

Policy re Screening

Detection of Scoliosis in Schoolgirls

PREAMBLE. The rationale for screening adolescent schoolgirls for scoliosis (sideways curvature of the spine) is based on the established criteria that early detection and treatment, where indicated, result in better long-term outcomes. Most importantly, in the early stages of curve development there are no symptoms to alert a girl or her parents. **Hence the way to detect a curve is to look for it.** Scoliosis is not a rare condition and approximately 2.5 percent of girls in the age range of 10-12 years (during the growth spurt) are at risk of developing a significant scoliosis (>20 degrees).

In the past, screening was performed to a variable extent in government and non-government schools in Australia but these programs have largely been abandoned. School screening, when properly performed, is an efficient method of detection. It should be a two-tiered process with the presence of a curve being confirmed by a medical practitioner before the parents are notified. Unnecessary notification and subsequent specialist referral are to be avoided.

The above-described changes in the health care system in Australia indicated that a new detection strategy was needed. This need led to the development of the National Self-Detection Program for Scoliosis by the Spine Society of Australia. The aims of this program are:

- to increase public awareness of the condition
- to encourage girls aged 10 and 12 to self-assess for the condition
- and to have family doctors assume care of minor curvatures (curves <20 degrees).

The ready access to the internet has enabled a more practical approach to the question of detection.

Each year in Spring we ask that school Principals of all government and non-government girls' schools download the Scoliosis Detection Fact Sheet from www.scoliosis-australia.org and distribute it to girls in Years 5 and 7 (10 and 12 years of age in most states and territories). This is the age range when scoliosis first appears.

The policy is:

- **The National Self-Detection Program for Scoliosis (NSDPS) is recommended for girls in Years 5 and 7 (10 and 12 years of age) by the Spine Society of Australia as a sound, preventative health measure. The program is endorsed by the Paediatrics and Child Health Division of the Royal Australasian College of Physicians.**
- **There is no case for routine screening of adolescent boys for scoliosis.**
- **No case exists for the screening of adolescent boys and girls for any other spinal disorders.**
- **The conduct of two-tiered school screening is supported where such programs still exist.**