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## Physicians' Medical/Legal Consultants of Texas, LLC

Physicians Helping Attorneys Helping People™  
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### Newsletter

July 2022

#### **This Month's Question:**

Is sciatica just a symptom after injury or possibly something more?

#### **PMLCtex Answer**

In a recent slip and fall case, sciatica was mentioned as one symptom among several. However, several care providers missed the not-so-subtle clues of "piriformis syndrome". We identified the issue, thereby increasing case value. Our attorney client thanked us for making his case a "slam-dunk" slip-and-fall case netting a surprisingly higher than usual settlement.

#### **PIRIFORMIS SYNDROME**

Slip and fall injuries frequently involve impact to the hip and or buttock. In addition, rotational forces at the hip can be sudden, forceful and under circumstances where the limb is fixed and unable to move in concert with muscle contraction. Sciatica is a fairly common resulting complaint in such cases. There are several commonly seen causes (traumatic and non-traumatic) of sciatica. Piriformis dysfunction as a cause is not the most

common and thus can be missed as a diagnosis. So, what are sciatica and piriformis syndrome and why are they important to understand?

Sciatica is pain and/or numbness in the sciatic nerve distribution. This means that discomfort may occur anywhere along the pathway served by this nerve. So, pain and/or numbness anywhere from the buttock and down the back or side of the leg may occur. Discomfort may also involve the foot and can be severe. Muscle weakness may also occur. It is important to note that discomfort and/or weakness may occur anywhere along the affected pathway. Sciatic irritation may affect one area of distribution differently than another. Some parts of the pathway may be spared. So, one may experience pain in one area; numbness in another and another area may be spared.

The most commonly recognized causes of sciatica are anatomical; those being disc protrusion, bone spur formation or spinal stenosis (narrowing of the spinal canal). After a slip and fall, the absence of these (or similar) anatomical findings may mean that the complaint of sciatica will be underappreciated or even considered exaggeration or malingering. While a less common cause, soft tissue injury to the piriformis muscle (or other muscles) can easily cause sciatic symptoms, hence the term “piriformis syndrome”. The piriformis muscle was simply the first one identified to affect sciatic nerve function when injured.

The piriformis muscle is top-most of four muscles in the area through which the sciatic nerve travels. These four muscles in the buttocks are somewhat layered like slats in window blinds. The sciatic nerve most commonly passes under the first “slat” which is the piriformis muscle and over the next muscle. There is a fair amount of variation in all of this “layering”, but the relationship between muscle injury and nerve irritation stays the same.

External rotation of the hip results in the foot rotated out while standing. Being an external rotator of the hip, the piriformis can be strained or torn if forced into external rotation too quickly or if forced to contract when the limb cannot move the way it should (into external rotation). This is akin to one attempting to lift a suitcase that is much heavier than anticipated. Muscle strain or even tearing may result.

Recent advances in imaging and neuromuscular testing created hopes that diagnostic criteria for piriformis syndrome would emerge. So far, such techniques have been found more useful to exclude other causes rather than pinpoint a specific muscular pathology. So, the approach to diagnosis and treatment is unchanged.

Symptoms serve as an excellent guide. Most affected individuals will note some combination of hip pain, buttock pain and sciatica. Women may also complain of painful intercourse. Pain is often worsened by prolonged sitting or when arising from a seated position. There is also frequently pain with palpation over the buttock and/or point of the hip. Any combination of the above may signal the existence of piriformis syndrome.

Treatment involves multiple common physical therapy modalities such as moist heat, stretching, electrical stimulation and massage and are commonly useful. Treatment is usually successful. However, left unidentified, this condition may not get the diagnostic and therapeutic attention it deserves.

Piriformis syndrome is important to identify as it represents a specific clinical diagnosis (and an additional damage in the case) as opposed to simply being hidden in a list of symptoms of “soft tissue injury” as often occurs. Once treated, it may still cause discomfort for months to years.

Piriformis syndrome is another example of where the Medical/Legal Consultant can increase case value, save attorney time and help obtain improved medical care for the injured client as we were able to do in this case.

## **Let Us Know How We Can Help You**

### Medical Summary Reports

- Help with strategies to promote medical theories; find overlooked diagnoses

- Clarify what medical reports & records mean and, just as important, what they don't mean
- Attendance at IME's
- Reviews of IME Reports
- Independent Record Reviews
- Assessment of case validity regarding medical issues
- Referral to appropriate expert medical witnesses
- Medical Research
- Facilitation of communication with clients, families, professionals and service & governmental agencies
- Case Coordination
- Facilitation of communication with treating doctors
- Table-side deposition assistance or deposition question preparation

As you know, **we have purposefully kept our fees at a fraction of the usual expert witness fees**, allowing you the opportunity to have us review your cases early in your representation while controlling your expenses.

CONTACT US for information or fee schedule.

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**P.S. ---Please pass this newsletter along to a colleague!**