

Orthopaedic Connection

I Will Demystify Total Knee Replacement

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Transforming patient information into patient understanding.

Knee problems are among the most common ailments I see in the office. Not a day goes by that I don't see at least a few patients whose knee(s) hurt.

If a person has had the pain for awhile, it isn't lessening and it's hard to sleep they naturally begin to get concerned. And then they get up courage to come for an appointment.

I can say without hesitation that all of these patients are hoping they don't need a total knee replacement!

A total knee replacement is the biggest form of treatment or surgical procedure on the "menu" of treatment for knee pain and knee problems.

I like to think of treatment as a menu because that truly is what it is. I tell patients and families that if you went into a restaurant and you found out that they only had one thing on the menu it would come as a shock to most people. They would probably say "Gee don't you have anything else but a pork chop, that's not what I wanted."

When a surgeon doesn't give you any other choice but total knee replacement it is the same thing.

When I hear that story I ask what the person did when given no other choice and many have said they got up and left the office!

Another example is if you are having car trouble and the shop only offers you a new motor wouldn't you be a little suspicious that maybe something less would be a proper approach? See what I mean?

Everyone Likes Choices

Well, of course there are always choices depending on what the diagnosis is. There are many reasons for knee pain and disability. When the cause of the knee problem is pinpointed then a proper diagnosis can be reached and a plan of treatment can be suggested to the patient and family.

Proper Diagnosis

Sometimes the cause of the knee pain can be determined at the first office visit by a careful history, good exam and plain x-rays taken standing.

Sometimes the pain has been present for a long time and is worsening. In addition the knee is becoming stiffer and might give out. Sleep is becoming more difficult due to pain.

Some degree of osteoarthritis would almost always be present in a knee like that.

But there are many variations and the knee might "just hurt". That knee might require an MRI x-ray and possibly even lab tests to diagnose the problem.

Only when the correct diagnosis is made can we begin the outline what I think would be a proper course of treatment.

Arthritis so severe as to only be helped by a total knee replacement is sometimes the diagnosis, but there are innumerable lesser conditions that don't require a total knee.

It isn't necessary to go into all the various diagnoses at this point.

Medical vs. Surgical Treatment

A good way to approach this in our discussion is to consider medical treatment first which is exactly what we do in the office.

Most patients cheer up when I begin as a surgeon to talk about conservative or medical treatment before I even use the term Total Knee Replacement.

Please come back next time for me to finish Demystifying Total Knee Replacement for you. See you next week.

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Good health, good life, all the best to you.

Dr. Haverbush