

The Updated Care Plan

I have finally received the written care plan from my consultant, following my review back in December 2014. The SPECT scan was effectively normal in terms of the bones themselves.

The x-rays however show that the spinal column and cord stretch extensively at the C4-5 level. This is worse when I bend my neck down (flexion), but on extension (looking up) the disc bulges, making it more likely to prolapse. The stretching and shearing of the spinal cord and disc are what are thought to be causing pain.

My consultant has decided to continue with the facet joint injections in the hope of them providing temporary relief before surgery. Surgery however will be ACDF - Anterior Cervical Discectomy and Fusion. (He will not consider disc replacement as I had once hoped). This will involve a horizontal incision on the right side of the neck to remove and reconstruct it using an interbody fusion cage.

Due to the abnormal anatomy, he has already told me that he may have to go in through my back too, which will be a separate incision, but I will only find this out post-surgery. Plates and screws have also been discussed but again the extent can only be finalised during surgery. The operation should be a minimum of around 2 hours and will require inpatient stay for several days following the procedure. The main risks are a hoarse voice and swallowing problems from having to move the trachea and voicebox out of the way, in addition to some potential form of paralysis from damage to the nerve roots or spinal cord. In the meantime, a CT guided facet joint injection has been pencilled in and should be within the next few weeks. I am still to finalise an exact date for surgery, but hopefully end of May - beginning of June.

My pain levels have now thankfully come down and I have more or less been off of Cocodamol and Ibuprofen for just over two weeks now. I am really enjoying being back at Uni, been really busy but it has been great! It is arguable that I should be resting more but for some reason I always wake up earlier than needed. I now have a locker on campus too which means I don't have to carry stuff around all day so that is really pleasing. My mental health has greatly improved, had a small dip when I had to book the admission for the injection but on the whole I am doing good. I have an exam on Monday so I will be revising for that the remainder of this weekend.