

Surgical Details and Post-Op Appointment

My post-op was pretty much done at 8 weeks, I have to admit I was very excited about it. I really wanted to see the intra-surgical images and the x-rays they took before I left the hospital – they did not disappoint.

Surgery took 2.5 hours which was only slightly longer than anticipated, there was some problems sticking all the cannulas in once I was anaesthetised, which explains a lot of the bruising around my wrists – they tried to get an arterial line in on the left first, but when that failed that had to do it on the right. The intubation tube was shoved down to about C3-4 level and they had to get baseline readings from the spinal monitoring before they made an incision, so there was a lot to do.

Imaging was taken before, during and after opening me up, I was fascinated by most of them. They went in, moved the trachea and oesophagus out the way, followed by my voicebox, protected all them, then located the correct disc, cleared it out, then marked up and inserted the bracket. Following all that they placed a uniplate over the vertebrae and then screwed the uniplate in with two screws, one in the vertebra above and one in the vertebra below the removed disc. Once that was all set, they started moving everything back in to place and closing up. They sutured everything up with dissolvable surgical thread before clipping the outside 17 times. On the way out they also inserted the drain so that any excess blood did not clot inside.

The images taken before I left theatre show the necklace of clips, they look absolutely fantastic. All that being said the highlight of my appointment was clearly seeing the images. He asked me how I was recovering, I told him it was going well, bar the withdrawal from morphine, and my stint in A&E, so he was very happy. He did a full neurological assessment, which I passed with no concerns. I told him the tremors were improving and he reassured me it was still early days on the pain front. Rotation proved to be fairly good, as was flexion, as expected extension is now somewhat limited, but he cleared me to start gentle physio to hopefully improve it all.

No new imaging was done which I found strange but I was glad to see all the images from surgery which I viewed in great detail, contrasting the old alignment with the new one. I vetoed lumbar surgery because I've no rush to be back in theatre unless absolutely necessary and he bypassed the concerns surrounding the C3-4 disc. Should no surprises be encountered then a full set of imaging will be done in December to save me from excessive radiation exposure.

A crash course in appropriate medication later (basic message being, take as much analgesia as you please but no NSAIDs) I was good to go. Needless to say I went home buzzing. I've been off all medication a full week now, I won't lie, some nights have been a struggle, there was one in particular where I was eyeing up all those little pills to the max, but perseverance allowed me to locate where the pain was stemming from and a very long massage later, the muscles in my shoulders were loose once again and I could finally sleep.

Right now the bracket is doing all the work in holding my neck together, over time the new bone will start taking over until it's completely fused – during that time I need to be mindful of my new addition so that nothing provokes it, otherwise it could start being rejected. Everything is made out of titanium inside so I should make it through scanners without setting them off, but I don't know how magnetic it all is yet.

Tremors are still present to a minor extent, and pain I continue to monitor with great care, but overall at this point I can conclude surgery has been successful, and the nerves continue to recover as time progresses. I am certainly glad I had surgery and I hope it puts me in good stead for the coming academic year. I have just started writing my dissertation and I am very excited about it! I can whole heartedly say my medical team truly is the best and they didn't fail to live up to my expectations at all!