

Dr. Howard Kapp

THE MAN WHO FIXES PEOPLE

By Kevin Caffrey

The son of an engineer, Howard Kapp was a curious child. Rather than follow the lead of his father who built bridges, tunnels and buildings, the younger Kapp focused on fixing things. After graduating magna cum laude from Harvard, attending medical school at Case Western Reserve University and completing a combined orthopedic residency program at Massachusetts General Hospital and Brigham and Women's Hospital in Boston, Kapp moved to Naples and established a joint replacement practice specializing in hip and knee replacements. Over the past 25 years, he has "fixed" thousands of patients.

"Joint replacement surgery continues to evolve and improve," said Dr. Kapp. "Our focus is on making procedures more patient-friendly. New technologies like custom components, minimally-invasive surgical procedures, computer navigation, partial replacements and joint salvaging procedures allow us to do that. New pain management and advanced rehabilitation techniques are equally important."

The development of new technologies is one thing; becoming proficient in using them and determining which truly represent advances that are economically viable is another.

"I perform between 700 and 800 joint replacements per year," he said. "So for me, the learning curve becomes much shorter. I'm able to adopt newer techniques more readily. This kind of volume enables me to confer with other high-volume surgeons and discuss the latest technologies. Just because something's new doesn't mean it's improved. Things that seem promising may end up not being the best direction to take."

The American Joint Replacement Registry is a new organization that tracks patients who have had total joint replacements. It allows surgeons to review procedures



Dr. Kapp reviews an x-ray of a patient with a hip replacement.

and the components that were used. Over time, each case can be evaluated to see if there are complications or if the patient has had a revision. The objective is to avoid using techniques and components that are not as effective as originally thought. Dr. Kapp is working to enroll NCH in the Registry.

"I'm also participating in an Outcome Study undertaken by the Harvard Business and Medical Schools," he said. "Medicare and other third-party payers will no longer simply pay for procedures. They're requiring proof that the outcome is worth it. The Registry and the Outcome Study are essential for us to provide a high level of care and improved quality of life for our patients. Projections for the number of people who will need replacements are staggering. We must continue to improve the techniques, measure outcomes and provide a superior level of care as the population ages. I'm all for using new technologies, but only when there's evidence they're beneficial and cost effective. The Registry and Outcome Study will identify them."

For more information about the NCH orthopedic unit and rehabilitation services, call (239) 624-3916.