

## Low back pain and fever

*François Mottu*

October 1996: A 62-year-old man consults for a fever (39 °C) with low abdominal pain, dysuria and pollakisuria.

What clinical examination do you do, what is your diagnosis and treatment?

Rectal examination shows an enlarged and painful prostate. Thinking of a prostatitis, I prescribe co-trimoxazole (Bactrim®) for 2 weeks. 6 weeks later, an urine exam is normal.

Late december 1996: The patient complains of low back pain with fever (38,2 °C). Painful muscle contraction can be felt and there is an elective pain on pressure at L4-L5. I prescribe him anti-inflammatory drugs for 4 days.

2 days later, because the back pain increases, the patient decides to go to the hospital. There, the blood examination shows: CRP 120, leucocytes 12 000/mm<sup>3</sup>.

What diagnosis did I miss?

What is the next step?

The diagnosis was infectious spondylitis L4-L5 and L2-L3. The diagnostic test was a MRI of the lumbar spine, and a local puncture shows the same *E. coli* as the one of the prostatitis.

Message: Lumbar elective pain and fever should stimulate careful follow-up, and not rarely investigations!