

October 26, 2012

Wong-Baker FACES Pain Rating Scale

Lots has happened since my last update, both good and bad. After talking with the doctor about my knee MRI results over the phone, we planned the surgery date for Wednesday, 10/24/12 at the Madison Surgery Center (MSC). A few days later, I had to call Dr. Wollaeger's office to change pain pills; my dear friend Vicoden was causing me to itch like crazy, even when I added in some Benadryl. And, worse yet, the Vicoden was no longer managing my pain. They tried me on Tramadol immediately after the Vicoden. After two doses of that over night, I was on the phone the next morning requesting something different as the Tramadol didn't touch my pain and let me tell you, it was a long, long, long 12 hours. They immediately filled a prescription for Oxycodone. While I was on the phone with the nurses, I mentioned that my shoulder pain wasn't lessening at all. Dr. W wanted me in for an MRI on that shoulder the very next day and poof, I had an appointment for another MRI.

The MRI folks at Ft. Atkinson Hospital all gave me the same look, "You again? Didn't we just see you?" I had the same woman running the MRI on my shoulder that did my knee. She was extremely nice, patient, and considerate. Believe me, have enough MRI's and you'll learn that's not how it always is. I've had them move my bad leg around, cramming my knee in the little "hut" thing the MRI machine uses, without a thought about the human that the knee was connected to. Not this woman; she was wonderful. When the shoulder MRI was done, she asked when my knee surgery was. Mind you, I didn't talk with her at all after the knee MRI, except for the usual small talk. So, I asked her how she knew I was having surgery. She said she could see immediately how messed up my knee was. Yikes! I told her that I hadn't gotten to see the films or anything as I only talked with Dr. W on the phone about the results. She then proceeded to wheel me into the operating room for the MRI machine and pulled up my MRI to review together. How great! I LOVE learning and this was a super way to do it. She also printed me a copy of the MRI results, which was devastating. I learned that what Dr. W told me about, was merely what he could fix. My "messed up" knee not only showed a completely blown ACL, the MCL detached completely from the bone, the meniscus torn completely and flipped up (bucket handle they call it), as Dr. W told me, but also included: my LCL (lateral collateral ligament on the outside of the knee) was a level 2 sprain (which means torn but not completely blown), a fracture at the top of the back side of my tibia, a tear on my patellar ligament (from the dislocation), and two bone bruises that actually had bone indentations. Yah, that's "messed up" as everyone calls it.

The next day I was on the phone harassing everyone about getting my shoulder MRI results. Dr. W. was unavailable; however, I asked for anyone that can read the MRI report to me and got a PA which was a very nice, patient man. We learned that I have a small tear in my rotator cuff, which is why I get tremendous pains when I move my right arm in a few certain ways. The fix for a rotator cuff is surgery and immobilization of about six weeks immediately afterwards. Needless to say, I couldn't believe what I was hearing.

Dr. W called me this past Monday to discuss options with my shoulder and we agreed to wait and do the "messed up" knee first as it was undoubtedly priority. He isn't sure he'll want to do surgery on the shoulder yet; regardless, I need to use that arm for crutches and physical therapy, so immobilization is not an option at this time. I was glad he and I were on the same page and there was no big decision to be made. Whew.

The Oxycodone was working better and I was taking one or two pills at a time. The MSC called me the day before surgery to tell me not to eat or drink anything (including water) beginning at midnight the evening prior to surgery. She continued on, explaining all the normal pre-surgery stuff. I was instructed

to continue taking the Oxy and only drink enough water to get it down my pie hole. And, that's what I did. When we left for the Madison Surgery Center at 7:00 AM, I could hardly function I felt so sick to my stomach and dehydrated. It was awful. By the time Dad parked the car at the front entrance to the 3rd floor of the MSC, I had the dry heaves like there was no tomorrow. Oh, was I sick. What a great way to start this experience... Fortunately, I had taken my favorite little blue pail out of the trailer where it lives and goes to horse shows with me and acts as a carrot dispenser. Nothing like entering the packed registration area, yakking your brains out into a sand castle building pail labeled "Paradigm Farm" clearly on it's side. Ah yes, another grand entrance by Ms. Shelly Reichart.

Before long, I was in a bed getting prepped for surgery. I had the most AMAZING nurse named Ed. I had not a want or need, and neither did my Dad or Mark for that matter. Ed even went and got them coffee as needed...which they didn't need any more of at that time already! I received the femoral nerve block as I did when I had surgery three years ago on my left ACL. That's one of the strangest feelings ever – they use an ultrasound as a guide for the needle to poke you to find the right muscle that triggers that they want to block. In this case, it was my quadriceps. Then, off I went into the operating room and remember complaining how cold it was compared to the hallw...a.....y. That was it, I was out.

I woke up hours later very happy to not be sick, but in a ton of pain. I made all the anesthesiologists I had seen (three in total before surgery) extremely clear that I was violently ill when I had knee surgery three years ago and how I didn't want to go down that path again. Being so sick is impossible when you can't move your leg...ugh. But, I wasn't nauseous at all! They worked on me for a long time (over two hours) to get the pain managed. They thought they might have to admit me to the hospital if they couldn't get it managed. But, after God only knows what got injected into my IV, as well as a shot of something else into my thigh above my injured knee, my pain finally lessened. They all laughed at me because I clearly don't follow the standard, universal "Wong-Baker FACES pain rating scale". You know the one – it has a scale from zero to ten with matching faces that go from a smile (0 pain) to sobbing (10 pain). I kept saying I was around a 5/6 in pain, but they thought I was nuts as apparently my expression and vitals didn't agree with that number. After all the pain management activities they did, I said I was a 1 or 2 on the scale and my expression must have begun to match the little chart as that's when they believed me. Thank goodness the staff there all had fun personalities – I had no problem highlighting to them how backwards it seems to be asking me my pain level if they have the picture to match to my face...I can't see my expression, so why leave it to me!?!? They thought I was just tough...little do they know about me!!!

Dr. W talked with me about the surgery and told me he didn't reattach the MCL to the bone as the surgery was tough enough as it was. The ACL was replaced by a cadaver part and the meniscus was stitched back together and put back 'right side up'. The MCL will reattach itself eventually and since the ACL repair was so solid, he felt comfortable leaving the MCL to heal itself. Again, his words were "it was a real mess in there". Yah, got it. I've got a messed up knee, big time.

I did get home late afternoon Wednesday after the surgery. Fortunately, I could crutch my way back upstairs to lay in my room with all my necessary amenities. I have not been sick to my stomach yet from the surgery...I'm so happy about that. But, the pain has been tough. I mean tough. I am on the maximum dosage of Oxy they gave me every four hours. And with that, I can lay in bed, knee propped up on pillows so it's higher than my heart and exist without pain. Ugh. Don't ask me to move it yet.

Today I got to change my bandages and let my poor leg breathe. Not only am I going to be living in my crotch to ankle immobilizer, I have an ace bandage on from my thigh to just beneath my toes. With the gauze and bandage, plus the ice pack wrapped in there, my leg weighs about five gajillion pounds. But,

I'm on the road to recovery. The five incision locations all look fine – ugly, but fine. The swelling is manageable, which is good at this point. Slow as it may be, I'm finally heading in the right direction. I have an appointment scheduled for next week to hopefully remove the stitches and then get a plan for physical therapy. With the extent of the damage, my pt is delayed a bit, but that's ok...it's there waiting for me once I'm ready.

I'm hoping to be teaching again soon. I have to see what happens at my doctor appointment next week and if I can manage the pain, I'll be back teaching asap. Can't wait! Not only do I miss seeing everyone, I miss the barn smell and Wally's never-ending whinnying for treats. It's the small, day to day things that I miss most. But, I'm lucky to have Andrew running the barn and Jackie working the horses. NEVER do I worry about the care or training with any of the horses at my farm. That's a huge blessing that I'm forever grateful for.

A huge thank you for the cards, emails, flowers and plants I've been receiving. I'm like a little kid when the UPS truck pulls in – they don't deliver bills, only good things like presents! Seriously, the kind words of encouragement mean the world to me and put a smile on my face, which is often missing (guess I live around the 3 or 4 pain marker normally now!). This awful post-surgery period will pass and my grimace will shift to a smirk and eventually, as I'm swearing at my physical therapist, a smile will follow. Oooh, I would be at pain face zero! Haven't been there since about 9:20AM Saturday, September 29th ...I'm ready!!!

Happy riding,

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