

The Bone and Joint Decade 2000-2010

Y P LOW,**FAMS, MBBS, FRCS*

Abstract

The World Health Organisation has declared the period 2000 to 2010 the Bone and Joint Decade. This is indeed timely and appropriate. Hundreds of millions of people in the world today are beset with a host of disabilities caused by trauma, ageing and degeneration and other affections of the musculo-skeletal system. With the state of art of orthopaedic surgery and rheumatology, sufferers of bone and joint disabilities have benefited a great deal from advances in pharmacology, newer techniques of imaging, surgery and man-made materials to replace diseased or damaged bone and cartilage. However, man-made materials, being non-living, are subject to wear and tear and loosening in the host bone. As we advance into the Bone and Joint Decade, further improvement in the treatment of bone and joint diseases lies in more basic cartilage and bone research. The Human Genome Project has provided us with a better understanding of disease genes and the possibility of gene manipulation to prevent and treat specific diseases. Cartilage cells culture and transplant are already a reality. Tissue engineering, i.e. growing cells in three-dimensional substrates of collagen or synthetic biodegradable polymers, started in the 1980s, will in future be used to replace damaged bone and cartilage parts with living and bone and cartilaginous tissues, respectively. The first steps have been taken; more research needs to be done. And it is not unreasonable to expect a significant breakthrough in the treatment of bone and joint diseases at the end of this decade.

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* Senior Consultant

Department of Orthopaedic Surgery

Tan Tock Seng Hospital

Address for Reprints: Dr Low Yin Peng, Department of Orthopaedic Surgery, Tan Tock Seng Hospital, 11 Jalan Tan Tock Seng, Singapore 308433.