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All About HEALTH

Orthopedic orientation

Here's help for your
musculoskeletal system



Area orthopedics focused on patients, advances

By **ALLIE VUGRINCIC**
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If you've ever broken a wrist, sustained a sports injury or if you're aging — and you should be — chances are you have had or will one day be in need of orthopedic care.

“Orthopedics is kind of one of those areas in medicine that is always going to be needed because we haven't found a way to stop the aging process, and as people age, the musculoskeletal system wears out,” said Dr. Thomas Joseph, president of the Youngstown Orthopaedic Associates, which has offices in Howland, Canfield and Boardman. “You're always going to have bone injuries, and orthopedics is the specialty that deals with those kinds of injuries as well.”

Orthopedics is the treatment of the musculoskeletal system — bones, muscles, joints and ligaments. It is a wide-reaching field that can treat anything from the neck down.

Subspecialties in orthopedics include sports medicine, which mostly deals with shoulder and knee injuries; hand and upper extremity; spine; orthopedic foot and ankle, which is more comprehensive than podiatry; orthopedic oncology, or the removal of orthopedic tumors; pediatric orthopedics; and adult reconstruction.

Dr. Ken Jones, originally from Pennsylvania, has been practicing in the area since



Staff photo / Allie Vugrincic

From left, Emily Petro, registered nurse, first assistant; John Ricci, Mako plasty product specialist; orthopedic surgeon Dr. Ken Jones, and surgical technician Karen Ward demonstrate how to use the Mako robotic arm to assist in a knee replacement at Trumbull Regional Medical Center in Warren. Trumbull Regional is the only hospital in Trumbull County to use the Mako technology, which assists surgeons with total knee and hip and partial knee replacements, allowing for smaller, more precise incisions.

he finished his residency almost 22 years ago. Along with his brother, Dr. Tom Jones, Jones has a private practice, Northeast Ohio Orthopedics, on North Road in Warren. There, he treats anything from a broken wrist to torn cartilage, carpal tunnel, and rotator cuff problems.

“I'm in the community,” Jones said. “It's what the community needs.”

JOINT REPLACEMENT

Jones also works with Trumbull Regional Medical Center in Warren in the Center for Joint Replacement, which focuses on surgical total hip and total and partial knee replacements.

Patients who benefit from joint replacement procedures include those suffering from osteoarthritis and avascular necrosis or those that have suffered a sports injury or other type of traumatic joint injuries, according to information from Trumbull Regional Medical Center. People often turn to joint

replacement when they have exhausted other treatments, such as supplements, over-the-counter medication and joint injections.

“Total joint replacements are some of the most successful operations that are done — not only nationally but around the world — in terms of patient satisfaction, improvement and quality of life,” said Dr. James P. Jamison, a Youngstown Orthopaedic Associates surgeon specializing in adult reconstruction.

In the past, joint replacement had been a solution only for adults older than 60 because of the limited lifespan of implants. Joint replacement is now an option for some younger patients as well, Jamison said.

“Implants are expected to last 20-plus years without question, provided there aren't any unforeseen problems,” Jamison said.

Adults as young as 40 are candidates for joint replacement. “We have patients who

are coming to surgery at younger ages, which returns them to a more productive life,” he said.

QUICK TURNAROUND

Better implants are not the only way joint replacement surgery has improved — new technology and pain management allows patients to get back on their feet and out of hospitals faster.

In 2019, Trumbull Regional's team of eight surgeons completed 497 total knee and hip replacements, as well as additional shoulder replacements and revisions. The average rate of stay for patients was 1.5 days — meaning patients were out of the hospital by lunchtime the day after their surgery. The program seeks to have joint replacement patients up and walking within four hours of their surgery.

“We can really push the patients to get moving,” said Jones, who added that

with spinal blocks and medications, patients often have very little pain for several days.

He said the key to getting patients home quickly without complications is anticipating their needs ahead of time, instead of responding to problems as they arise.

Still, recovery is a process that involves physical therapy and the patient must put in work to get their new joint feeling normal. Jones said patients can generally move freely within three months, but it can take a year to get used to a total replacement.

“The important thing is that it takes a lot of retraining of the joint,” Jones said. The patient’s input is key — which is why patients have to be motivated and ready to have their surgery.

Center for Joint Replacement orthopedic navigator Peggy Rable, registered nurse, sees patients through their joint replacement journey. She asks

patients to choose a coach — a family member, caretaker or friend — to assist them in their post-operative recovery. Coaches watch the same pre-surgery video as patients so they know what to expect.

“They also come the day after when they go through their therapy session with the patient,” Rable said. “They learn the same therapy. They learn how to assist the patient.”

North Carolina native Jamison said that in his 23 years of practice, there has been a push to reduce patient hospital stays. Now, because of the COVID-19 pandemic, patients are eager to leave hospitals and surgical centers as quickly as possible.

Getting patients out faster has a lot of benefits, Jamison said. It minimizes the risk of complications like deep vein thrombosis, a condition where a blood clot forms in a vein deep inside the body.

Patients who spend more time in the hospital also have

a greater risk of infection or developing pneumonia, according to Jones. He said when he first started practicing, it wasn’t uncommon for a total hip replacement patient to spend five days in bed.

PATIENT-FOCUSED

While the Center for Joint Replacement aims to have patients in bed as little as possible, their rooms do come with a view — from the eighth floor of Trumbull Regional Medical Center, patients can watch the sun rise or set over Warren. The rooms also have more exotic views, with each one themed to a different location.

“Our quote is ‘Where your new hip or knee will take you,’” Rable said. “You could be in a room that has a beach in Hawaii or you could be in Italy. The patients seem to really enjoy that — they’re not just staring at sterile walls.”

The rooms also each have a sign announcing their “destination” and marking the

Orthopedic subspecialties

- Adult reconstructive — hip and knee replacements
- Sports medicine — treatment of sports injuries, typically shoulder and knee
- Orthopedic oncology — removal of orthopedic tumors
- Pediatric orthopedics — treatment of musculoskeletal system in children
- Orthopedic foot and ankle — typically more comprehensive treatment than podiatry
- Hand and upper extremity
- Spine

SOURCE: Dr. James P. Jamison / Youngstown Orthopaedic Associates.

distance a patient has walked on their new joint. When the center is not under COVID-19 precautions, patients are assigned an airplane cutout that they can move across a wall chart to track their distance. The chart can spur friendly competition between patients who want to walk further than their counterparts.

The Center for Joint Replacement rooms are all private, with private baths. Patients sit in recliner chairs after therapy, which also helps reduce surgical complications, according to Rable.

“The patients are comfortable,” Jones said, pointing to “little things” that make patients’ stays better — they do not have to wear a surgical gown, the floor presents and friendly atmosphere, and under normal circumstances, visitors can join patients in their rooms.

OTHER ADVANCES

The Center for Joint Replacement and Youngstown Orthopaedics both have the capability to do Mako robotic-arm assisted surgeries. The Mako at Trumbull Regional Medical Center is the only one in Trumbull County, while Youngstown Orthopaedics works with a Mako at St. Elizabeth Boardman Hospital and the Orthopaedic Surgery Center.

“You use robotic assistance when you’re performing a joint replacement to improve the precision and accuracy,” Joseph said.

With Mako robots, surgeons can make smaller incisions, which means patients can recover faster and have smaller scars. Procedures done with the Mako show less implant wear and loosening and reduced blood loss, according to information from Trumbull Regional Medical Center.

Another technology-based technique is arthroscopic surgery, also called arthroscopy, used to diagnose and treat joint problems. The

minimally invasive technique involves using fiberoptic cameras inside the joint so surgeons can view the area to be operated on without seeing it directly, according to Joseph.

Joseph said the recovery process for patients is also more advanced than it once was. The use of biologics — drugs derived from living organisms — accelerate the healing process and can lessen scar tissue and inflammation.

One commonly known biologic is stem cells, which come from human bodies or from embryonic fluid. Another biologic is platelet gel, which is obtained by taking blood from a patient and spinning it in a centrifuge to get platelet-rich plasma with growth factors. The platelet gel is then injected back into the patient to facilitate healing. Platelet gel has been around for about 10 years, according to Joseph, and is used at Youngstown Orthopaedics.

QUALITY CARE

Youngstown Orthopaedic Association is the area’s largest orthopedic group with 10 surgeons and one physiatrist who takes care of non-operative musculoskeletal paint. The entity has its own MRI machine, physical and occupational therapy, and DME bracing, or durable medical equipment bracing. Surgeons are trained in subspecialties, allowing Youngstown Orthopaedics to treat the whole spectrum of orthopedics in “one-stop shopping,” according to Joseph.

Youngstown Orthopaedics also works closely with the Orthopaedic Surgery Center, an ambulatory surgery center in Youngstown, and has urgent care facilities in Howland and Canfield that are focused on orthopedic emergencies.

The Center for Joint Replacement at Trumbull Regional Medical Center has been recognized for its



Staff photo / Allie Vugrincic

Debbie Heydle of Hubbard performs therapeutic exercise two days after a bilateral hip replacement with help of physical therapy assistant Gretchen Scherer of Struthers at Trumbull Regional Medical Center in Warren.

excellence — it was the first in Ohio to achieve the Joint Commission’s Gold Seal of Approval for advanced certification in total hip and total knee replacement. The hospital is also a designated Blue Distinction Center + for knee and hip replacement by Anthem Blue / Cross Blue Shield.

Jones pointed to the uniformity of the joint replacement program as a reason for its success.

“When someone goes on an airplane, the pilots, no matter what airline you’re flying on — they all have the same checklist,” Jones said. Even though the surgeons at the Center for Joint Replacement come from different practices, they all adhere to the same overarching program — though some parts are customized for individual patients.

“My philosophy is that when everybody in the hospital is doing well, we all benefit. It’s not about the volume or numbers, it’s about the outcome,” Jones said. “It’s about having a program where the patients do well.”



Staff photo / Allie Vugrincic

Trumbull Regional Medical Center Orthopedic Navigator Peggy Rable, registered nurse, points to a “Venice” sign in the hallway of the orthopedic floor at Trumbull Regional, which includes a measurement in feet to show patients how far they have walked. The floor is inspired by travel and the theme “where your new hip or knee will take you,” with each room and corresponding sign representing a different place.



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