

Joint School: Where Education is Part of Surgery

By: Mary Keating

Surgery can be frightening. There are futuristic devices, unfamiliar faces, and the ring of complex medical terms. For many, surgery, hospitalization and aftercare is unnerving and overwhelming. When the time comes for any surgical procedure, there are questions, fears, anxiety, and expectations.

"Patients who are scheduled for joint replacement surgery have many questions," said Aaron Altenburg, MD, Surgeon, Idaho Orthopaedic & Sports Clinic. "When patients prepare mentally and physically for any surgical procedure they are actually taking the right steps toward a successful outcome. And it is important for patients to have a medical team who is open to empower, educate, support and answer all of their questions."

Although PMC has some of the most skilled, nationally recognized orthopaedic surgeons in the region, they are continually looking for ways to raise their quality standards even higher. Along with the dedicated and caring surgeons, the entire medical staff is committed to providing every patient with the highest level of care.

"We don't just want to meet the bar, we want to exceed it," Dr. Altenburg said. "Patients and their complete medical team need to be on the same page so needs and concerns are addressed."

The experienced surgeons and staff at Idaho Orthopaedic & Sports Clinic know that anxiety is common and that questions need to be answered. To that end, a team of medical specialists from Portneuf Medical Center and Idaho Orthopaedic flew to the Rochester, MN. Their goal was to learn and develop an educational pre-operative course modeled after the joint school at the Mayo Clinic.

"We have found that education prior to a scheduled surgery can be used very effectively to better align patient and doctor expectations," Dr. Altenburg said. "Pre-operative education plays a vital role in patient outcomes and is directly linked with better patient care and enhances the overall comfort level for our patients."

What is Joint School?

It is a comprehensive, pre-operative, educational course taught by a collaborative interdisciplinary team. It is designed for patients who are scheduled for total joint replacement surgery at Portneuf Medical Center.

"We offer a half day class for patients undergoing total joint replacement," Dr. Altenburg said, "Patients get to meet and talk with everyone who will be involved in their surgery and post-operative care. They can touch, feel and test the various machines and adaptive equipment, discuss discharge plans and develop a clear understanding of their role in the recovery process."

Patients who attend Joint School will interact with physicians, nurses, physical therapists, occupational therapists, anesthesiologists and care coordinators.

"The School was very informative," said Susan Nay, knee replacement patient. "It answered all the questions I needed to know."

Included in the half day educational course, patients and family members get instruction on how to prepare for surgery, and what to expect before, during and after surgery. Additional

topics include instruction on bathing, home safety, incision care, potential complications, discharge options and the role of physical therapy in their recovery process.

"If scheduled for a replacement, it is very beneficial for patients to attend," Nay said.

Philosophy of Joint School:

"Aligning expectation of the patient and the medical team is the main goal of Joint School," Dr. Altenburg said. "The over-reaching goal is to get patients back on their feet, both physically and psychologically."

Major surgery on a joint may take two to three hours in the operating room, but getting full motion, strength and flexibility back in that joint after surgery usually takes months. That is where pre-operative exercises, education and post-operative therapeutic exercises play a major factor.

"I believe patients come to us for a service, and our goal is to meet and even exceed their expectations," Dr. Altenburg said. "Joint School is one way we strive to exceed expectations."

Who attends?

"The class is for patients scheduled for surgery and their families," Dr. Altenburg said. "It is for a husband and wife, a grandparent and their family. Family members play a vital role in the recovery process."

When families attend with the patient, it helps families feel more prepared to deal with the post-operative care and to become an integral part of the recovery process.

Benefits:

"Attendance at Joint School correlates to shorter hospital stays, improved surgical outcomes and greater patient satisfaction," Dr. Altenburg said.

Idaho Orthopaedic & Sports Clinic believes that Joint School is empowerment, encouragement, and support in an atmosphere of caring, comfort, and complete understanding. Joint School helps patients develop both positive and realistic expectations. And, it promotes motivation and inspires patient success.

"Joint school is an individual experience," Dr. Altenburg said. "Participants gain valuable physical and physiological benefits. Our ultimate goal is to help maximize the body's mobility after surgery and to improve overall surgical outcomes."

For more information about joint replacement and the Joint School at Idaho Orthopaedic & Sports Clinic, call 208-234-1960 or visit them on the web at www.idaortho.com.

SIDEBAR

Joint School

Patients scheduled for a total joint replacement surgery are invited to attend Joint School. Here, they can ask questions, interact with medical professionals, learn about the process, and become an integral part in their own recovery.

Topics Covered:

- How to prepare for joint replacement surgery
- What to expect during the hospital stay
- Advanced planning for post-hospital care and hospital stay
- The role of physical therapy in the recovery process
- Specialized equipment needed following surgery
- Occupational therapy: instructions on bathing, dressing, home safety, utilizing assistive devices.
- Pain management

- Safety precautions
- Question and answers

Benefits:

- Improved surgical outcomes
- Reduced recovery times
- Reduced pre-operative stress
- Improved strength and balance

What Patients Learn:

- Joint anatomy and surgical procedures
- Functional mobility including bed mobility, transfers, walking and climbing stairs
- Use of adaptive equipment such as a walker, cane, raised toilet seats and dressing aides
- Post-operative precautions
- Pre and Post-operative exercises
- Home safety instructions
- Fall prevention