Which spinal injury is most likely in this patient?
   a. Burst fracture
   b. Compression fracture
   c. Distraction
   d. Translocation

(See next page for answer and discussion)
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The correct answer is a distraction injury, (C). As you can see in the image above, there is a large space between vertebrae shown by the red arrow. Distraction injuries often occur in a motor vehicle collision. This is because the pelvis is fixed to the seat by the seat belt, but the upper body is much more mobile leading to possible stretching and/or breaking of ligaments of the spinal cord during sudden and violent crashes. The various types of injury above are described by the thoracolumbar injury classification and severity (TLICS) score. Vertebral injuries can be easy to miss on chest x-rays and must be carefully looked for, and further imaging is often necessary.