

Why Today's Joint Replacements are Better

Joint replacement is becoming something of a rite of passage in this country. More than 600,000 people in the U.S. undergo knee replacement surgery, and more than 423,000 total hip replacements are performed annually, for a total of 1,025,650 joint replacements each year.

The rising incidence of joint replacement reflects not only an aging population but also the improvements that have been made. Artificial joints today are more durable, work better and last longer. Both the surgery involved and the rehabilitation time needed are shorter and easier. As a result, more people are willing to commit to having joints replaced.

A recent study of Medicare patients named NCH Healthcare System the No. 1 busiest hospital in Florida for joint replacement surgery and the fourth busiest in the country. Sue Graziano, R.N., director of orthopaedics and neurosciences at the hospital, credits NCH's team approach when monitoring the patients' care post surgery.

"We start with a pre-op education program for the patients and their families," Graziano explains. "Every Thursday, we hold a two-hour course where they have the opportunity to meet the members of our interdisciplinary team. A nurse and a rehabilitation therapist discuss how to prepare and what to expect. We basically guide them through the process, from surgery to discharge."

Topics discussed range from pain management to the different equipment used for rehabilitation to how to prepare their houses for their return home. The last, Graziano says, is an often overlooked but important element.

"Most patients are leaving here with a walker or a cane," she notes. "We do focus on patient safety with



emphasis on fall prevention. The patients may find they need an elevated toilet seat and a grab bar in the shower for support. We also recommend wearing non-slip footwear."

The goal of the pre-op program is to educate and involve patients in their own healing. Knowing what to expect lessens anxiety, and the group aspect can even lead to an informal network of support. Because NCH has dedicated orthopaedic units, patients who meet in the pre-op program often renew their acquaintance during rehabilitation. "Sometimes the family members will even meet for coffee," Graziano adds.

"Oh, My Aching Joints," a presentation covering the prevention, procedure and benefits of joint replacement, will be presented by NCH at Collier County libraries in February. For details, contact Headquarters Library at (239) 593-0334. **NH**