

8 February 2017

Knee degeneration treatment by keyhole surgery not included in publicly funded healthcare services in Finland

Recommendation	Keyhole surgery examination and treatment of knee degeneration due to ageing, in other words mild knee arthritis and degenerative meniscal tears, are in Finland not included in the publicly funded healthcare services for patients who do not have a significant acute knee trauma or lock knee diagnosed by a doctor.	
Grounds	Seriousness of the health issue	Repetitive or long-term knee pain is common among adults and increases with ageing. According to survey findings, every fourth person over 40 years of age suffers from knee pain most commonly caused by knee degeneration. In addition to pain, knee degeneration can cause stiffness of the knee and make moving and independent coping difficult.
	Effectiveness	With regard to pain treatment and knee function, keyhole surgery measures (lavage, debridement i.e. mechanical cleansing, removal or partial removal of meniscus) do not give any additional benefits compared with physical exercise.
	Safety/Adverse effects	The most common keyhole surgery side effect is vein thrombosis, which occurs in 2–11 patients among 1,000 patients treated by keyhole surgery. Among 1,000 patients, 1–4 patients suffer from bacterial infections. Other, more rare side effects are the necessity to undergo a new, unplanned operation, or death.
	Costs	In 2014, the direct imputed cost of keyhole surgery operations conducted in public healthcare due to of knee degeneration was about EUR 22.6 million. The Care Register for Health Care (HILMO) indicates that 10,617 keyhole surgery operations due to knee degeneration were conducted in 2014 in public healthcare. Based on available information, the average cost for one operation was EUR 2,130. Additionally, 4,520 keyhole surgery operations were conducted by private healthcare services in 2014 and the Social Insurance Institution of Finland (Kela) paid EUR 900,000 in compensation for those operations. In other words, approximately 15,000 keyhole surgery operations due to knee degeneration were conducted in Finland in 2014. The publicly funded direct cost of these operations was approximately EUR 23.5 million. Costs due to sickness absence are not included in these numbers.
	Ethical viewpoints	Long-term results of keyhole surgery treatment of knee degeneration are not better than the results of physical exercise. Keyhole surgery operations due to knee degeneration cause high costs and can involve rare but severe side effects.
Background information and references	PALKO's background memo and Finohta's report "Tähystyskirurgian vaikuttavuus polven kulumassa" (Effectiveness of keyhole surgery in the treatment of knee degeneration.) (In Finnish)	
Procedure codes	NGA30, NGD05, NGD15, NGF25, NGF35	

