

The Benefits of Online Communities for Post-Operative Hip Replacement Patients

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Online patient communities and patient forums have sprouted up all across the web, focusing on diseases and conditions ranging from total hip surgery, to insomnia, to epilepsy and cancer. For the most part, these forums serve as a reliable source of medical information and the benefits of them are becoming clearer with time.

One community in particular, patients recovering from hip replacement surgery, is showing dramatic growth and popularity. Post-operative hip replacement patients create a social network in the online forums where members can discuss their concerns about rehab and physical therapy and ask specific questions from moderators and experienced e-patients.

Josephine Fox, a moderator at the BoneSmart.org hip replacement forums and nurse of over fifty years, says that post-op hip replacement patients often express worries about accidents, complications, and failures. The support they are given in the forums allows them to cope with the emotional side of undergoing surgery. Emotional issues can range from depression to poor pain control to difficulty with the activities of daily life such as bathing, dressing, and mobility.

Using the forums as a place to talk about issues such as swelling, pain, and trouble sleeping helps members to feel less disconnected and isolated after their surgery. One patient writes: "So... Saturday I noticed a lot more pain and some swelling in the area of the incision! It started like that be progressed quickly. The pain got a lot worse as did the swelling! Now it feels like there is a water balloon under the skin there. It's hot to the touch! It felt much like a new clot. So, I spent four hours in the ER. It's not a new clot, but they don't know what it is and told me to talk to my OS today! That's the plan, but no sleep last night!! Frustrated and needed to vent!!"

The goal of online communities for post-op hip replacement patients is to foster communication between those who have recently undergone surgery and those who have had one or more surgeries. Experienced users are encouraged to help "mentor" new patients, and provide a nurturing environment of support and knowledge. Obtaining specific answers to questions like, "Why are my legs so swollen?" and "Shouldn't I be further on at X weeks?" provides patients with an immediate sense of comfort and ease. In addition, e-patients are properly informed about rehab, recovery, and infection hazards. The moderators, who have special training in these areas, help to pass along reliable and practical information.

Post-operative hip replacement patients learn how to use medical home-equipment like ice machines and CPM's (Continuous Passive Movement). Furthermore, physical therapy can be confusing to patients who are just beginning the stages of rehabilitation. Moderators and experienced members of the forum offer suggestions on how to navigate this crucial period. Members who have gone through physical therapy for a total hip replacement are often more than willing to share their experience.

By sharing their experiences, patients can provide more assistance to each other than even a physician might be able to. Tom Ferguson, author of the article, "What I've learned from E-Patients," writes: "I have also learned that an online group . . . is not only much smarter than any single patient, but is also smarter, or at least more comprehensive, than many physicians—even many medical specialists."

About BoneSmart.org

Replacement Surgery. The BoneSmart® National Consumer Awareness Campaign's mission is to raise patient awareness of the options available to persons diagnosed as a hip replacement or knee replacement candidates by providing an Internet portal for awareness of the latest advances in joint replacement materials, their longevity and suitability for various applications. With this information the potential patient may be better informed when discussing options with his or her surgeon.