based spine care, non-operative and peri-operative optimization, and integrated models that improve patient outcomes before, after, and outside the operating room.

This evolution is consistent with the NASS mission and the Board-approved recommendations of the 2015 Allied Health and PhD Engagement Task Force, which emphasized the need to elevate allied health professionals and develop programming that integrates all members into the core life of NASS. While the Section's origins were in the Allied Health community, its scope has grown to reflect the realities of contemporary spine care: no single discipline operates independently, and optimal outcomes require integrated contributions from multiple providers.

The Section on Interdisciplinary Spine Care has produced highly practical, condition-focused and system-focused programming across many years, including:

- Psychologically Informed Practice (2019)
- Role of the First-Contact Practitioner (2019–2020)
- Value Models in Spine Care (2019)
- Postoperative Pain Management & Chronic Pain (2022)
- Bone Health Through the Ages (2024)
- Degenerative Cervical Myelopathy (2024–2025)
- Gait and Movement Analysis in Spine Disorders (2025)
- Innovative Service Delivery Models (2025)

Membership Composition:

The Section's 2025–2026 roster includes neurosurgeons, orthopedic surgeons, physical therapists, chiropractors, physiatrists, researchers, radiologists, physician assistants, and nurse practitioners. This breadth of representation ensures that the Section on Interdisciplinary Spine Care is uniquely positioned to address both clinical and system-level challenges in spine care. The Section on Interdisciplinary Spine Care focuses on interdisciplinary spine care across the full continuum - from first contact evaluation through rehabilitation, post-operative recovery, chronic condition management, and system-level models that influence access, outcomes, cost, and value.

Purpose:

The Section on Interdisciplinary Spine Care focuses on multidisciplinary and interprofessional best practices and evidence-based care to enhance diagnosis, treatment, and overall patient outcomes. Our section strives to advance the quality, value,

and patient-centered nature of spine care by providing opportunities for extensive interdisciplinary care collaboration and education.

The Section supports high-quality education, fosters interprofessional engagement, and promotes models of care that improve outcomes before, during, and after surgical intervention. The highlights the importance of Interdisciplinary Spine Care, which includes the following.

- Support models in which surgeons, and other health professionals work together to assess, manage, and care for the patient longitudinally.
- Emphasize best possible spine care, including prevention, conservative management, perioperative optimization, post-operative recovery, functional outcomes, and long-term value.
- Strengthen the integration of health professionals who contribute essential components of evidence-based spine care.
- Support value-based care models, outcomes measurement, system redesign, and care pathways.
- Ongoing work on spine terminology harmonization, which benefits clinicians across all specialties.
- Cross-disciplinary publications, special focus issues, and future research collaborations.
- The Section remains central to strengthening the onset-of-care pipeline by engaging early career PTs, DCs, APPs, and PhD researchers, all in line with NASS' 2015 Board directives.

Scope of Work

The Section's activities and programming reflect a consistent and coherent focus on **interdisciplinary spine care**, including:

- first-contact evaluation and triage
- conservative and non-operative management
- peri-operative optimization
- outcomes, function, and return-to-activity pathways
- post-operative rehabilitation
- care coordination and interdisciplinary communication
- spine terminology standardization
- care models and delivery innovations
- evidence synthesis and special focus publications
- NP/PA/APP programming, both historical and renewed
- collaborations with external societies (e.g., APTA)

Relationship to the NASS Strategic Mission

As NASS re-examines its identity, particularly the extent to which it positions itself as primarily surgical rather than fully multidisciplinary, the Section cautions against a shift that would inadvertently narrow the Society's value proposition.

If NASS were to move toward a "strictly surgical" orientation, the downstream effects would be significant:

- diminished engagement from other health professions
- reduced early-career pipeline development
- weakened collaboration across specialties
- loss of programming addressing pre-operative optimization and post-operative outcomes
- reduced ability to address the majority of spine care delivered outside of surgery
- erosion of NASS's long-held identity as the leading multidisciplinary home for spine care

The Section recognizes that surgical practice is central to NASS and that many innovations, technologies, and revenue streams originate in surgical fields. However, modern surgical excellence depends on the areas this Section leads: first-contact diagnosis, shared imaging language, peri-operative readiness, post-operative rehabilitation, chronic pain prevention, and interprofessional communication. These are not peripheral issues; they influence outcomes as directly as surgical technique.

The Section on Interdisciplinary Spine Care mission aligns perfectly with NASS's strategic future, supporting a model in which surgical and non-surgical practices work together to strengthen each other rather than compete for identity space.

Alignment With NASS Identity and Strategic Future

Interdisciplinary spine care is essential to the future of spine care:

- Modern spine care is inherently team-based,
- Outcomes depend on multiple components including conservative management, perioperative optimization, rehabilitation, and coordinated follow-up,
- Payment models increasingly evaluate the entire care episode, not only a procedure,
- NASS' unique strength, compared to peer organizations, is its multidisciplinary identity.

Clarification of the Section's Name

The Section received feedback that the name "Interdisciplinary Spine Care" may be misunderstood. While the name accurately reflects the Section's inclusive membership and team-based focus, the purpose of the section is greater than the disciplines of the

section members. The primary focus is on the concept of *interdisciplinary spine care*. The section remains open to discussions about terminology that may:

- better communicate the Section’s emphasis on interdisciplinary and collaborative spine care,
- expand its contributions to peri-operative and conservative care,
- clarify the section’s distinction from other non-operative sections, and
- align with NASS’s long-term strategic direction.

The Section recommends that if a name change were to be considered, to avoid narrowing the Section to a single profession or subset; avoid terms such as “non-operative,” which do not represent the Section’s membership or mission; preserve inclusion of operative voices and leadership; and accurately identify the Section’s system-of-care orientation; maintain the core focus of interdisciplinary care. The Section is committed to working with the Board to explore options that enhance clarity while maintaining core values and alignment with NASS’s mission.