



Photo by JEFF STOKOE/Advocate staff

Substitute teacher Roseanne Martyniuk shares a laugh with Grade 6 students at Central Middle School recently. A hip replacement has put her back in the classroom and Martyniuk also shares as a volunteer with people facing and recovering from joint surgery.

## Help for people who are new to the joint

By [Susan Zielinski - Red Deer Advocate](#)

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Ortho Connect volunteers have all been there. All the volunteers with the national support program for orthopedic surgery patients have experienced the anxiety before and the challenges after a joint replacement, because they've all actually had the surgery.

Ortho Connect started as a pilot in Ontario a few years ago for hip and knee patients only. In spring 2009, it was opened up to all types of orthopedic surgery patients.

Red Deer volunteer Roseanne Martyniuk, 57, said hip replacement surgery in October 2005 "absolutely" changed her life for the better.

Before surgery, she struggled through her work day with severe, chronic pain.

"By the time I'd come home from work, I could do pretty much nothing else. I would come home and plop myself down in a chair and that was it," said Martyniuk, who has since retired as a full-time foods and fashion studies teacher but continues to work as a substitute teacher.

The Canadian Orthopaedic Foundation, which runs the free service Ortho Connect, matches patients with trained volunteers who have had similar surgery. They also try to match up patients by language and age. They talk on the phone or by email.

Martyniuk said hip surgery is definitely scary and it would have been nice to have someone to talk things over with before she had surgery.

Now she's ready to lend an ear.

"Quite often they are not able to express what their fears are. They just want to talk to someone," Martyniuk said.

As of mid-February, Ortho Connect had over 100 volunteers and had assisted over 300 clients.

Volunteers don't provide medical advice, but can help people structure the questions to ask their family doctor, surgeon or pharmacist.

"Surgeons give them all the information they need, it's just not from someone who's had it done," said Donna Weiss, manager of community resources for the Canadian Orthopaedic Foundation.

"It's just straight peer support. This is what it was like for me. This is what I did."

Ortho Connect was developed as more and more people started calling the foundation with their concerns.

Weiss said when the program started most patients had questions before surgery.

"We're finding more and more people now will come to us after surgery as well. So many things come up, things you didn't even know you wanted to ask."

Volunteers can offer helpful tips. Weiss said one of the volunteers who had foot and ankle surgery recommended cleaning out a bathroom cabinet for storing all types of clothes so people don't have to move from dressers to the closet with limited mobility. They can have a shower and get dressed right in the bathroom.

The volunteer also recommends people wear an apron to carry around commonly used items.

"In her apron she kept all her little essentials, like a small thing of Kleenex, and lip balm and all these things so you don't have to constantly go get them."

"All these little hints give people a measure of calm to know the person has been through it."

Information on the service has mostly spread by word of mouth.

"We had thought initially just having (pamphlets) in surgeon's offices would work wonderfully but it doesn't, because they are so busy. They don't have time to say 'Hey call this number.' They have it on display but people aren't always looking around and see them."

Ortho Connect is funded through donations and recently received a grant in Ontario to reach out to more orthopedic surgery patients in that province and in the future funding in other provinces will be sought.

Martyniuk was one of Ortho's first volunteers in 2006.

She said doctors do an amazing job. They are the health-care professionals. But people who have actually had the surgery can provide a different perspective.

"There is someone out there who cares."

For more information on Ortho Connect, go to [www.canorth.org](http://www.canorth.org)  
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