When the Student is Ready, the Teacher Will Appear

Eisenhower Joint Replacement Center

Debi Gardner, RN

As an orthopedic nurse at Eisenhower Medical Center, Debi Gardner, RN, counseled many patients preparing to undergo the challenges of a knee or hip replacement, never once stopping to think that she might one day need a joint replacement herself.

"Ten to 15 years ago, knee and hip replacements left patients rather debilitated for a time, requiring a hospital stay for as long as 10 days, as well as long rehabilitation," says Gardner, now the Clinical Services Director at Desert Orthopedic Center. "So, I used to think that was a tough surgery for patients to have to go through."

In 2000, after 10 years of actually teaching a class on how to prepare for a joint replacement, Gardner tore the cartilage in her knee: "I'd like to say it was a skiing accident, but it was actually loading groceries into my car; I just kind of tweaked it and ended up tearing my cartilage."

A rubbery, fibrous connective tissue found between bones, cartilage permits the smooth movement of joints. In a healthy knee, the joint moves freely, because it is covered in the slippery tissue and powered by large muscles. As cartilage wears — either as a result of injury, aging or osteoarthritis — joints become stiff and movement, constrained. The limited movement that one does retain can be painful and frustrating; even simple things, such as picking up the morning paper, can cause pain.

"Unfortunately, because I was so heavy and because I was a mover, my knee was pretty much in pain much of the time," Gardner says of the days following her injury."So I lost the weight and tried to assume a more active lifestyle…bicycling, motorcycle riding, and scuba diving. But it became increasingly more difficult for me to do these things, and after about a year, I knew I needed to do something else."

That "something else" came in the way of a total knee replacement through the Eisenhower Joint Replacement Center. The procedure incorporated the use of a prosthetic joint shaped to fit over the ends of Gardner's femur and tibia, providing a smooth surface that allowed for easier joint movement.

For the 40 million Americans affected by arthritis, total joint replacement is one of the most effective ways to reduce pain and restore mobility. It is most often used after medication and other therapies have failed to provide the needed relief.

The orthopedic surgeons at Eisenhower Joint Replacement Center have worked closely with the Eisenhower Medical Center staff to develop a joint replacement program that shortens hospital stays, improves the quality of orthopedic care and makes recovery more enjoyable.

"Thanks to all the new technology, physicians have the capability and skills to take joint replacement to a new level," Gardner asserts. "And now, when patients have this procedure, they're in the hospital for three or four days. The majority of our patients then go directly home…and that's how it was for me."

Today, Gardner, now 50, is fitter than ever before, doing all the things that she was unable to do before the surgery. "My life has really changed as a result of Eisenhower's joint replacement program. It's enabled me to live the life I've always wanted to live."

For more information about the Eisenhower Joint Replacement Center, please call 760-773-4545.

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