Elbow Replacement

System used

Total elbow joint replacement (TER) is a salvage surgery offering pain control and function in cases of elbow pain and lameness that cannot be effectively controlled by less invasive, medical means. At Croft we use the TATE cementless elbow system. Compared with hip replacement, TER is in its infancy and though several systems have appeared over the last ten years or so, all have had very serious shortcomings and none have stood the test of time. During the last four years or more, Croft has been involved with clinical phase development of the TATE elbow replacement system. This TER has evolved from earlier systems and early experience has been very promising. Croft was the only veterinary centre in Europe to be involved in this first clinical phase and consequently we have substantial experience of this procedure. Medium term (up to 3 years) follow up of our TER cases is very encouraging.

When

The indications for TER are broadly similar to those for hip replacement. However, the functional results with TER are not as good as we have come to expect with hip replacement and the “newness” of the procedure means that we don’t yet have any long term follow up studies so currently we will keep TER for the more severely affected patients.

Prognosis

The prognosis with TER is good – pain control appears to be profound and is apparent very quickly after the operation. To date, all the dogs we have operated have been functionally very much better than before surgery. However, some restricted range of joint motion remains and all dogs will show some permanent minor elbow lameness. Owners have been consistently happy with the outcome of TER surgery.

Long term prognosis is not yet known for the simple reason that the first case was operated less than 5 years ago so there is not yet any long term data. However, surveillance of early cases suggests that long term prognosis is likely to be acceptable. TER is very demanding surgery and the possibility of catastrophic complication exists. There have been remarkably few catastrophic complications (fewer than 5%) in the first group of cases. It is likely that as our experience of TER surgery expands, we will become more “upbeat” about the prognosis and this surgery will find a place amongst younger dogs with lameness related to elbow dysplasia and arthritis.