



Health and Wellness Support Program

For Employees Facing
Orthopaedic Surgery and Treatment

Ortho Connect Peer Support Program



www.orthoconnect.org

Canadian Orthopaedic Foundation
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I. Introduction to the Canadian Orthopaedic Foundation

Established in 1965, the Canadian Orthopaedic Foundation is dedicated solely to helping people build, maintain and restore their bone and joint health. By advancing research, delivering public and patient education and fostering excellence of care, we strive to keep Canadians moving pain-free, longer and stronger.

At the core of our day-to-day efforts are our public and patient education and support programs. We deliver high-quality programs, trusted by patients, professionals and employers alike. These programs provide essential information about bone and joint health - from building it to restoring it - so people can live and move longer, stronger, and pain-free. Each of the Foundation's educational resources are provided to patients, their families and friends – free of charge. They are created with input and approval from our Medical & Scientific Review Committee with members practising in each of the sub-specialties of orthopaedic medicine across Canada, as well as other leading experts in physiotherapy, nursing and other healthcare sectors.

Our public and patient education and support includes:

- The Ortho Connect peer support program,
- OrthoLink - a bi-annual educational newsletter,
- www.canorth.org with more than 200 pages about bone and joint health, disorders and treatments, and
- A variety of educational booklets that help people on the road to restored mobility.

The Foundation is powered by professional staff and more than 500 volunteers in over 80 cities. The Foundation has a strong donorship of orthopaedic professionals, patients and members of the public. Given the importance of bone and joint health to a vibrant life of movement, and to civic and economic activity, the Foundation appeals to people from all walks of life – to keep them moving pain-free, longer and stronger.



II. The Impact of Bone and Joint Conditions

Good bone health is vital to one's overall well-being and ability to earn a living. The human skeleton consists of 206 sizable bones supported and supplemented by ligaments, tendons, muscles and cartilage. Our bones serve several important functions:

- Provide body structure,
- Protect internal organs,
- Anchor muscles, ligaments, tendons and joints for movement,
- Store the body's calcium reserve, and
- House bone marrow which generates blood cells.

With an aging population, the incidence of musculoskeletal conditions such as osteoporosis - which alone affects more than 1.4 million Canadians - is growing, causing an increasing demand for treatment. In fact, at more than \$16 Billion dollars per year, musculoskeletal conditions are the second most costly category of disease in Canada. Bone and Joint problems are the leading cause of disability amongst the working population accounting for approximately 39 per cent of long-term disability costs.

III. Employees Preparing for Orthopaedic Surgery

Knowing that an upcoming surgery will give relief from pain and disability can be very comforting, but it can also cause concern, anxiety, and even feelings of 'loss of control'. Once the decision is made to have surgery, there is likely a waiting period.

Employees can use this time to learn about and prepare for surgery. Familiarizing themselves with what comes next allows some control and understanding over treatment.

If an employee is newly referred for bone and joint surgery, they will likely have many non-medical questions after seeing their surgeon. To help individuals with such questions, along with finding methods to cope with the pain and anxiety that go along with an upcoming surgery, they can turn to the **Ortho Connect** Peer Support Program – a program that is unique in Canada.

Ortho Connect is a peer support program through which newly referred orthopaedic patients are matched with volunteers who have already undergone similar surgical treatment.

Patients connect with trained volunteers by phone to learn what to expect from their treatment and how to prepare for their best possible outcome. **Ortho Connect** helps patients to feel confident and informed through providing an experienced, understanding ear.



Ortho Connect is a valued addition to any employee health and wellness plan. It is a free, yet vital resource that is ideal for any employee environment where physical wellness is integral to work function.

IV. About Ortho Connect

Ortho Connect is a peer support program offering services by telephone and online to help orthopaedic patients prepare for their surgery, as well as plan for a successful recovery and return to a life of mobility.

Developed by the Canadian Orthopaedic Foundation, **Ortho Connect** is a free, telephone-based peer support program through which people newly referred for bone and joint surgery are matched with trained volunteers who have already undergone similar surgical treatment. Volunteers are trained to listen, support, encourage, and, if necessary, refer clients to community resources for information and assistance based on individual needs and desires.

The purpose of the program is to enable patients to learn, understand, and become comfortable with their upcoming surgery, supported by a person who knows what they're going through. Once a request for service is received, the Foundation matches the client with a trained volunteer within approximately 48 hours. The program is similar to peer support programs such as the Canadian Breast Cancer Foundation's Reach-to-Recovery Program.

Ortho Connect arose from the unmet need for new orthopaedic patients to talk to someone who has already been through the same type of surgery. The need was determined through monitoring the nature and number of public inquiries received by the Foundation and through extensive, informal research. "Someone to talk to who has been there" was the most common response when former patients were asked retrospectively to identify gaps in the care path and what would have been of most value to them in their experience.



V. Maximizing Employee Attendance and Return to Work

Surgery to restore mobility to a painful and uncooperative joint or bone is a welcome relief – even more so when pain and immobility has meant time off work and decrease in household income. For working people who require surgery to their bones and joints, the preparation for a full return to work starts before the surgery happens.

People know their jobs best. The more descriptive a patient can be, the better surgeons are able to help them achieve results that make the best sense for them, and to help them understand expectations and how long recovery will take. That way, people can make appropriate arrangements for time off work, and have a reasonable back-to-work plan.

Prior to surgery, it's important for an orthopaedic surgeon to have an accurate diagnosis, but equally important is to understand how the troublesome joint is affecting the patient's daily life. Sometimes there isn't much choice in the type of operation to fix a particular problem, but other times there are options. Knowing what a patient hopes to accomplish with surgery, and how quickly, can make a big difference in treatment, recovery, returning to work and a host of other factors.

Here are some important questions for patients to discuss with their surgeon:

- What type of work do you do?
- Consider the time you spend at a desk, standing for long periods, driving, walking to the bus, climbing stairs, lifting items and their weight.
- Map out your day from the time you wake up and let your surgeon know how often you rely on your troublesome joint.
- Can you afford to be off work and for how long? Many people don't have the benefits of short- or long-term pay for health-related work absences. Knowing that a quick return to work is important to one's household helps a surgeon determine a suitable recovery plan.
- Will your employer accept a graduated return to work? Many employers, especially those with roles requiring physical labour, will work with an employee following surgery to return to a role that is less physically demanding.

Fully understanding options is important so one can plan for their best possible recovery while still getting back to work as soon as they can.

Following surgery, the greatest gains in function typically happen in the first three months. But patients will continue to improve, and need to realize that a full recovery can sometimes take up to one year. Learning and planning ahead helps to avoid disappointing surprises later.



VI. Improving Employee Retention

Ortho Connect can help to improve employee retention post- surgery. Employers promoting **Ortho Connect** demonstrate that their employees' health and well-being are integral and that their return to work is important to the organization.

VII. Employees Caring for Orthopaedic Patients

The **Ortho Connect** Peer Support Program is also suitable for those individuals that care for and/or are responsible for others facing orthopaedic surgery. Peer support is extended beyond patients themselves and is also offered to caregivers. This is ideal when language is a barrier or when one is taking care of an elderly parent.

VIII. Promoting Ortho Connect to Employees

There are a number of ways to promote the **Ortho Connect** service as an extension of your overall health and wellness program. The Canadian Orthopaedic Foundation suggests the following:

- Educate your health and wellness and/or human resource teams about the Ortho Connect program and provide resource materials to individuals who connect with employees on a regular basis
- Write a letter to your employees announcing **Ortho Connect** as a new and valuable offering of your health and wellness program;
- Include information about **Ortho Connect** in your employee newsletter and other communication vehicles on a regular basis
- Launch the **Ortho Connect** program by hosting an employee fundraising event for the Canadian Orthopaedic Foundation;
- Display the **Ortho Connect** poster in the lunchroom / cafeteria and other high traffic areas;
- Display postcards in your health and wellness office, and in other suitable and visible areas;
- Provide all employees facing orthopaedic surgery with an **Ortho Connect** postcard for their reference;
- Post the **Ortho Connect** logo on your employee website;
- Become a corporate donor to the Canadian Orthopaedic Foundation, and
- Encourage employee volunteerism through the Ortho Connect program, or as an ambassador to the Canadian Orthopaedic Foundation.



IX. What Ortho Connect Clients Tell Us

Since the **Ortho Connect**'s inception in 2009, the Canadian Orthopaedic Foundation has assisted hundreds of Canadians facing orthopaedic treatment. With an aging population, this number is growing each year. We regularly receive positive feedback from our **Ortho Connect** clients, such as:

"After suffering many years with arthritis, I was in pain. I've had two knee replacements and I am grateful to have both knees still helping me to walk! I was fortunate to receive the expert work of my surgeon and also appreciate the work of the Canadian Orthopaedic Foundation whose help and advice is available if needed."

"My wife had 4 knee replacement surgeries. Thank you to the Orthopaedic Foundation, the researchers and surgeon for the good work."

"I am very thankful that my surgeon provided me with the Ortho Connect contact information. I am very blessed for Paula [my volunteer]."

"It was beneficial to get to know the volunteer and to learn from her experience."

"Excellent program! It was very helpful to speak with someone that had a similar experience. It helped me to deal with the apprehension."

"My peer volunteer raised issues that had never occurred to me such as the need to build upper body strength when one is on crutches for such a length of time. We talked about respite care, pain management and footwear."

"Catherine, my volunteer, is the first person I've talked to who really knows what this is like. I feel really good about my decision now, and feel that I know what I'm getting into, and why I'm doing so. Ortho Connect provides a truly valuable service."

"A live voice who understands just what you're going through provides immeasurable comfort, yet is likely not available when your aching hip causes a sleepless night. The new website extends that live service to provide round-the-clock access to information and resources at your convenience."



X. Employee Volunteerism

Fostering a culture that promotes employee volunteerism is ideal in today's workplace. Employees are seeking work-life balance, as well as alignment to their personal values and beliefs to their everyday job. With our aging population, ready-to-retire older workers want to serve their communities. These demographics, combined with the scrutiny of Consumers wanting transparency and confirmation of a company's community work, results in increased opportunity for "trust" and brand loyalty.

The Canadian Orthopaedic Foundation offers rewarding volunteer opportunities to those who have undergone orthopaedic treatments, as well as those who have a vested interest in helping their community.

Ortho Connect Volunteer – after completing a 1-hour training session and reviewing a detailed training manual, volunteers are matched with patients awaiting similar orthopaedic treatments. Volunteers provide a "real world view" of what to expect and how to prepare for upcoming surgery. They help ease apprehension and provide assistance in sharing information and community resources. Volunteers choose how much – or how little- time they wish to spend each month.

Canadian Orthopaedic Foundation Ambassador – volunteers assist the Foundation by distributing educational materials to community organizations and events. Volunteers choose ho much – or how little – time they wish to spend each month.