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As time goes by, we seek to improve our understanding and explanations of the things we see every day in practice. One area that was recently brought into focus for me was differentiating between bilateral pain and pain that is experienced on both sides of the body. I believe this distinction was made at a recent GMI seminar, and the instructor was Dr. Denny O'Hara.

Dr. O'Hara explained that truly bilateral symptoms come on at the same time and are roughly equally intense. When we are able to help a patient with this type of complaint, we might expect to find pressure on the spinal cord, a posterior sacral segment, etc.

Pain on both sides of the body might look like a case of bilateral numbness in the hands, but when you question farther, you learn that it started in the right hand and eventually developed in the left. It is also likely worse in the right hand.

This topic reminded me of Pfluger's Laws, which I first learned about in the book, ***The Neurodynamics of the Vertebral Subluxation***, by A.E. Homewood. (If you haven't read this book, I'd highly recommend it. You can find it on Amazon. Remember to use Amazon Smile!)

There are actually 5 parts to Pfluger's Laws, and they describe how the body responds to sensory stimuli that enter the cord unilaterally. For the purposes of Gonstead chiropractic, let's assume that a subluxation exists whereby irritation is produced on the right side of the disc and this signal is being carried to the sensory aspect of the cord on the right side via the recurrent meningeal nerve.

Pfluger's first law (the law of unilaterality) states that if a sensory stimulus provokes muscular contraction only on one side of the body, that contraction occurs under all circumstances and without exception on the same side of the body as the stimulus. Using the example above, this

simply means that the muscle contraction and symptoms would first appear on the right side of the patient's spine.

The second law (the law of symmetry) states that if the stimulus persists, the muscle contraction and symptoms will cross to the opposite side of the body at the same level. How often have you had a patient tell you that when they first hurt their back they felt it on the right, but now they are feeling it on both sides? This law tells us that the injury was likely on the right side.

Law number three (the law of intensity) states that the symptoms will begin to intensify on the originally injured side. This sounds to me like the person who calls you on Sunday morning saying that they woke up stiff on Tuesday but assumed it would go away. Now they can't take it anymore and want you to meet them at the office today.

The law of radiation is Pfluger's fourth law, and it states that symptoms next travel up the spine toward the head. Now the patient with lower back pain might be feeling tight across the shoulders, has a headache and their hands are falling asleep. If you had gotten to it a little earlier, it may have only spread upward a few segments. This law suggests that the problem is likely toward the bottom of where the symptoms started.

The last law is the law of generalization. If the stimulus is strong enough and lasts long enough, it will propagate through the medulla oblongata and cause general muscle contractions throughout the body. Without correction, this can start a chronic pain cycle and cause other systemic problems which can become much more difficult to manage.

I think it is common practice to encourage your patients to seek care sooner than later following an injury or flare-up. Pfluger's laws give us an explanation of why that is good advice. They also help point us toward a major subluxation when symptoms and findings may seem to be spreading everywhere. And in following Dr. Gonstead's words, once we find the problem, we can correct it and leave it alone! ♦

