

Partial Knee Replacement at the Circle Hospital Reading: A Patient's Experience

Introduction

I had the inner (medial) compartment of my right knee replaced in October 2015 at the Circle Hospital Reading. My surgeon was Mr Sean O'Leary. I was recommended to use Mr O'Leary by my physiotherapist and I paid for the surgery. I was 64 at the time.

Background

I am 5 feet 9 inches tall and I weigh 11 stone 8 pounds which gives me a healthy body mass index (BMI) score. I have Grade 5 (severe) asthma and hereditary type 2 diabetes, but both conditions are well controlled by drugs plus a low carbohydrate diet in the case of the diabetes. I have arthritis in my left knee but this does not generally trouble me. I have worn orthotics in my walking boots for some years to alleviate over pronation, excessive inward twisting of the feet, which caused me heel pain when walking long distances. I am very active - I run my own business, I walk my Border Collie every day and my hobbies include long distance walking and gardening. Before the knee surgery I had never been an inpatient in my life nor had I had an operation.

Development of the Problem

I first noticed a problem with my right knee in 2013. Driving home after a long day out walking the inner part of my knee would ache to the point that I had to keep moving my leg whilst driving. This problem got slowly worse. In May 2014 I did the first nine days of the Coast to Coast walk, which included walking over rough tracks and climbing Lake District peaks and by the end of the nine days I was struggling to walk downhill because of the pain in my knee. Once I had completed the Coast to Coast walk the pain in my knee abated for a while, but I started to experience pain when walking as well as afterwards and the pain steadily worsened. In May 2015 I completed the Coast to Coast walk, a further seven days, and afterwards the pain in my right knee was significant and I started to get shooting pains in my right buttock. These were so severe at times that I had to grab something to avoid falling over and I struggled to walk at times. I could no longer walk long distances without significant pain.

I consulted an osteopath who confirmed the over pronation and prescribed purpose made orthotics to replace the off the shelf ones that I was using. This alleviates the pain to an extent but I was still experiencing problems when I walked any distance. I consulted the osteopath again and he diagnosed medial compartment arthritis in my right knee. He explained that the shooting pains at the back of my right thigh were caused by the gluteal (buttock) muscles in my right leg going into spasm, which in turn was a result of walking awkwardly because of the pain in my knee. I had extensive treatment of my right gluteal muscles and this cured the spasms and I was able to walk normally again He advised exercising my right knee and using a specialist arthritis knee brace.

I tried the exercises and I bought a Donjoy knee brace specifically designed for right knee medial compartment arthritis. The brace had a large metal hinge on the outside of my knee which straightened my knee joint out and stabilised it. The brace worked well and I was able to continue day walks of up to 10 miles but the pain and stiffness continued to worsen. I found the exercises difficult because my knee joint was so painful and unstable. My knee continued to deteriorate quite rapidly and in July I saw Mr O'Leary for a consultation and he advised surgery. I booked the operation for October because I had holidays booked in the summer.

The Operation and Hospital Stay

The operation went smoothly and the care I received whilst in hospital was first class. I had the operation on a Tuesday morning and came out on Friday lunchtime. My knee was quite swollen and although I was assured that this was quite normal Mr O'Leary suggested staying until the Saturday.

On the Wednesday morning I was helped out of bed and with the help of a walking frame I was able to have a sitting shower. In the afternoon the hospital physiotherapist showed me how to use crutches and by the end of my hospital stay I was able to walk some distance down the ward corridor and to climb and descend stairs. The physiotherapist also gave me exercises to do but my knee continued to be quite swollen which limited how far I could bend my leg. This proved to be a problem getting in and out of the car on the journey home and in retrospect staying until Saturday would have been wise.

Rehabilitation

At home I needed to keep my leg elevated and use ice packs repeatedly. The pain was acceptable although I struggled to sleep to start with and needed to sleep on my back. I had painkillers from the hospital for one week and when they finished I did not need anything during the day but I took slow release Ibuprofen at night. I was able to sleep normally without painkillers after ten weeks.

I am a self-employed counsellor and sex therapist and I work from home for six or seven hours a day, four days a week and I started work again on the Monday after I came out of hospital on the Friday. I found that I got tired with the pain and having to use crutches but in retrospect having something to do helped with my recovery and I would do the same again. I used two crutches all the time for two weeks and then I started to use just one crutch in the house.

I do not live in the Reading area and so rather than use the hospital physiotherapy service I saw a physiotherapist locally. My first visit to the physiotherapist was exactly four weeks after my operation. He encouraged me to walk without a crutch inside the house but to continue to use one crutch outside for a while. By the time I saw Mr O'Leary for a six-week check-up I was able to walk four hundred yards or more without crutches and I had started to walk my dog again, but I had not driven up to that point. I was able to drive the 90-minute journey home after the check-up.

I saw the physiotherapist eight times, initially weekly and then fortnightly or longer over a period of four months. He was concerned that my knee was still noticeably red and swollen after five weeks and I took a course of antibiotics. The swelling had subsided by my six week check with Mr O'Leary.

The initial exercises were mainly stretching and increasing mobility but included a sitting lift with a five-pound weight round my ankle. The intensity of the exercises increased gradually so that by ten weeks after surgery I was doing split squats which involved taking my whole body weight through a single leg. By 14 weeks I was using weights with the split squat and now (after seven months) I am able to do 36 repetitions on each leg in sets of 12 holding two 5kg weights. My current exercise program also includes bending each knee using a towel to fully close the knee; side and straight planks (holding my body weight in a stationary position); straight leg lifts with a five-pound weight, 36 times each leg in sets of 12; balancing on my hands with a large ball under my calves and pulling my knees towards my chin; and sliding wall squats with a 10 second hold, 36 times in sets of 3.

The physiotherapist advised me to change from daily exercises to alternate days to allow my muscles to recover.

Complications

After five weeks, whilst on one crutch, I experienced a sharp pain behind my left (unoperated) knee and I struggled to walk afterwards for two days. After careful research I concluded that I had probably torn a hamstring slightly and the physiotherapist gave me intensive stretching exercises to help me recover. These showed that my hamstrings were very tight and I continue to do stretching exercises, my regime being stretching exercises one day and the strengthening exercises the next. I also experienced cramps in both calf muscles and various mild aches and pains as my body adjusted to walking normally again.

Where Am I Now?

At my six month check I had just completed a 16 mile walk and Mr O'Leary was pleased with my progress. After seven and a half months I walk normally and I am pain free. My operated knee feels slightly numb but this is not a problem. I have completed the first two days of the Pennine Way, 31 miles over rough country in two days, with another five days planned for the summer. I did a day walk of 13.5 miles with hill climbing totalling 3,000 feet and drove home for 3.5 hours afterwards without any problems. I would not hesitate to make the same decision again and the knee replacement has enabled me to return to my previous lifestyle.

Michael Stock

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