



Juliann Scharlacken, left, helps Cynthia Wychocki to walk. Wychocki recently had knee replacement surgery at NCH Healthcare System.

THE ROAD TO RECOVERY FOLLOWING JOINT REPLACEMENT SURGERY

By Elizabeth Kellar

Joint replacement surgery is one of the most frequently performed procedures in the United States, with more than 1 million such surgeries performed in 2011. As our baby boomer population ages, so the need for joint replacement surgery increases.

Patients who are having this surgical procedure can expect an overall rehab road to recovery that lasts six weeks or more, based on lifestyle and overall activity goals each patient wants to achieve, explained Sue Graziano, Director of Orthopaedics & Brookdale Center for Healthy Aging at the NCH Healthcare System.

Reasons for having this elective surgery vary, Graziano said. But most who find themselves facing a hip or knee replacement do so because osteoarthritis has damaged their joints or worn out cartilage, resulting in bone-on-bone grinding causing stiffness, pain and loss of range of motion.

"We want patients to come in empowered to have the surgery," Graziano said. "We offer an Interdisciplinary Pre-op Patient Education Program weekly for patients and family to attend before patients have their surgery. Our program at NCH is extremely comprehensive. Some of the topics our team discusses are the following: preparing for surgery and hospitalization, pain management, physical therapy progression, discharge planning. Patients and their family have the opportunity to ask questions. Our program helps our patients better prepare for recovery. They know what to expect; anxiety and apprehension are certainly decreased."

A typical total knee replacement surgery takes just 1½ hours, and rehabilitation begins as soon as the patient is out of surgery and awake. Graziano noted that getting the new knee active is essential to a smooth and effective recovery and helps decrease the risk of post-surgical complications.

"Our physical therapy team gets the patient up," she said. "It's time to start walking."

Pain management is also key to recovery, as the nursing staff works with patients to make sure their pain is under control. There are many ways to manage post-surgery pain, Graziano said, including pain medication, cold therapy and relaxation modalities.

Typically, joint replacement surgery requires a two to three day hospital stay. When that stay is completed, home care is the next step. The home care team RN and physical therapist make sure patients continue to progress along their healing path.

Patient recovery rates vary based on the overall health status of the patient, but by week three, many patients have returned to enjoying outdoor activities. By week six, patients have resumed normal activities, including driving.

"Many of our patients say, 'How come I waited so long to have this done?'" Graziano said.

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