

Editorial

The Arthroscope as a Research Tool

Arthroscopy can and has been put to three broad uses in our orthopedic practices: As an aid to diagnosis, to perform surgical procedures and, finally, as a research tool. It has been widely used by orthopedic surgeons to diagnose lesions of the joints and surgically treat them but is rarely used as a research tool or to do follow-up studies. This is unfortunate, as it deprives our orthopedic profession of a chance to learn more about the conditions that we treat. It also tends to promote the image of the orthopedic surgeon as interested only in the technical and surgical aspects of orthopedics, rather than the scientific ones. Information that we badly need, such as the fate of the articular cartilage after injury or disease, cannot be provided by those interested only in research, as they, unfortunately, have no knowledge or expertise with the arthroscope. Arthroscopic surgeons themselves must fill this void.

An effort in this direction is made by Drs. Ewing and Voto in their manuscript on "Arthroscopic Surgical Management of Osteochondritis Dissecans of the Knee." It is only a preliminary report of what happens to lesions of the articular cartilage

caused by osteochondritis dissecans but it is a step in the right direction. Unfortunately, no intra-articular photographs of these lesions have been provided in this article, presumably because the procedure was all done under video, and no actual photographs were taken. Although it is possible, as most people know, to make prints from the video screen, this is time consuming, expensive and, at best, provides an inferior photograph compared with that obtained by a still camera.

We hope that others who are scientifically minded will see the need for providing more information about this tissue about which we know so little and yet is so essential to the health of the joint. The fate of the knee joint or any joint depends upon the integrity of the articular cartilage. We need more knowledge to better treat our patients who suffer from disease or injury of this most important tissue.

S. Ward Casscells, M.D.
Editor-in-Chief