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Antti Malmivaara completed his MD at the University of Helsinki in 1977. After working as a general practitioner for some years, he specialized in physiatics in 1986. In 1987, he completed his thesis, which was on pathoanatomy and radiology of the spine.

Since the beginning of 1990s, he has been active in clinical research for low back pain and has undertaken several randomized controlled trials and Cochrane reviews in the field. Perhaps his most influential paper compared the effectiveness of bed rest versus ordinary activity for acute low back pain. It was published in the New England Journal of Medicine 1995, showing ordinary activity superior to the other alternatives. Other randomized trials and systematic reviews include effectiveness and cost-effectiveness of orthopaedic surgery and rehabilitation and lifestyle interventions for back pain and other musculoskeletal disorders. Antti has also served as the Chairman of the Task Force for Finnish Current Care Guidelines for Low Back Disorders since 1996.

Antti is currently the Senior Medical Officer and Vice-Chief at the Centre for Health and Social Economics (CHESS) at the Institute for Health and Welfare,, in Helsinki. He is also one of the editors of the Current Care Guidelines of the Finnish Medical Society Duodecim, and Scientific Advisor for the Orthon Orthopaedic Hospital, Invalid Foundation.

Current work at CHESS includes cost-effectiveness research based on nationwide registries in Finland, and also a variety of topics on clinical effectiveness and cost-effectiveness research in the field of musculoskeletal disorders, rehabilitation, orthopaedic surgery vascular surgery, bariatric surgery, cardiology and emergency medicine. Cochrane reviews and methodological work within Cochrane Collaboration form also a part of Antti's activities. He has been a member of the Cochrane Back Review Group Editorial Board since 2007.