



BRITISH ASSOCIATION FOR SURGERY OF THE KNEE

30th April 2026

The Editor
The Guardian

To the Editor,

Re: Common knee surgery may be ineffective, 10-year study finds

We are writing in response to an article published in The Guardian today, reporting the findings from the FIDELITY trial comparing arthroscopic partial meniscectomy with sham surgery. Whilst we acknowledge this is a substantial body of research, we are concerned that the headline as published, and the interpretation offered, will mislead patients who have knee conditions that are potentially remediable by surgery.

The trial results were published in The New England Journal of Medicine. This is a high quality scientific publication, but the article referred to is a personal correspondence and has not been subjected to rigorous peer-review which is the mainstay of all scientific work. Hence the methodology, analysis, statistical interpretation and conclusions drawn from the paper have not been scrutinised by peers with potential publication bias.

The FIDELITY trial was designed to test one specific clinical scenario: middle-aged adults with degenerative medial meniscal tears, no evidence of osteoarthritis on X-ray, and no history of injury. The study was never designed to, and cannot answer the question of whether surgery helps patients whose tear is injury related. Those patients who sustain a meniscal tear through injury but with no osteoarthritis represent a large proportion of those referred for knee surgery. Moreover, early surgery including meniscal repair rather than removal of meniscal tissue, can restore normal knee mechanics and protect the joint from long-term damage. Similarly, patients with meniscal flap tears causing mechanical issues and who have undergone appropriate physiotherapy but without symptom resolution, may benefit from arthroscopic surgery. The FIDELITY trial and your commentary does not speak to these groups, and it would be a disservice to your readers to have them believe that surgery is futile for them.

The British Association for Surgery of the Knee (BASK) developed by an independent expert working group and published the results in The Bone and Joint Journal following rigorous peer review in 2019, confirming that arthroscopic partial meniscectomy retains a clear role in appropriately selected patients once conservative treatment has been properly completed and found to be insufficient.

The FIDELITY findings support the existing evidence, including BASK's opinion, that patients with degenerative meniscal tears should be offered conservative management initially with surgery an option if that symptoms prevail. Where the coverage of today's article risks causing harm is implying that this conclusion applies across the full range of meniscal pathology. It does not.

Patients who are worried about their knee following today's coverage should speak to their general practitioner or treating orthopaedic surgeon. Treatment is personalised and made jointly with patients and by clinicians who are trained in this area and who follow national evidence-based guidelines.

Yours sincerely,

Alasdair Santini, President of BASK
Chinmay Gupte, President-elect of BASK
Leela Biant, Past President of BASK
On behalf of the BASK executive committee

References

1. Kalske R, Sihvonen R, Paavola M, et al. Arthroscopic Partial Meniscectomy for Degenerative Tear: 10-Year Outcomes. *N Engl J Med* 2026;394:1757-1759.
2. Abram SGF, Beard DJ, Price AJ, and the BASK Meniscal Working Group. Arthroscopic meniscal surgery: a national society treatment guideline and consensus statement. *Bone Joint J* 2019;101-B:652-659.