



THE NAMING PLUS A BRIEF HISTORY OF ARACHNOIDITIS

- The word Arachnoid refers to a spider's web.
- The arachnoid is the second layer of the meninges, or neuraxis, the 3 protective layers covering the spinal cord. Web-like, it is located in the middle, between the dura and pia mater, layers.
- The arachnoid layer is a fine, fragile, and cobweb-like tissue. When the arachnoid becomes inflamed this condition is known as the disease "arachnoiditis".
- The exact year the disease, "arachnoiditis", was named is uncertain, however, the 1873 "Comprehensive Medical Dictionary", published by J.B. Lippincott & Co., did include this definition of arachnoiditis: "A faulty term, denoting inflammation of the arachnoid membrane".
- In 1869 the famous neurologist, Dr. Charcot and his colleague first described a syndrome we now call the disease, arachnoiditis. The causes of the disease were infections, primarily tuberculosis and syphilis.
- Dr. Addison, the physician who discovered adrenal failure, published his findings on 11 autopsied cases in 1855. Two cases had severe pain, atrophied adrenals and calcium deposits and fluid around the arachnoid layer, suggesting that long-standing, end-stage arachnoiditis was a likely cause of pain and adrenal failure.
- The first recorded attempt to treat arachnoiditis was probably in 1781 when Dr. John Fothergill, a renowned British physician, treated a patient with severe back and sciatic pain who had other symptoms compatible with arachnoiditis (ARC). Opioids had failed to relieve his patient's pain, but he obtained positive results with a mercury concoction called calomel.
- Between 1930 and 1990 pantopaque and other oil-soluble dyes were infused into the spinal canal for diagnostic (myelogram) purposes. A small percentage of these patients developed ARC and other neurologic complications.
- Magnetic Resonance Imaging (MRI) replaced oil-based dyes in the late 1980's, and ARC subsequently became a rare, unappreciated disease.
- Beginning around 2000 an extended life span, with increasing rates of chronic painful spinal conditions such as herniated discs and arthritis plus the increasing use of invasive medical interventions and surgeries to treat them, began fueling an increase in the incidence and prevalence of ARC that continues to this day.