



Arachnoiditis Bulletin 1 Revised March-2018

EXPLANATIONS AND DEFINITIONS YOU MUST KNOW

SPINAL CANAL: The spinal canal consists of 4 components: (1) spinal cord; (2) nerve roots; (3) covering or lining; and (4) fluid. Think of the spinal canal as a closed pipe filled with structures bathed in fluid.

NERVE ROOTS: The actual spinal cord runs from the brain down to about the lumbar area. Below the spinal cord hangs about 2 dozen string-like structures called nerve roots. Collectively they are called the cauda equina. The nerve roots can become damaged, inflamed, clump together, and stick or adhere by adhesions to the arachnoid layer of the spinal canal cover. When sticking and adhesions occur, the term adhesive arachnoiditis is applied. If only enlargement, displacement, and clumping of nerve roots is seen on an MRI, the term “cauda equina syndrome” may be applied. Symptoms are similar to AA.

ARACHNOID: The cover or lining of the spinal cord is scientifically called the thecal sac or meninges. The inner layer is called the “Pia Mater”. It is extremely thin and fragile. The outer layer is the dura which is thick and firm. The arachnoid is the middle layer. It contains blood vessels and inflammatory cells and can become inflamed if irritated or damaged.

ARACHNOIDITIS: ARC is inflammation of the arachnoid layer of the spinal canal covering or lining which can be caused by trauma, infection, toxins, or friction between the covering and spinal cord or nerve roots. (ICD-10, G03.9) ARC most commonly develops in the lumbar spine area, but it also occurs in the cervical (neck) spine area.

ADHESIVE ARACHNOIDITIS (AA): This condition is present when there are adhesions between the arachnoid layer and the nerve roots in the cauda equina. Adhesions are seen on contrast magnetic resonance imaging (MRI). (ICD-10, G03.9)

TARLOV CYSTS: A cyst or outpouching of a spinal nerve root. (ICD-10, G96.19) They are often called “perineural” cysts. Tarlov cysts are frequently associated with ARC.

**ARC-Plain Arachnoiditis
AA-Adhesive Arachnoiditis**