

Knee Surgery's Effectiveness Studied

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A Department of Veterans Affairs and Baylor College of Medicine study published in the July 11 *New England Journal of Medicine* reports patients with osteoarthritis of the knee who underwent placebo arthroscopic surgery, were just as likely to report pain relief as those who received the real procedure.

The researchers say their results challenge the usefulness of one of the most common surgical procedures performed for osteoarthritis of the knee.

"The fact that the effectiveness of arthroscopic lavage or debridement in patients with osteoarthritis of the knee is no greater than that of placebo surgery makes us question whether the 1 billion plus dollars spent on these procedures might not be put to better use," said lead investigator Nelda P. Wray, M.D., a health services researcher at the Houston VA Medical Center and Baylor College of Medicine.

In the study, 180 patients with knee pain were randomized into three groups. One group received debridement, in which worn, torn, or loose cartilage is cut away and removed with the aid of a pencil-thin viewing tube called an arthroscope. The second group underwent arthroscopic lavage, in which the bad cartilage is flushed out. The third group underwent simulated arthroscopic surgery; small incisions were made, but no instruments were inserted and no cartilage removed.

Bruce Moseley, M.D., a clinical

associate professor of orthopedics at Baylor, recruited all the patients in the study and performed all surgeries, both real and placebo. Baruch Brody, Ph.D., director of the Center for Medical Ethics and Health Policy at Baylor, was instrumental in critically assessing the ethical issues involved in the study and in developing the stringent consent process for the study.

Of the 324 participants who met study inclusion criteria, 44 percent declined to participate, demonstrating they understood that they might not receive the actual surgery. Before

undergoing surgery, participants also wrote in their chart, "On entering this study, I realize that I may receive only placebo surgery. I further realize that this means that I will not have surgery on my knee joint. This placebo surgery will not benefit my knee arthritis."

During two years of follow-up, patients in all three groups reported moderate improvements in pain and ability to function. However, neither of the intervention groups reported less pain or better function than the (See "Knee Surgery" page 31)

Medical Journalists Honored

Journalists, public relations professionals, and photographers and illustrators from Texas Medical Center institutions were honored recently for outstanding medical/health reporting by two professional communications societies.

At the Excalibur for Excellence Awards ceremony, hosted by the Public Relations Society of America's Houston Chapter, Texas Medical Center News Managing Editor Ronda Wendler, Assistant Editor Kathleen Charter and Senior Graphic Designer Michele Owen earned a Silver Award in the "newspaper" category. In addition, Wendler earned several awards in the "writing bylined articles" category, including a Gold Award for "Another DeBakey Milestone," a Gold Award for "The Other DNA," and a Silver Award for "'Tis the Season for Respiratory Syncytial Virus."

At the Bronze Quill Awards, sponsored by the International Association of Business Communicators' Houston Chapter, Wendler, Charter

and Owen earned an Award of Merit in the "newspaper" category. In addition, Owen earned an Award of Merit in the "design" category.

Other honors went to Paul Harasim of St. Luke's Episcopal Hospital, who was named at the Excalibur Awards ceremony as Public Relations Professional of the Year, and Stefanie Asin of The Methodist Health Care System, who received the Young Public Relations Professional of the Year award.

Other communications professionals receiving Excalibur awards include Allison Bieser, Stephanie Cunningham, Dawn Dorsey, Paul Vincent Kuntz, Jennifer Patrick, and Bill Zander of Texas Children's Hospital; and communications teams from LifeGift Organ Donation Center and St. Luke's Episcopal Hospital. Organizations honored with Bronze Quill awards include The Methodist Health Care System, Texas Children's Hospital and The University of Texas Health Science Center at Houston. ■

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