

STUDY OF ARTHRITIS IN YOUR COMMUNITY

Arthritis Study Update

Spring 2005

This newsletter provides quarterly updates on the Study of Arthritis in Your Community and related topics. It is provided to study participants as well as individuals who have expressed an interest in our research.

Waiting for Surgery?

Osteoarthritis is the main reason for the ongoing and increasing demand for hip and knee joint replacements. It is estimated that there are about 20,000 patients currently waiting for joint replacements in Ontario.

In April 2005, The Institute for Clinical and Evaluative Sciences published a report called **Access to Health Services in Ontario, ICES Atlas**. This report identified the volume and wait times for key health services in Ontario. For the first time, patients, providers, and policy-makers in Ontario know how long the wait time is in their local areas, and in other parts of the province for cancer and cataract surgeries; cardiac procedures; and hip and knee replacements. Two of our researchers, **Dr. Gillian Hawker** and **Dr. Nizar Mahomed**, were contributing authors to this landmark report.

In 2003/2004, there were nearly 23,000 total hip and knee joint replacements done in the province of Ontario, almost twice the number done 10 years ago. Despite the increase in total joint replacements (TJR) being performed, in the past ten years there has been more than a 4-fold increase in the number of people waiting more than 26 weeks for the surgery. Without a considerable increase in TJR surgeries, the number of patients with long wait times will

continue to rise as the population ages.

Despite long waiting lists, there is positive news for hip and knee replacement patients. Statistics show that the average length of stay in hospital for hip and knee replacement patients has dropped in the last eight years, with no compromise in outcomes. There is also better pre-operative patient education, less invasive surgery, better pain control methods and better post-operative rehabilitation available.

The **Access to Health Services in Ontario, ICES Atlas** can be accessed online at www.ices.on.ca.



Our new Consumer Collaborators met for the first time in May. This dynamic group will be working with our research team by providing the perspective of the person living with osteoarthritis.

We've Moved!

The study office has moved from the 10th floor to newly renovated space on the 8th floor of Women's College Ambulatory Care Centre. Please note our new address on page 4. Our phone numbers will remain the same.

Pain and Fatigue Community Discussions

Last year, we held a series of focus groups to learn more about your experiences of pain and fatigue associated with osteoarthritis. We were happy to speak with over 80 of you at one of our 14 discussion groups held in Woodstock and Toronto. Thank you to all of you who participated for sharing with us your experiences and knowledge.

We learned a lot of valuable information about the impact arthritis-related symptoms, such as pain and fatigue, have on your life. You told us that arthritis affects you not only physically but also socially and emotionally. You shared with us what the pain and fatigue associated with your OA feels like to you and what factors (like the weather!) make these symptoms worse or better. We also learned a lot about how you manage your arthritis pain on a day-to-day basis. This information has helped us gain a greater understanding of these important issues, and ensures that we are asking you the right questions in our telephone interviews.

Vioxx[®] Survey

We would like to thank everyone who recently participated in our Vioxx[®] survey. Your opinions are always important and we are very grateful that so many of you were happy to speak to us. We were primarily interested in gaining a greater understanding of how the recall of Vioxx[®] influenced you.

Most of you had heard about the recall through the media, particularly newspapers. Almost 1/3 of you had used Vioxx[®] and approximately 10% of you were using this medication at the time it was recalled from the market. The recall of Vioxx[®] has influenced your attitudes towards the use of pain medications – one fifth of you told us that you are more fearful of your use of pain medications. We'll continue to watch carefully to document the impact of this recall on your osteoarthritis management in the future.

WANT TO TALK ABOUT YOUR PAIN?

Our focus groups last year were such a success! We're hoping you're interested in participating in some more sessions this year!!! We would like to speak with people who have osteoarthritis (OA) to better understand how the characteristics of arthritis pain change from the early stages of osteoarthritis to late in the disease. We are also interested in hearing about which aspects of arthritis pain you consider most distressing.

We are looking for both men and women with OA over the age of 40 years. Participation would involve attending a 2-2.5 hour discussion group (usually 8-10 people) and sharing your experiences of pain across the course of your arthritis. If you, or anyone you know, may be interested, please contact us at our toll-free number 1-877-437-1591 or 416-323-6218 (Toronto) and we would be happy to provide more details.

Our Telephone Interviewers

Many of you have been talking to Shirley Griffin, one of our telephone interviewers, for many years. We are delighted that Shirley will be continuing to speak with you during our ongoing study interviews. Prior to becoming involved in medical research, Shirley worked as the director of a social service organization.

We would also like to take the opportunity to introduce the newest member of our interviewer team, Annette McCole. Annette has worked as an interviewer for several research projects at both St. Michael's Hospital, and the Arthritis Community Research and Evaluation Unit in Toronto. She will be working with us on a part-time basis. Welcome Annette!

Arthritis Q&A

In each issue, we will try to address your arthritis-related questions. If you have a question that you would like answered, please let us know.

What type of exercises should I do after joint replacement surgery?

One of the biggest fears people have about joint replacement surgery is that it might keep them from participating in their favourite sports and physical activities. Proper exercise is essential for regaining strength, flexibility, and mobility after joint replacement surgery. In addition, regular physical activity can help prevent postoperative weight gain and many other health problems, including high blood pressure, diabetes, and colon cancer. You can still stay active after surgery, although you may have to limit or avoid certain activities.

Most postoperative exercise programs start with gentle range-of-motion activities and muscle-strengthening exercises. Your doctor or physical therapist will help you decide when you're ready to move on to other kinds of physical activities. After a few weeks, you may be able to resume lower-impact activities, such as swimming, walking, or riding a bicycle.

Higher-impact activities, such as jogging, playing tennis, or aerobic dancing may be advised against for quite some time—perhaps indefinitely. The concern is that such activities could damage the new joint or loosen its parts. However, every individual's situation is different. The best policy is always to talk to your surgeon or physiotherapist before trying such activities and follow his or her recommendations.

What is Fibromyalgia? Is it a type of arthritis?

Fibromyalgia is an increasingly recognized chronic pain illness, characterized by widespread musculoskeletal aches, pain and stiffness, soft tissue tenderness, general

fatigue, and sleep disturbances. The most common sites of pain include the neck, back, shoulders, pelvic girdle and hands, but any body part can be involved.

Fibromyalgia patients experience a range of symptoms of varying intensities that change over time. Fibromyalgia affects 900,000 (3 in 100) Canadians, and its incidence increases with age. Women are much more likely than men to develop fibromyalgia, and it is most common in women 50 years of age or older.

Is acupuncture effective for arthritis?

Acupuncture is a traditional Chinese medical procedure, which is designed to restore proper balance of the body's energy. Thin, solid needles of varying length are inserted into acupoints at a specific depth where they are twisted & left in place for periods of time ranging from a few minutes to nearly an hour.

In November 1997, a US panel assembled by the National Institutes of Health endorsed acupuncture treatment for some conditions. They found acupuncture effective in treating painful disorders of the muscle and skeletal systems, such as fibromyalgia and tennis elbow. It was judged as a 'reasonable option' for the relief of post-operative pain and low-back pain. Acupuncture may also be of some benefit as a supplement to standard remedies for carpal-tunnel syndrome and osteoarthritis.



Our Consumer Collaborators helping us evaluate a new questionnaire that we are developing to assess sleep in people living with osteoarthritis.



Spring Gardening Tips

The smell of spring is in the air. It's time to dust off those trowels and spades and wake up the garden from a long (and cold!) winter's rest. Gardening is a great way to stay active and enjoy the outdoors. To help keep gardening an pleasurable and pain-free experience, consider the following basic tips and techniques:

- Warm up your joints before beginning to garden. Do some light stretching to reduce soreness later on. Change positions frequently to avoid becoming stiff.
- Use a stool or kneeling pad when working on or near the ground to protect your knees.
- Gloves can provide a good grip (especially those with a ribbed surface), and can also help to protect your hands.
- Using raised beds or containers can help to minimize bending, and can allow you to move parts of the garden to more convenient places for maintenance.
- Look for hand tools that have an ergonomic design to ease strain in your wrists and arms. Tools made of nylon reinforced with fiberglass provide a good lightweight alternative to traditional tools
- Planting more perennials means you can still enjoy flowering plants as well as some varieties of vegetables and fruit without reseeding every year.
- If you do want to plant annuals, consider using seed tape or 'click seeders,' to help avoid having to grasp the seeds with your hands, and also to space seeds more easily.
- Keep tools and watering sources nearby to avoid unnecessary trips.

Pace yourself!! Gardening is not a race, make sure to take time to stop and smell the roses.

The earth laughs in flowers...
-Ralph Waldo Emerson

TO REACH US:

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