

LETTER TO THE EDITOR

Dear Sir,

F. Lund and B. E. Nilsson ("Arthroscopy of the Patello-Femoral Joint" *Acta orthop. scand.* **51**: 297–302) pointed out that only 19 per cent of their patients were free of pathological lesions when the patello-femoral joints of patients with patello-femoral pain were examined by arthroscopy. They said this was in contrast to the 49 per cent found in the prospective study of clinically diagnosed chondromalacia patellae performed by Leslie & Bentley (1977). However, Lund and Nilsson should note that we did not include patients over the age of 40 years because of the difficulty in differentiating primary osteoarthritis from chondromalacia patellae in the older patient. This difficulty is confirmed by Lund and Nilsson in that 29 per cent of their patients had grade IV chondromalacia patellae indistinguishable from osteoarthritis of the patello-femoral joint and from their Figure 4 it would seem that all but 2 of these 36 patients who had this severe degeneration were over the age of 40 years. Therefore, if Lund and Nilsson exclude the over 40 age group as we did, they will find that approximately 50 per cent of their patients had no demonstrable lesion of the patella. The findings of Lund and Nilsson therefore confirm our findings rather than contrast with them. This is an extremely important observation as patello-femoral pain is a common complaint in the young adult and it should be recognised that 50 per cent of patients will have no demonstrable pathological lesion on macroscopic examination of the patello-femoral joint.

I would also like to point out that we have been misquoted when it is said that we examined patients with a "suspicion" of chondromalacia patellae. We in fact examined those patients with a clinical diagnosis of chondromalacia patellae according to the strict criteria established by Robinson & Darracott (1970). We said that physical signs were more helpful than clinical

symptoms and that the arthroscope was a useful tool in the diagnosis of chondromalacia patellae.

REFERENCES

- Leslie, I. J. & Bentley, G. (1977) Arthroscopy in the diagnosis of chondromalacia patellae. *Ann. rheum. Dis.* **36**, 287.
 Robinson, A. R. & Darracott, J. (1970) Chondromalacia patellae. *Ann. phys. Med.* **10**, 286–290.

I. J. Leslie, M.Ch.Orth. FRCS

LETTER TO THE EDITOR

Dear Sir,

In answer to Mr Leslie we would like to offer this comment.

The 19 per cent mentioned in our paper were patients who were completely free from pathological findings at arthroscopy, i.e. also findings outside the patello-femoral joint. From Table 1, however, it is possible to calculate the percentage of normal patello-femoral joints – 43 joints, 34 per cent – which considering the age distribution is very similar to the findings of Leslie & Bentley 1977. We agree that their findings are confirmed by our data. The difference between the two studies is rather in the reporting of observations outside the patello-femoral joint.

If one takes the view that chondromalacia is a morphologic condition of the cartilage of the patella which can only be diagnosed by visual inspection, then clinical signs and symptoms could only raise a "suspicion". This is our own opinion and it is most unfortunate that this can be read as a quotation.

On one very important point I think we can agree, namely that patello-femoral pain and chondromalacia patellae are by no means synonymous entities.

Fleming Lund

Bo E. Nilsson