Evolution of Arthroscopy

When arthroscopy was first developed in humble beginnings in Japan over a decade ago, not many realized at that time that it was the beginning of a revolution. It was introduced in the US through the efforts of such men as O'Connor, who learned the techniques of operative arthroscopy from Dr. Hiroshi Ikeuchi of Tokyo. The procedures have rapidly evolved into a refined art in the past ten years.

Its beginning provided us with an extension of our ability to perform a better physical examination of knee disorders. We were learning knee pathology from a direct visual perspective. It revolutionized our thinking about the surgical treatment of intraarticular lesions. From the lessons learned by observation, operative techniques using more sophisticated instrumentation were rapidly developed.

The stimulus of success, provided by the knowledge gained from this examination of the knee, gave further impetus to look into the shoulder, ankle, wrist, elbow, and even the spinal canal as is presently being done on an experimental basis in Japan. New technology has been developed to satisfy the requirements for the expanding horizons of the arthroscopist. The development of special operative instrumentation, including intraarticular knives, scissors, abrasion tools, shavers, special needle guides for peripheral meniscus repair, and more recently the introduction of the laser, has been rapid and spectacular.

Arthroscopy has also enhanced and modified certain of the periarticular procedures about the knee. It has given us valuable information on whether to perform a tibial osteotomy or a Maquet procedure.

As with every new technique we must be judicious in our evaluation. Enthusiasm is no excuse for good judgment; there is potential for monetary and patient-care abuse. This negative impact can reflect badly on our profession and turn a positive force into one that embarrasses us all. If this happens, the ultimate potential of this new tool is lost to our patients.

Robert D. D'Ambrosia, MD
Editor-in-Chief