



THE PULSE

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OUTPATIENT JOINT REPLACEMENT

Pain control gives doctors leg up

New ways of managing pain are making it possible for some people to go home from the hospital the same day as joint replacement surgery, a change in the practice of medicine that would've been unthinkable 10 years ago.

Dr. Timothy Sauber, an orthopedic surgeon at Allegheny General Hospital, performed his first same-day knee replacement operation in May on a man in his late 40s. The typical stay for such an operation is several days.

"In 10 years, 70 percent to 80 percent of these surgeries will be done this way," Sauber said. "The motivation is people who don't want to spend their time in the hospital."

And the innovation is being picked up outside big academic medical centers, too. Tom McMullen, 65, had his left knee joint replaced last October at St. Clair Hospital by Dr. Brett Perricelli, chief of orthopedics.

St. Clair was the first hospital in the region to do same-day knee replacement surgery.

"I told him yeah, I don't like to be in the hospital," said McMullen, who is the maintenance operations director for

American Airlines. "I even told him he could do it in my garage if he wanted."

Outpatient joint replacement surgery is not for everyone, but McMullen had extensive support at home. Also, he'd had his right knee replaced several months earlier, so he knew what to expect. It didn't hurt that he lived in a one-story home, making it easier to recover.

"He did very well," Perricelli said. "Every facility needs to tailor what works for that patient in that facility."

"Every patient's needs are different and every person's social situation is different."

UPMC has done same-day total hip replacement operations for several years, but has yet to perform outpatient knee surgeries, said Dr. Anthony DiGioia, an orthopedic surgeon who practices at Magee-Womens Hospital.

The short stays are not for every patient and extensive patient education is needed prior to surgery, he said.

Advances in pain control are making same-day joint replacement surgery possible, said Dr. Nicholas Sotereanos, an orthopedic surgeon at Allegheny General Hospital.

AGH doctors administer pain medication through a catheter near a large blood vessel in the leg and Perricelli used a drug cocktail with limited narcotics.

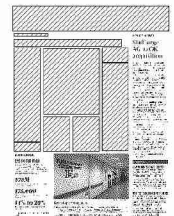
"That was revolutionary for us," Sotereanos said. "The whole paradigm of pain control has shifted to avoid narcotics."

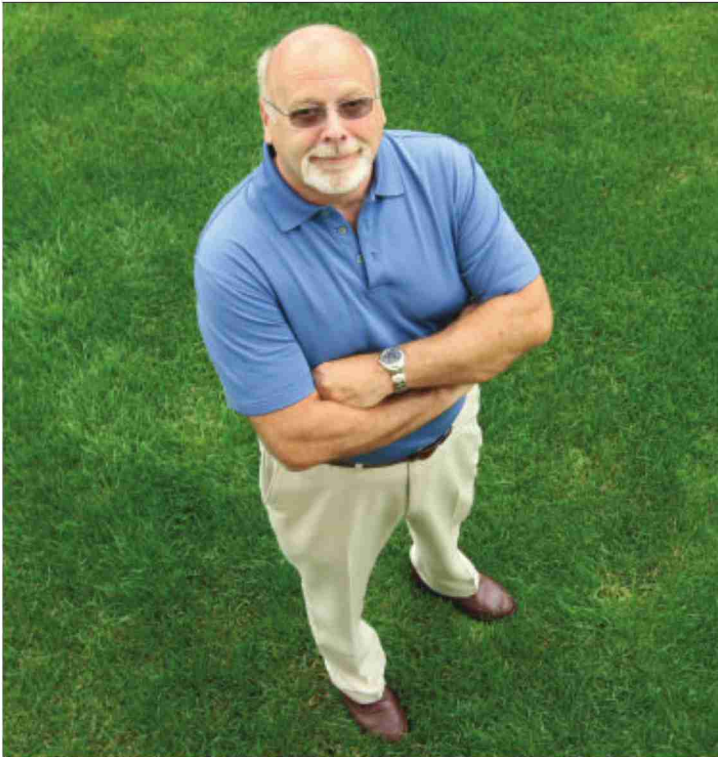
Narcotic pain relievers can cause dizziness, constipation and other side effects that can slow recovery. Reducing or eliminating use of narcotics can make it easier to send a patient home early, Sotereanos said.

"You're avoiding the vicious cycle of pain and nausea," Sotereanos said. "That's what really helped with the knees."

Researchers recommend caution for doctors considering same-day joint replacement operations.

A 2013 study, for example, found the outpatient approach resulted in "sizeable cost reductions" but also an increased risk for readmission and mortality for outpatient and short-stay patients.





JOE WOJCIK

Tom McMullen had his left knee joint replaced last October at St. Clair Hospital. He went home the same day.