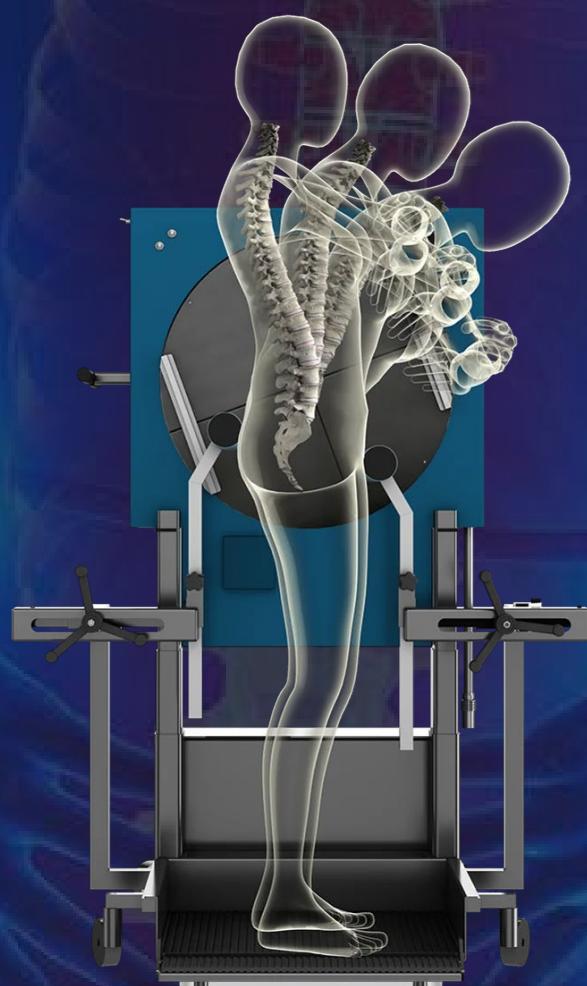


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THE ROLE OF LIFE CARE PLANNING & VMA IN SPINAL LIGAMENT INJURY CASES

An Interview with Dr. Stephen Barnett, DC, CLCP
Hosted by Dr. Scott Tauber, Chief Clinical Advisor





Introduction

Dr. Scott Tauber:

Welcome everyone, my name is Scott Tauber, DC, and I am the Chief Clinical Advisor for the Driving Force Company.

Today we're going to talk about a critical but often misunderstood piece of Personal Injury cases: **life care planning**. Many providers and attorneys aren't fully aware of how life care plans protect patients and strengthen cases. And when spinal ligament injuries are involved, the importance of life care planning becomes undeniable.

To explore this subject, I'm excited to have **Dr. Stephen Barnett**. Dr. Barnett has more than 46 years of clinical experience, including decades in private practice, years as a hospital administrator at Emory in Atlanta, Georgia and now as a certified life care planner. He has authored over 300 life care plans, been deposed more than 70 times, and currently leads a national team of life care planners at LCP Pro.

Dr. Barnett, thank you so much for being here.

Dr. Barnett's Background

Dr. Stephen Barnett:

Thank you, Scott, it's a pleasure to be here. As you mentioned, I practiced Chiropractic for about 30 years, running a large clinic in Stone Mountain, Georgia. When I retired from private practice, I was brought on at Emory as a hospital administrator, where I learned an incredible amount about managing complex cases and working alongside neurosurgeons and other specialists.

During COVID, I transitioned into life care planning. After completing a 120-hour certification course and passing the national exam,



I began developing plans that predict and outline a patient's medical and financial needs for the rest of their life expectancy. Since then, I've authored more than 300 plans and reviewed over 3,000 cases.

"A life care plan is the only document that projects the future needs and costs of a Personal Injury patient."

– Dr. Barnett

What is a Life Care Plan?

Dr. Scott Tauber:

Let's start with the basics. What exactly is a life care plan, and why is it so important in Personal Injury cases?

Dr. Stephen Barnett:

A life care plan is a **dynamic document**, meaning it changes over time as the patient's needs change. Its purpose is to outline the **future medical care and associated costs** for a patient throughout their statistical life expectancy.

This includes everything from ongoing therapies, diagnostic imaging, and pain management to practical needs like home health support or even yard maintenance if the patient can no longer do those tasks. It's all based on research and meta-analysis, which means every projection is backed by data.

Without a life care plan, cases are often settled only on "specials," meaning current medical bills. That ignores the long-term costs, which can be enormous in spinal injury cases.

Why Documentation Matters

Dr. Scott Tauber:

In previous discussions you've mentioned that documentation is the foundation of a good life care plan. What do providers and attorneys need to understand about medical records?

Dr. Stephen Barnett:

Documentation is absolutely critical. Records should tell a story: what the patient has, what has been done so far, and what the treatment plan is moving forward. Unfortunately, many records stop at diagnosis and treatment-to-date. That's like reading 23 chapters of a 24-chapter book; you don't know how the story ends.

Pain management is a good example. Procedures like radiofrequency ablations (RFAs) or injections are not one-time solutions. They provide relief for six to twelve months, then need to be repeated. If that interval isn't documented, insurers and attorneys may assume the patient is fine when, in reality, the need is ongoing and permanent.



“Your medical records must project forward. Without that, you’re not telling the full story of the patient’s injury.”

– Dr. Barnett

The Most Common Spinal Injury in Auto Accidents

Dr. Scott Tauber:

What injuries most often require a life care plan?

Dr. Stephen Barnett:

The most common, by far, are **facet ligament injuries**. These capsule ligaments are small and fragile, and they stretch long before a disc does. Once injured, they heal poorly and often with scar tissue that leaves the spinal segment unstable.

This instability leads to irritation, early osteoarthritis, and, in many cases, the need for future surgical intervention. If a disc injury shows up on MRI, you can assume the ligaments were already damaged first. That's why ligament injuries are the true starting point of chronic spinal problems after trauma.

Cervical Fusions & Adjacent Segment Disease

Dr. Scott Tauber:

Another area you've spoken about is adjacent segment disease after cervical fusions. Can you explain why attorneys and providers need to be aware of this?

Dr. Stephen Barnett:

Absolutely. When one level of the spine is fused, the levels above and below are forced to take on more motion. Over time, this leads to degeneration and instability, what we call adjacent segment disease (ASD).

The research is clear: the risk of ASD increases **3% every year after surgery**. After 10 years, the risk is around 30%. After 20 years, it's more than 50%. For multi-level fusions, the risk is even higher.

If an attorney settles a case without including the costs of monitoring and treating ASD, they're doing their client a serious disservice. And for providers, it's important to understand that these patients will need ongoing surveillance even if they feel better temporarily.

"Adjacent segment disease is not a possibility - it's a statistical certainty."

– Dr. Barnett

VMA: Objectifying Spinal Instability

Dr. Scott Tauber:

That brings us to Vertebral Motion Analysis (VMA). How does this technology change the way we as providers evaluate spinal ligament injuries?

Dr. Stephen Barnett:

Traditional tools like flexion-extension X-rays and MRI can give clues, but they don't quantify instability well.



VMA is different. It measures how each spinal segment moves in real time, providing objective, reproducible numbers on both translation and angulation.

That's incredibly powerful for both providers and attorneys. Clinically, it helps doctors identify injuries that might otherwise be missed and guides treatment decisions. Legally, it provides the objective evidence courts and insurers require. Instead of subjective opinions, you have hard data.

“VMA transforms invisible ligament injuries into undeniable evidence.”

– Dr. Barnett



Life Care Plans + VMA = Comprehensive Case Protection

Dr. Scott Tauber:

So when you combine life care planning with VMA, what do you get?

Dr. Stephen Barnett:

You get a comprehensive protection system for both the patient and the case. VMA shows **what's wrong today** by documenting the instability. The life care plan shows **what that means for tomorrow** by projecting care and costs.

Together, they ensure patients receive the care they need, providers have defensible treatment plans, and attorneys can secure settlements that reflect the true value of the case.



Closing & Contact

Dr. Scott Tauber:

This has been a fantastic discussion, Dr. Barnett. Thank you for sharing your expertise. Before we wrap up, how can people reach you if they'd like to learn more?

Dr. Stephen Barnett:

The best way is through **LCP Pro**. We're a national group of life care planners who provide services in all 50 states. We offer a free initial record review to see if a case is a good candidate for a life care plan.

✉ intake@lcppro.com

📞 770-355-2997

🌐 www.lcppro.com

Dr. Scott Tauber:

Thank you again, Dr. Barnett. If you're a provider, remember: your documentation is the backbone of both patient care and case value.

If you're an attorney, never settle without understanding the lifelong impact of spinal ligament injuries.

And for both, remember — **VMA and life care planning together create the strongest foundation for protecting patients and clients.**

