



## Seminars tackle tough health issues

Doctor's latest in Naples focuses on arthritis

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Arthritis: It's the No. 1 cause of disability in the United States.

One out of five people have it, and two-thirds are women. There are more than 100 different types of it.

"It's a real problem for us," Dr. Robert Zehr told 19 people attending his free Aug. 18 seminar, "What's New and What Works for Painful Knees and Hips." The talk with a slideshow and discussion afterward was part of a community outreach program created by Physicians Regional Healthcare System, which has two locations, one on Pine Ridge Road, and one on Collier Boulevard, in Naples.

The hospitals host talks led by experts in all sorts of health problems, such as heartburn, weight loss, varicose veins, shoulder surgery and stomach pain.

Evelyn Greenfield, 75, attends the seminars with her husband often. "They're quite knowledgeable, and I have quite a lot of the things they talk about, unfortunately," said Greenfield, a Naples retiree. "I even go to seminars about things I don't have."

The most common form of arthritis is osteoarthritis, the wear-and-tear kind. Rheumatoid arthritis is an autoimmune disease, meaning the body is attacking itself, and traumatic arthritis happens after an injury. "It's best thought of as the Humpty Dumpty kind," Zehr said as the crowd tittered.

Doctors don't know for sure what causes arthritis, but they do know what helps alleviate the pain of it: healthy diet, weight loss, braces, walking aids, medications, exercise and surgery.

Surgery should always be the last resort.

"You want to wait just long enough that it's cutting into your activities," he said. "Don't wait until you're a couch potato."

Joint replacements are becoming a more popular option than ever with the country's aging population, with about 500,000 knee replacements and 220,000 hip replacements a year, Zehr said. Doctors expect knee replacements to spike 670 percent by 2030. "Knee replacements are going up like an F-15 off a tarmac," Zehr said. He urged people considering the surgery to research their doctors and to choose one experienced in their problem.

The American Academy of Orthopaedic Surgeons cites 80 percent of joint replacements are performed by surgeons who do 20 of these a year. Zehr has done more than 5,000 joint reconstructions. He recommends a minimally invasive total knee replacement in which he makes a 4-inch incision compared to the more common 8-inch cut. No muscles are detached or sliced, and it's less painful with shorter recovery time.

Janet Popowich, 65, had both knees replaced, and the results were wonderful, she told the seminar group after Zehr's talk. "Any time people ask me about the pain, I tell them, the day after, you're like 'Why did I do this? The second and third day, you're like 'Well ...' and then after a week, you're like 'Why didn't I do this sooner?'"