

Vetrun Extra – April 2

Vetrun Extra is a new service from Masters to keep our members in contact with each other and with their club during this difficult time.

Please do just that –stay in touch!

Let me know how you're coping, staying fit, occupying your time.

Email contributions for me to include in *Vetrun Extra* –send to vfdwaters@gmail.com.

I'll reply to all your emails and, if suitable, share your words on this page with all the members.

Knees News

by

Vic Waters

SIX months ago I had my left knee replaced and by and large the outcome is good, as I have already reported in *Vetrun* (December 2019 – no. 512.)

Two weeks ago I suffered a setback when swelling increased in the lower leg. That has been treated with a prescribed anti-inflammatory and currently I am waking better than at any time since surgery.

I have been cautious and kept distance down to around two kilometres. On all surfaces, including cross-country and the beach, I am presently walking with no pain or adverse effects.

Swelling has been the principal problem, in my case. Although I achieved acceptable bending of the new knee joint from the outset, retained synovial fluid around the knee caused tightness and made this more difficult.

I believe that once all swelling has vanished there is nothing to prevent me from walking vigorously, and then running.

I know a few members are weighing up pros and cons of knee replacement.

One consideration might be 'how long do replacement joints last?'

Following is a transcript of that topic in an ABC discussion between Dr Norman Swan and Dr Jonathan Evans, *Orthopaedic Surgeon; Research Fellow, University of Bristol.*

How long do knee and hip replacements last?

It's a common question for those undergoing surgery, and now we have a clearer answer.

Orthopaedic surgeons say the numbers are good, but what about those whose replacement doesn't go the distance?

Norman Swan:

Probably the commonest question asked by people undergoing a hip or knee replacement; how long will my new joint last? Well, that's been partly answered by British researchers using a large amount of data from various countries, including Australia. Jonathan Evans is an orthopaedic surgeon and researcher at the University of Bristol. Welcome to the *Health Report*.

Jonathan Evans:

Good morning Norman.

Norman Swan:

So first of all just tell us why we don't know, why we haven't known to date how long joints last, because in Australia we've had the National Joint Replacement Registry for a long time.

Jonathan Evans:

Yes, so the main reason we haven't had such a clear answer so far is really the length of time that hip and knee replacements do last. So you'd really have to wait for all the information to become available before we can give the answer.

Norman Swan:

So where did you get the information from?

Jonathan Evans:

So what we wanted to do was we put ourselves in the position of a patient, but a patient that had access to all the university databases and information. So we looked everywhere we could in the world to try and put together as much information as we could. The main place that we found this useful information was, as you correctly said, the Australian Joint Registry is a really good resource that's been running for a long time, but really the forerunners of the national joint registries were the countries in Scandinavia such as Sweden, and so these countries started their registry slightly earlier which meant that they've got longer-term data. So the most data contributed to our research was from Finland and indeed Australia.

Norman Swan:

So when you crunched the data, let's take hips first of all, how long does a hip last?

Jonathan Evans:

So we found that anyone having a hip replacement has got a six out of ten chance of it lasting 25 years. So really it's great news for the patient, it's a lot longer than we expected. We always had good ideas of how long they would last, for 10 or 15 years, but really to go all the way up to 25 years, six out of ten lasting that long is really good news for our patients.

Norman Swan:

And what about knee replacements?

Jonathan Evans:

So knee replacements we found actually lasted a little bit better. So we found actually it was about 80% of knee replacements would last 25 years as well, so that's even better news for them.

Norman Swan:

Were you surprised by any of this?

Jonathan Evans:

Yes, we were very surprised, bearing in mind we are a specialist joint replacement research unit, we weren't expecting the results to be this high. We are not quite sure why we weren't expecting them to be this high but it really is great news for the patients, that they can go into an operation with their eyes open knowing that they've got a six out of ten or an eight out of ten chance for hips or knees to last 25 years.

Norman Swan:

Because the word on the street until now has been that knee replacements don't last as long as hip replacements.

Jonathan Evans:

Absolutely, so that is one thing we were expecting from our study. We've got to look at our results with an analytical eye really, we've got to be quite analytical about our results and think why is it that those knee replacements seem to last longer. One explanation we could come up with is the fact that what we've looked at specifically is how long are the hip or knee replacements in the patient. Unfortunately it's not always the case that just because a knee replacement or a hip replacement is in a patient that they are successful. It could be that particularly in the case of knee replacements that they are still inside the patient but that patient might not have a full range of function and might have some pain going on, but a decision has been made by the patient and the

surgeon that they are better off leaving it as it is than trying to change it and improve the situation.

Norman Swan:

So with an artificial hip they are more likely to do a revision.

Jonathan Evans:

Yes, so it could be the case that that patient might need a revision, but knees we find in particular you often don't jump in to revise as quickly as you would with hip replacements.

Norman Swan:

So that's great news, six out of ten people getting a hip replacement, it lasts 25 years, eight out of ten knees. But what about the two out of ten knee people getting a total knee replacement, and the four out of ten people getting a hip replacement, what were the predictors of failure and why did they fail?

Jonathan Evans:

That's not something we specifically looked at in our research, but what we do know from other research and particularly from the registries such as Australia and the UK that have a lot of information is that the main reasons people fail is it could be just wear of the joint itself. So anything man-made will wear out eventually, and so as the patient moves more and uses that joint, very, very small wear particles will be released from the polyethylene in the hip or the knee replacement, and over time as those levels build up it can cause the metal components to loosen. And as they loosen it can cause pain, and eventually needs to be replaced.

Norman Swan:

What about the choice of joints? My understanding of the National Joint Replacement Registry in Australia is that they've shown which are the high performing joints and which are the low performing joints, and that some joints do fail earlier. I think you've shown that in knees. There's the infamous case of the metal on metal joints, but there have been others too. And I think they find that the older hip joints, the more old-fashioned ones and the cheaper ones last longer.

Jonathan Evans:

Yes, so certainly that is the case. Last year in England and Wales there were 822 different hip replacements put in, and the reason for that is you can have a separate ball and socket put together to create such high numbers of hip replacements in particular. So we have an idea that there is variation between the different brands of hip replacements and knee replacements that come on the

market. The one thing we will say is registries such as the National Joint Registry here and the Australian Joint Registry is they keep a very close eye out to look to see if there is a particular brand of hip or knee replacement that is not lasting as well. So patient safety is always at our forefront. So yes, there is variation between them, but we are looking to make sure that they are all good enough to be going in our patients.

Norman Swan:

And what about variations between surgeons?

Jonathan Evans:

So, again, that's something we look at with the National Joint Registry, but with a main focus on making sure that all surgeons are close enough to the average that there isn't anyone that is having results worse than anyone else statistically. So there can be variation but we find that particularly in surgeons that variation is much smaller, and we believe that it is a safe and effective procedure pretty much whoever is doing it. So therefore patients can go into it confident with this new information that their hip or knee replacement is likely to last a long time.

Norman Swan:

Jonathan, thank you very much.

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