

Injured MLB pitchers opt for unproven stem cell injections over Tommy John surgery

[Editor's note: Tommy John surgery is a surgical procedure in which the ulnar collateral ligament in the elbow is replaced with either a tendon from elsewhere from the patient's own body, or the use of a tendon from the donated tissue of a cadaver]

28-year-old [Garrett Richards, pitcher for the Los Angeles Angels,] is the latest player to turn to orthobiologics, the class of treatments that includes stem cells and [Platelet-rich plasma or PRP], in hopes of healing an injury. While clinical studies have shown great success with those who use orthobiologics, they are not yet a panacea for the pervasive elbow injuries in baseball for two reasons: They work only on partial ligament tears, like Richards', and medical studies have yet to validate their efficacy independent of other treatments run concurrently.

The lack of knowledge as to how orthobiologics work inside the body – while the proteins in stem cells and platelets are believed to regrow damaged tissue, doctors have yet to isolate best practices for particular injuries – speaks to the difficulties in true medical advances. Still, the desire of Richards and others to avoid surgery lends orthobiologics enough credence to warrant further studies.

In May 2013, [a paper published in the American Journal of Sports Medicine](#) found 30 of 34 overhand throwers with partial UCL tears who used PRP had returned to their previous level of competition.

[Another study arrived in 2016](#) that didn't cast doubt on the value of orthobiologics so much as offer a different avenue: rest.

The GLP aggregated and excerpted this blog/article to reflect the diversity of news, opinion, and analysis. Read full, original post: [How baseball players are trying stem cells to avoid Tommy John](#)