

## *Orthopaedic Connection*

### **Total Knee Replacement Demystified**

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#### ***Transforming patient information into patient understanding.***

I finished class last week saying that certainly at times I see patients in the office who have what doctors call end stage arthritis of the knee.

The arthritis in those patients is really advanced. Anything less than a joint replacement would be doomed to fail. I honestly tell the patient and the family what I believe to be true.

However there can be many reasons why a total knee replacement is not right for a particular patient.

Some reasons are age and the other medical conditions that exist with the knee arthritis that would make major surgery unwise.

Even though a total knee replacement might be the most ideal treatment, if the person can't have it medical management of the arthritis still exists.

#### **Medical Treatment**

Pain relievers coupled with Physical Therapy targeting the quadriceps and hamstring muscles of the thigh are very important. Stronger muscles (if it be possible to strengthen them) always provide some relief of pain by relieving stress that exists on the painful joint.

It goes without saying that less weight can relieve pain that is present in an arthritic knee joint, but I realize that losing weight is not always possible for some patients.

#### **What Else?**

Well lots of things. If the person is not too squeamish about needles, a steroid shot is often administered. These injections can help a lot for weeks or months. Response varies from one patient to the next. Response is usually determined by how deteriorated the joint is, that is how close the bones are together and how much motion in the joint has been lost.

#### **Joint Lubrication**

Arthritic joints in addition to bone and surrounding tissue changes always have abnormal lubrication in them. It appears that the poor lubrication has a lot to do with arthritis pain.

Enter *viscosupplementation*, a 50 cent word for injecting a substance into the joint which can help the joint make its own better lubrication which can relieve pain. A series of 5 injections of a lubricating substance called Supartz can relieve pain for 6 months to a year and beyond in many patients.

#### **Surgical Options**

If the bones are in contact and joint motion has been lost, arthroscopic surgery plays almost no role in surgical treatment. Whether to try arthroscopic surgery is a decision only I or another experienced Orthopaedic Surgeon can make.

Osteotomy or realigning the bone was used in the past, but more recently has lost favor because it is often unpredictable in outcome.

Partial knee replacement is something I often hear advertised on the radio in Detroit. It makes surgery sound like a breeze. In reality it is a legitimate technique, but it has a narrow population of patients with knee arthritis that it can help.

## **Total Knee Replacement**

Total knee replacement has been the superstar of operations which are done for advanced end stage arthritis. It is a difficult decision for patients to make. We find that women usually wait longer than men to have it and age alone is not a factor if the patient's health otherwise is good enough to have major surgery.

The success rate is high and a successful hip or knee replacement fulfills perfectly the stated goal of our practice which is *"To help people return to more pain free, functional lives."* That is it in one sentence. It is what I do every day. Not always doing a total knee replacement, but choosing the best treatment for a person's knee arthritis whether it be medical or surgical.

Now who wouldn't want a job like that -- to be able to help relieve another person's pain and improve their quality of life?

Have a good week.

## **Gratiot County Herald Archive and Office Website**

I sincerely appreciate all of you loyal readers and patients present and future and welcome to all newcomers!

Besides what you read today there is a huge treasure trove of Orthopaedic and musculoskeletal information at [www.orthopodsurgeon.com](http://www.orthopodsurgeon.com). It contains the 1) Website Library 2) Your Orthopaedic Connection 3) complete archive of every GCH article I have written.

I specialize in you. Be well.

Dr. Haverbush