

Going for ACDF Surgery

Exactly 2 years, to the date I started writing these chronicles, was the date of my surgery – 3rd June 2015.

The days leading up to surgery I remained completely calm and relaxed, I had opted to keep busy and away from the emotional states of my family. The day before I left home I was with friends from morning until night. My sister gave me a gorgeous Build-a Bear puppy called Tom when I got home, the puppy encompassed elements of things that make me smile – it was a very thoughtful gift, and was promptly packed to join me over the coming days. Inevitably several people chose that time to tell me exactly what they thought of me which although heart-warming I found quiet amusing.

I slept most of the journey there and arrived at the hospital just in time to be admitted at 1pm, I was very glad to have travelled alone and the continuing peace was very serene. The admissions team went through a whole loads of paperwork and questions with me again and then sealing the deal, put my name-band on, before sending me to the ward. The ward staff did my induction, showing me where everything was, asked me another load of questions, put another name-band on, did baseline observations (again) and then left me to get settled after telling me my medical team will be coming round later. I think some form of health professional came to see me every 30 minutes at least over the next hours.

Consent was signed again following an in-depth disclosure of the surgical plan... They were going to make a right-sided incision in the crease line of my neck, move the trachea and oesophagus out of the way. They would also move the voice box out of the way and make sure all these were protected before going through the muscle to remove the disc, insert the cage, fill it with bone-graft of shavings from the surrounding area, put a plate over it and screw it in. They would then close up and insert a drain so any excess would filter out rather than clotting.

Minor risks included infection, bleeding, haematoma, DVTs and PE (blood clots), CSF leak. None of them seemed probable to me due to the expertise of my medical team so I didn't give any a second thought. The ones that did concern me were the hoarseness of voice, difficulty swallowing and paralysis. Above everything I didn't want to sound like a guy for several weeks when I woke up, the swallowing problems I was reassured would most likely improve within days-weeks if it did occur and nerve damage would be continuously assessed throughout surgery via spinal monitoring. Other risks included bladder/bowel problems, chest infection and UTIs.

As always they had to over prognosis, which covered that there may be no improvement, pain could in fact worsen and the adjacent segments may suffer quicker degeneration. The latter I cannot comment on at present however I am very pleased to say that there has been improvement of symptoms thus far, but please note I am still in very early days of recovery, barely doing anything and yet to come off of Morphine.

We covered blood transfusion again because I have some rare antibody which required a more specialised cross-match, and thus blood was being bought in from three different centres across the country. They took several blood samples every day I was there in hospital for various reason too, ranging from U&Es – FBCs. X-rays would be taken before and after surgery to ensure that the materials were correctly positioned. The Registrar also wanted to know whether or not I was aware of any other problems, I reassured him I had had my heart, brain, lungs and kidneys checked at some point or another and all of them

were okay so I wasn't going to looking for anything else. He was relieved that I was aware of what could be associated with KFS and walked away a happy man with a signed consent form.

My sister arrived around 5pm having travelled down in the car with my mum, we spent the evening together reminiscing on our time in Florida, catching up and then she waited until I had finished watching my University's Teaching Awards before she left. My only priority that day was to ensure I got to watch those, my Wi-Fi connection was the first thing I sorted when I was settling on the ward and I was certainly not disappointed when Sociology won Best Department 2015 (against all the odds).

On the day of surgery I was nil by mouth from midnight, and once it was established I would definitely be having surgery in the afternoon, I was supposed to be nil of liquid intake from 11am, however like an idiot I accidentally forgot and had a few sips of water at 12.30pm. Consequently, I spent several hours after that worrying I would be called down to theatre too soon and would aspirate during surgery, as the hours ticked on that concern began to ease.

My medical team came round very early in the morning to check I was okay, the anaesthetist came to do his checks. He reminded me of what would essentially be coming in and out of my body and then joyously left telling me he would see me later. By his request my nurse put local anaesthetic on several places around my hands (I am guessing he anticipated having trouble cannulating) and eventually I also changed into the luxurious hospital gown, ready for theatre.

My sister came to the anaesthetic room with me and was then asked to leave. She was understandably worried but calm and I am very glad she had been there. Once she left, it was all very quick, the ECG machine was attached, a cannula was inserted, final checks were done and my oxygen was turned on. Everything in place, they drugged me out to my final thoughts of meditation.