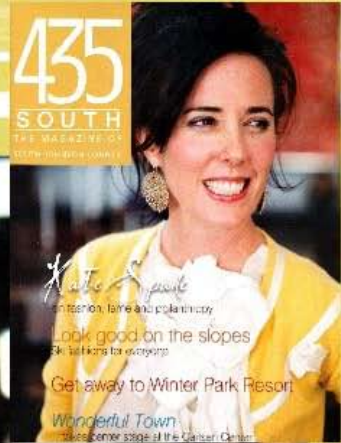


healthy living

A JOINT EFFORT

Leewood orthopedic surgeon provides alternative to hip-replacement surgery

Dr. James K. Brannon





While working as an orthopedic surgical resident in Los Angeles, Dr. James K. Brannon, saw patient after patient with tremendous hip and back pain come into the hospital seeking treatment, only to be turned away because their joints were not bad enough to merit a total replacement surgery.

What Brannon was seeing were patients who were suffering from avascular necrosis, a condition in which the poor blood supply to an area of bone leads to bone death. Gone untreated for extended amounts of time, avascular necrosis can deteriorate the joint to the point that it is no longer salvageable, making total hip-replacement surgery a necessity.

Under many orthopedists, patients who are affected by avascular necrosis are in pain for many years before the problem becomes obvious enough to be detected by MRI and X-ray. In the meantime, those patients have been shuffled from doctor to doctor, all the while being prescribed pain killer after pain killer to stifle the pain.

"450,000 Americans receive total hip replacements each year, and 80 percent are replaced without knowing what caused the patient's joint pain," Brannon says. "For thousands of those patients, dead bone inside the femoral head is the cause of the pain."

With compassion for his patients who were in considerable amounts of pain yet were not advanced enough to need full-fledged replacement surgery, Brannon began working on a solution that would allow patients with avascular necrosis to preserve their joints early rather than replace them later in life.

As founder, president and CEO of Orthopedic Sciences, Inc., Brannon created the Hip Tool™, a surgical instrument that allows surgeons to core into the femur through a small incision, find and remove dead bone with the aid of an endoscope and replace it with healthy bone.

"It's basically a root canal of the hip," Brannon says. The healthy bone then heals as would a simple fracture, offering renewed life to the hip. Brannon has also developed similar procedures for the knee, shoulder and ankle joints.

In March 2005, Brannon relocated to south Johnson County to take a job as the director of the Joint Preservation Center at Truman Medical Center's Lakewood campus in Kansas City, Mo.

"Our clinic is based on the premise of listening to patients and giving them quality care," Brannon says. "I can't

help everybody, but I do the best I can to help the patients that I can."

Rebecca Martin of Topeka, Kan., is one of the patients whose life has been changed by Brannon's procedure. Martin, 36, says she had been in pain at least six years before she had her hips operated on by Brannon. Because her mother has had four hip replacement surgeries, Martin knew that it was important to pay attention to the pain she was feeling in her hips and back and to take action.

"I'm a runner, and it got to the point that I couldn't run anymore," Martin says. "Now I feel great."

For Brannon, Martin's was a classic case of preserving not only a joint, but also the quality of life.

"Why should someone have to be in pain for years and years and lose their mobility before something is done?" Brannon says. "There's no reason to wait that long if you don't have to."

But that's not to say that Brannon can rescue every weary hip that comes his way. Sometimes, a hip replacement may still be necessary if the avascular necrosis is too advanced to salvage the joint. Brannon performs hip replacement procedures as well.

"Hip replacement is a great procedure, and I'm not denying that," he says. "But I'm not here to see whose hip I can replace. First and foremost I'm here to save what God gave you. No hip works better than your own healthy hip."

As for the downtime of the surgery, this minimally invasive procedure allows for a relatively speedy recovery, especially when compared to more extensive joint-preservation and joint-replacement surgeries. Brannon says most patients spend 6-8 weeks on crutches following surgery.

Dr. James K. Brannon is a board-certified orthopedic surgeon, a Fellow of the American Academy of Orthopedic Surgeons and an assistant professor in the Department of Orthopedic Surgery at the University of Missouri School of Medicine. He is also the founder, president and CEO of Orthopedic Sciences, Inc. and the director of the Joint Preservation Center at Truman Medical Center.