



# The Promise and the Scam of Stem Cells

By Robert Kepley, MD

Stem cells are truly remarkable “creatures.” All stem cells begin life as part of an embryo and have the ability to become any type of cell in the human body. They can become skin, heart, muscle or nerve cells, and once they become a differentiated cell, they remain that cell type permanently. The promise of stem cells is that through medical research we can manipulate stem cells to help cure disease.

For many years, stem cells have been used to effectively treat blood and immune system diseases. There is also great promise for the use of stem cells to treat specific types of nerve damage. While these are wonderful medical advancements, stem cells are rather limited in what they are proven to effectively treat.

In orthopaedic surgery, there is ongoing investigation into the ability of stem cells to treat tendonitis and ligament injuries. At Stanford University and the Mayo Clinic, ongoing studies are investigating whether stem cells have any place in the treatment of arthritic knee joints. To date, there hasn't been any evidence of cartilage regrowth. These studies have only noted some short-lived relief from the pain and inflammation associated with knee joint arthritis.

Other treatments, such as cortisone injections, platelet-rich plasma injections and oral anti-inflammatory medications, provide a similar decrease in joint inflammation. These are all significantly less expensive than stem cell injections, and their long-term effect has shown to be exactly the same.

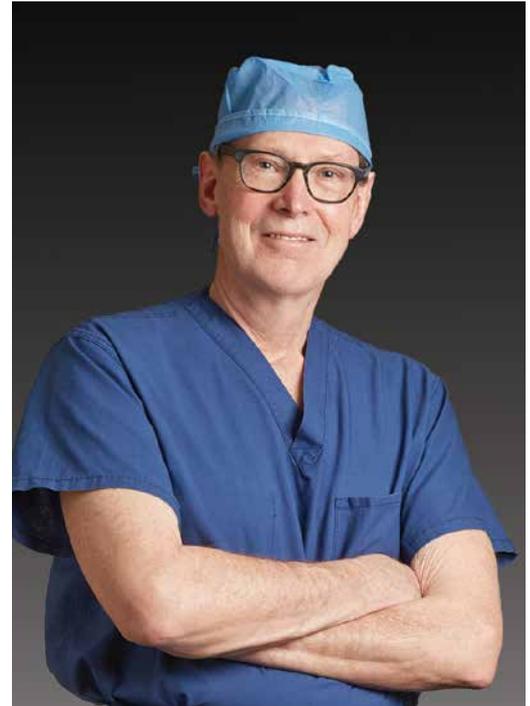
Unfortunately, there are dishonest individuals with a chiropractic education who are scamming the public by claiming that their “stem cell injections” will reverse knee joint arthritis. While we'd like to

believe that putting stem cells into an arthritic, worn-out knee joint could correct years of deterioration, this is a fraudulent claim that is frowned upon by ethical researchers in the medical community. If stem cells truly prevented the need for knee replacement surgery, it would be reported on the nightly news, the FDA would approve it, insurance companies would pay for it and every orthopaedic surgeon in the country would do it. There are currently no studies showing that injecting stem cells into an arthritic knee will reverse arthritis.

This is not meant to be a criticism of the chiropractic profession. There are many highly competent and ethical chiropractors that orthopaedic surgeons consult with on difficult orthopaedic problems. However, anyone making unproven claims that they can inject what they think are stem cells into an arthritic knee joint, observe new cartilage growth, reverse arthritis, charge an exorbitant out-of-pocket fee and expect a lasting good outcome should be regarded with suspicion and as unethical.

Some of these unethical individuals who advocate stem cell injections will state that orthopaedic surgeons don't support the treatment because we want to make more money by performing knee replacement surgeries. If that were the case, we would bury our ethics, abandon the Hippocratic Oath, begin injecting “stem cells” and be paid five times as much for a five-minute injection in place of a two-hour surgery that truly fixes a knee joint.

My Crystal Clinic Orthopaedic Center partners and I are passionate about practicing orthopaedic surgery and providing the best, most honest, ethical care for our patients. Be careful what you allow to be injected into your knee joint and who you allow to inject it.



*Dr. Robert Kepley is a board-certified, fellowship-trained orthopaedic surgeon, specializing exclusively in total joint replacement surgery of the knee and hip. He is a graduate of the Ohio State University College of Medicine and served his fellowship in joint replacement surgery at St. Ann's Hospital in Columbus. Dr. Kepley is a member of several state and national medical societies. He has been a physician since 1975.*



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