

Orthopaedic Connection

Stem Cells Revisited

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Transforming patient information into patient understanding.

Stem cells are being talked about and written about frequently these days.

I wrote three articles about stem cells in the past which are listed in the Gratiot County Herald archive. You can easily find them if you wish. They are # 215, # 216, #217 articles.

At this time I am writing only about arthritis of the knee and stem cell treatment for the arthritis.

Knee Arthritis

Knee arthritis occurs when the cushioning material cap that covers the ends of the bone wears out and deteriorates. I refer to the cap as articular cartilage which is its correct medical term.

The result as everyone knows is pain, inflammation, stiffness etc.

Traditional Treatment

- Anti-inflammatory/Pain medication
- Weight loss
- Corticosteroid Injection
- Viscosupplementation Lubrication
- Cane/walker
- Bracing
- Total Knee Replacement

All of this is old news. Pretty obvious, right.

Enter Stem Cells

Stem cells exist in various parts of the body. Research has identified stem cells that can become musculoskeletal tissue.

Some clinics take these stem cells from bone marrow for example, keep them alive by some preparation, process them and inject them into the knee. In the knee they are supposed to go to the arthritic place, attach and turn into articular cartilage.

Ah, it ain't that simple unfortunately.

The Hype

If you believe the claims, that is what is *suppose* to happen. This technique is way to simplistic and unproven actually. It isn't wrong to do it, but researchers working in laboratories feel that it is too early to make claims that this will "cure arthritis". Clinical trials done at respected medical centers will tell us in time whether this technique is the answer. As far as I am aware Medicare and most insurance plans will not cover this treatment. When that is the case patients should be very careful about spending their own hard earned money to pay for this treatment.

Hard To Evaluate

It is very tricky to evaluate any treatment for arthritis. Why? Because arthritis symptoms and pain as everyone knows seems to come and go. Often various treatments are thought to be effective in some patients

when it really is the result of arthritis symptoms normally ebbing during the treatment. In addition remember the *placebo effect* which means some people will get better simply because they believe the treatment will work. **Take Home Point:** Stem cell injections in the knee joint thus far have not been proven to be effective. More research is needed.

“Can’t Hurt”

I can’t tell you not to do it because there is a lot of confusion out there and maybe someone will benefit and have less pain for a time. But it is not a cure for arthritis at this point.

I don’t think it would hurt you, but you would need to pay for it no doubt and it could be expensive.

My patients put their trust in me and what I do improves the quality of their lives.

Gratiot County Herald Archive and Office Website.

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

Besides what you read today there is a huge treasure trove of Orthopaedic and musculoskeletal information at www.orthopodsurgeon.com. It contains the Website Library, Your Orthopaedic Connection and complete archive of every GCH article I have written.

I specialize in you. Be well.

Dr. Haverbush