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## Bending rules: Southborough knee doctor honored

Photos



*Contributed photo*  
 Dr. David C. Ayers of Southborough, chairman of orthopedics and physical rehabilitation and professor of orthopedics at UMass Medical School, was recently honored for his part in breakthrough research on post-surgery knee function.

By Abby Jordan/Daily News staff  
**The MetroWest Daily News**  
 Posted Apr 24, 2008 @ 12:01 AM

WORCESTER — As the number of patients receiving total knee replacement surgery continues to swell, a pair of doctors at UMass Memorial Medical Center has been recognized for breakthrough research on post-surgery knee function.

Doctors David C. Ayers of Southborough, chairman of orthopedics and physical rehabilitation and professor of orthopedics at UMass Medical School, and Patricia D. Franklin, director of clinical research in orthopedics and associate professor of orthopedics, attended the Knee Society's annual meeting in March. There, they received the Chitranjan Ranawat Award for surgical technique.

The Knee Society's award is given annually to researchers whose work advances professional knowledge and improves treatment of knee disorders.

"The fact that we were given this award acknowledges the importance of our work as a contribution to help knee-replacement patients," Ayers said.

Total knee replacement surgery, in which an artificial joint or prosthesis replaces a damaged knee joint, is typically performed on patients with advanced arthritis who have not found pain relief from treatments like pills or shots.

Ayers said most knee replacement surgeries are performed on patients 60 to 80 years old. However, more young people who develop arthritis from knee injuries and more people over 80 need the surgery, said Ayers.

Since 1998, there has been a 73 percent growth in knee replacement surgeries, according to the Journal of Bone and Joint Surgery, and 450,000 are performed annually. UMass Memorial Medical Center does around 1,000 a year, a number that has grown from 400 since 2003, said Ayers.

Ayers and Franklin came to UMass Memorial Medical center in 2003 from the SUNY Health Science Center in Syracuse, N.Y. Continuing research they spearheaded in 2002, the doctors studied outcomes from 16,000 surgeries in 34 states and 250 hospitals.

They found that while 98 percent of patients reported outstanding pain relief, there was a wider range in how well their knees functioned after surgery, Ayers said. Roughly two-thirds of patients greatly improved and could return to activities, jobs and hobbies that pain previously prevented them from doing.

But one-third of the patients improved considerably less, Ayers said.

"Before the study it was assumed that patients followed a normal distribution, that most were in the middle," said Ayers. "We found that was not true."

Ayers' and Franklin's resulting paper, "Functional Outcomes after TKR Varies with Patient Attributes," has changed how potential

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knee replacement patients are assessed, said Ayers. Factors like obesity, strength of the quadriceps muscle, and emotional health can predict how well a patient's knee will function after surgery.

"We can identify patients who are at a higher risk of not getting the functional improvement we want them to have," said Ayers. "We're able to give them a more realistic look at what the operation will do for them."

The hospital received a grant from the National Institutes of Health in November 2007 which Ayers, Franklin and other researchers have begun to use to develop a program to increase patients' knee function following surgery.

With the number of knee replacements expected to increase more than 600 percent by 2030, according to the Journal of Bone and Joint Surgery, Ayers' and Franklin's continued research could lead to more positive outcomes for knee replacement patients.

"The next step is very exciting," said Ayers. "When you put this at a national level, this is a very significant finding."

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