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# Reflections of an Orthopedic Surgeon

By Brian Cole, MD

Over the last 7 years, I have had the privilege of treating many of your patients with orthopedic problems of the shoulder, elbow and knee. I would like to take this opportunity to provide some of the highlights representing the intellectual and technological advances in orthopedics over the last several years.

## Shoulder

The advent of arthroscopy combined with the development of innovative instrumentation has paved the way to treat common shoulder problems (i.e., shoulder instability, labral tears and rotator cuff tears) entirely arthroscopically while patients remain awake during the procedure with regional anesthesia and are discharged typically within 1 hour of their operation. Our understanding of the complexities of the shoulder joint provides enormous insight into what normal and abnormal anatomy represents. At this juncture, outside of tendon transfers and shoulder replacement operations, there remains very little that we cannot manage exclusively through the arthroscope in an outpatient setting.

The benefits including less perioperative morbidity, less incidence of stiffness and the ability to address all pathology simultaneously have truly been determined in our patient population. Prospective comparisons of our patients to historical controls following the same procedures performed through larger incisions with muscle cutting have helped us to determine that these advances are not "just technology over reason", but rather, represent legitimate benefits to our patients with significant cost savings to the health care system.

## Elbow

Tennis elbow (i.e., lateral epicondylitis) is typically cured with temporary activity modification, physical/occupational therapy, steroid injections and with the use of a tennis elbow brace. Failure of conservative therapy rarely occurs, but often leads to a recommendation for surgery. Until last year, this surgery was performed through an open incision and quite frankly, often led to a relatively unpredictable outcome.

Today, this same operation is performed arthroscopically through two 1 cm incisions. This new method allows us to assess for joint pathology that would otherwise be missed with an open approach (i.e., 15% of the time) and is associated with a much more rapid and definitive reduction in pain. While the long-term outcome is currently being evaluated, we believe that there is no downside to managing lateral epicondylitis arthroscopically and that patients stand to benefit tremendously. This is especially true for our athletes and athletes with occupational injuries.

## Knee

Possibly the most exciting area of all is the ability to resurface knees with damaged cartilage and replace missing meniscus tissue in an effort to reduce pain, improve function and potentially stave off the need for joint replacement. At the Rush Cartilage Restoration Center® ([www.cartilagedoc.org](http://www.cartilagedoc.org)), we are currently engaged in clinical trials for next generation tissue engineering technology that promises less invasive surgery at a lower cost. At this time, we have one of the largest patient populations in the world who have undergone autologous chondrocyte implanta-

tion, fresh osteochondral allograft transplantation and meniscus transplantation. Appropriately indicated patients have clinical success rates with significantly reduced pain and improved function in nearly 85% of all cases. Recent advances include our ability to perform these very same operations in the shoulder, elbow, hip and ankle.

## Biography

Dr. Cole is an Associate Professor in Orthopedics at Rush University Medical Center in Chicago. He specializes in arthroscopic shoulder, elbow and knee surgery. He is the director of the Rush Cartilage Restoration Center and co-team physician and consultant for the Chicago White Sox and Chicago Rush Arena Football team, respectively. Dr. Cole has authored more than 150 articles, text books, and technique papers discussing the results of these procedures. Dr. Cole is an invited lecturer in and outside of the United States on a regular basis.



For more information or to make an appointment, contact Dr. Cole's office at 312-243-4244 or you can reach him through his informational website at [www.cartilagedoc.org](http://www.cartilagedoc.org).