

November 29, 2012

The Knee Bone is Connected to What?? The Heart?!?!

Well, the last time I wrote I was so excited to be moving on...but, once again, I was wrong. Things were good through the weekend and I started the following week strong. I had a therapy appointment on Monday the 19th, which went well considering I was flat out for a week in a hospital bed. After therapy I enjoyed lunch with my Dad who was kind enough to be helping out at the farm on Monday getting in one last lawn mowing. By that evening, I had no appetite again – but I thought it was from a bigger than usual lunch. On Tuesday morning, I was right back to feeling awful again...low grade fever, loss of appetite, weak and miserable to put it mildly. I exchanged messages with my surgeon trying to figure out what to do next. By Wednesday morning, my heart was racing and had a frequent, irregular beat along with the other symptoms. When I explained that to my surgeon, he said to go see my regular doctor as he could run an EKG and other tests that an orthopedic surgeon wasn't set up to do. I called Lake Mills Medical and saw my family doctor (Dr. Kazi) within 30 minutes of my phone call. After an EKG that showed the irregular beat and potentially some enlargement of some part of the heart (I don't remember the heart part), Dr. Kazi sat me down to chat. He explained his genuine concern over one of two things that could be going on based on my symptoms and history: my infection may have spread to my heart or I could have a blood clot at the top, possibly enlarged, part of the heart. Mind you, I was ready to faint I was so weak (I never did faint, just felt that way) so I took this all in stride...even though I wanted to say "Are you f\$###ing kidding me?!?!?!?"

Dr. Kazi called Dr. Ballisimo, a cardiologist at Meriter Hospital in Madison (where I stayed the week before). Dr. Kazi explained my situation and they agreed to get me admitted asap. So, I left Lake Mills Medical and headed directly to Meriter Hospital's 11th floor -- the cardiac floor. As Andrew drove me, I had to call my family and let them know where I was headed. Easily the hardest phone call was to my Dad, who answered (Mom & Mark got a voice message to call me). Telling him it could be my heart and that I was off the get an ultrasound on my heart and other tests was the longest sentence I've ever stuttered out. I'm one strong cookie, don't get me wrong...but it took all I had to be strong on the phone with my Dad so that he wouldn't get too upset. After all, I didn't know anything and was going for tests. I made it through the phone call, but couldn't hold back after hanging up. Seriously? I had KNEE SURGERY. Unreal.

By 10:30 AM on Wednesday, 11/21, I was checked into the lovely 11th floor of Meriter Hospital and had a beautiful view of the capital and surrounding lakes. I was easily the youngest person on the floor and had a nurse dedicated to just me...yah, things are a bit different on the cardiac floor. I was wired up twelve different ways with machines beeping among many other noises that had my head spinning like an owl. They asked about my blood pressure as it was something like 190/110. I explained that my blood pressure is usually good (120/70), but considering I went from knee surgery to wondering if my heart had an infection, I thought I had the right for the BP reading as it was. They agreed. Then, they drew a TON of blood for tests (and I mean a TON), but fortunately, the lab guy was excellent with his needles and it was quick and easy. On the other hand, the nurse who was assigned installing my IV was not so good with needles. My right arm was still bruised from the bad IV the week prior, so she had to use my left arm and found right in the elbow crack to be the best spot to stick me. Her first try was a failure – my little veins actually bent the stint! I'm telling you, the only self-preserving part of my body are my veins!!! So, she tried again, in the same spot, and got it. Great, now every time I bent my arm (ie. crutches) that thing hurt like hell.

Mom and Dad arrived and entered the room huffing & puffing. I asked what was up and learned that there was a fire drill and they shut down the elevators during the drill. Mom and Dad had to walk up all 11 flights of stairs -- good thing they were on their way to the cardiac floor, just in case. They got their exercise in for the day!

The ultrasound on my heart went well and showed no structural problems. Thank God. It is a strange thing to see your heart at work, watching the blood flow, seeing the flaps flap, and hearing the swooshing of blood in and out and all around. Don't recommend the experience really, but was very happy to know my parts were working and wouldn't have known it if not for my knee surgery...yah, I'm stretching to find positives here. After the ultrasound, it was off to x-ray where they x-rayed my entire right leg, knee to hip, to see if the infection had spread from my skin & tissues to my bones. Again, x-rays looked clean. So far, I was passing my vetting ... well, less failing my flexions ;)

The blood work came back and showed no sign of infection at all. YAHOO!!! Liver and kidney values were good. The only thing that wasn't in the acceptable range was my potassium; it was low. Apparently, low potassium levels can cause irregular heartbeats and/or a racing heart. Hmmmm...now we were getting somewhere. They gave me an awful tasting cocktail that was a potassium boost and shortly after that, I started feeling better. Of course, I also got a full bag of fluids in my elbow crack IV. My orthopedic surgeon, Dr. Wollager, stopped by after his day of surgeries to see what in the heck was going on with me. We joked about how it had to be bad for business having a knee surgery patient end up on the cardiac unit. None of this has been related directly to my knee. Around 6:00 PM, my hospital phone line rang and it was the cardiac floor doctor. She had talked with the cardiologist and they found nothing wrong with my heart. All the doctors agreed that I had enough antibiotics and could come off all of them. No complaints from me! And, all they would do overnight is monitor me, so if I wanted, I could go home. Needless to say, I think I had my gown off before I finished agreeing to go home and hung up the phone. I am soooo done with hospitals, or so I hoped.

By Thursday morning (Thanksgiving Day), I was starting to feel like crap again. My heartbeat started getting irregular and speeding up again. After talking with the triage nurse on the cardiac floor that I had visited the day before (don't ask how I swindled my way through the phone lines to get to her!), I was off to Meriter Hospital's ER again. It was great -- I had the same ER nurse that I had when I visited Meriter's ER the week prior! Her name is Jude and she rode dressage 20 years ago, so we had something very in common and were memorable to one another. Unfortunately, I also remembered her by the bruise on my hand from her IV...ahhem... she did an awful IV installation the week prior. And, as she looked for another spot to put an IV, we noticed the huge bruise on my left elbow crack from the day before. We were running out of real estate on my arms! She found another spot and sure enough, the blood work, urine sample and other tests revealed I was dehydrated (again) and this time was tested for "c-diff" which is when the antibiotics remove the good bacteria from your GI Tract. They were concerned because I had mild diarrhea and kept being dehydrated. Fortunately, that was not the case and the test was negative. Phew. I was able to get home to rest before heading to Mom & Dad's for Thanksgiving dinner that night. I had surveyed everyone on the 11th floor to find out about the Thanksgiving turkey the hospital served. I concluded I would have had to have had Mom smuggle turkey in for me. Thank goodness I didn't have to make her a criminal ;)

So, today is Thursday and I'm excited to report that I've been hospital free for almost a week! I started physical therapy again this past Monday. I was excited to have therapy on Monday as not only were we working on the knee, we also evaluated the shoulder. Yah, that didn't go so well...the shoulder is still so irritated, swollen and sore that we can't start strengthening work yet. So, it's back to icing and resting

it...easier to say than to do when you're on crutches. I also had a pre-scheduled appointment with Dr. W for my 4+ week checkup. Dr. W thought the knee looked great and told me two more weeks in my brace, now unlocked so I can bend in it. And, with the brace, I can start weaning off my crutches, slowly. That will help my shoulder rest up. My next appointment with Dr. W. is scheduled for 4 weeks from Monday and he made two things very clear to me. First, if I didn't make more progress bending it, they will knock me out and force the thing to bend. As my eyes lit up and the "f" bombs started to load, he explained I wouldn't know a thing as I'd be out...I explained that I would eventually be awake and am confident that would hurt like hell. I prefer not to go that route. He said it's not uncommon and called a "stiff knee". But, I have been making progress and believe me, am very driven to put it mildly to get this thing to bend! His second point was that he had absolutely no interest in seeing me before the next appointment, including in the hospital! Again, we had a good laugh about this entire fiasco...what else can you do at this point?!?! And without hesitation, he renewed my Vicodin prescription – he understands how sore I get between the knee and the shoulder.

I have very high hopes that I will teach Jackie this weekend and slowly get started back into normal life (whatever that means!). For now, I'm trying to accomplish little projects in the house like catching up on opening mail (ie bills), organizing magazines, etc. Sad when you need a nap after little projects...argh! I can't wait to sleep an entire night; still seems very far out since I remain flat on my back. But, the little projects make me feel like I might be able to make a full recovery after all!

As I've said all along, thank you for all the kind emails, facebook posts, cards, & flowers. You will never, ever, ever know how much they've helped me through this. Needless to say, it's been a rough road for so many unexpected reasons. So thank you again and again for all your support!

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