Key Questions
Lumbar Fusion & Discography

Background:
An evaluation of the strength of evidence for the safety and efficacy of lumbar fusion for the treatment of degenerative disc disease (DDD) associated with chronic low back pain.

Key Questions:
Part I – Lumbar fusion surgery and nonsurgical treatments for chronic lumbar back pain
  1) Does lumbar fusion surgery reduce pain and improve functional status/quality of life more effectively than nonsurgical treatments?
  2) What are the rates of adverse events (perioperative, long-term events, and reoperations) for lumbar fusion surgery and nonsurgical treatments?
  3) What patient characteristics (i.e., workers’ compensation population, patients with chronic pain, psychological distress, and age-groups) are associated with differences in the benefits and adverse events of lumbar fusion surgery?

Part II – Role of discography prior to lumbar fusion surgery
  1) In patients being considered for lumbar fusion surgery, what is the reliability of discography?
     a. Test-retest reliability
     b. Inter-reader reliability
  2) In patients undergoing lumbar fusion surgery, do the results of pre-surgical discography predict the degree of pain reduction or improvement in functional status/quality of life after lumbar fusion surgery?
  3) In patients being considered for lumbar fusion surgery, do patients who receive discography that influences the treatment choice have better treatment outcomes than patients who do not receive discography?