

So much for how good hip replacements are!

Back in November 2010, after suffering from hip pain and trouble walking, and numerous X-rays and doctors visits, I had a bi-lateral hip replacement, meaning that both hips were replaced at the same time. X-Rays from my primary care doctor showed arthritis had set in, causing the pain. This means bone on bone with the soft tissue deteriorated.

My daughter made an appointment for me at Rothman who was advertising expertise in hip replacements. I saw Dr Sharkey from the Rothman Group and he agreed that the x-rays showed both hips needing replacing. He seemed to know what he was talking about, so I chose him to do the surgery. He said he had expertise in bi-lateral hip replacements, which sounded good to me. As I look back, I now know there are questions I should have asked but didn't. I didn't know what to ask. Had I asked too many of them, I might not have gone ahead with the surgery. The important question that I should have asked was "what type of hips would be installed and what were they made of" but I also learned that he might have also chosen a different type after opening me up. I would have also wanted to know what problems might come up after the surgery and what warranty I would get.

The only way I would get through all this, is not to think about the surgery and that's just what I did. I could have easily talked myself right out of it.

The Surgery went well. I spent two and a half days in Riddle Hospital. Right after surgery, they have you stand up on your legs. Nothing seemed to matter while there, except to get out. It must have been the drugs. Also, every sound that I heard was not normal. Something was odd and I couldn't quite pin it down. I told them and they seemed to be concerned. I normally can not sleep on my back and this was no exception. They brought me a special bed that elevated my back and gave my feet a certain lift, and this worked. There was one other incident of inattentiveness by the nurses, but I will leave that out for now. (TMI) I had absolutely no pain after the surgery, except for one incident. I will get to that in a second. They had me walking with a walker before I left the hospital. In fact, as I was ready to leave, they told me to try walking to the door. It felt so good, I just kept going and went about a hundred feet or so. They had to chase me down. Then, they wanted me to see an ear specialist before releasing me. To get released, they wanted to take me to a hearing specialist. They tried to get me to sit in a crazy wooden chair with wheels and low to the ground. It was not a normal wheel chair. As I tried to get in the chair, I got my first pain and it was so intense, I cried. They gave me an extra pain killer and put me on a gurney and wheeled me to x-ray to find out what happened. In fact, as I was wheeled to x-ray, the whole place seemed to start spinning as I looked up to the ceiling. They x-rayed me and found nothing abnormal. The pain wore off and gradually the spinning stopped and then they finally released me in a normal wheel chair. One of the drugs that I was on was called Coumadin, which is a nasty blood thinner and it required blood tests every day for several weeks. This is to prevent blood clots. What a royal "pain".

I was taken to Bryn Mawr Rehab by ambulance, which is normal. While at the hospital, I tried to watch TV, especially one of my favorite programs, Smallville, and as interested in it as I was before surgery, I could not follow it there. Nothing seems to matter.

I arrived at the Rehab on Thursday. I remember the food was very good and they treated me very well, but I realized that I was not in control. I still had absolutely no pain whatsoever. Nothing seemed to matter, though. Maria came to visit every day and spent every possible time with me. On Saturday, I asked to be taken off the pain medication. They complied. I was eating well up to Saturday night. Dinner came and it looked repulsive, even though I personally selected things I liked earlier that morning. They brought me any and everything, trying to get me to eat something. They even brought cake and ice cream. It all looked repulsive and I just couldn't eat. Then they determined that it might be caused by quitting the

meds “cold turkey”. They wanted to put me back on them and I agreed to a half dose. In a few hours, my appetite came back. They got me food later that night and I ate. I was really hungry then. I went on a program to be gradually taken off the meds. It worked in a few days and I didn’t lose my appetite again. Of note, I never had any pain whatsoever while at the rehab, even during therapy. I did realize that I needed to get my muscle strength back and I was doing stairs and almost everything using a walker or cane. These people at BMR are really great at what they do. Susanne was my therapist and she was terrific. I had done PT before at Phoenixville, but the attention they gave me here was just the best. Maria was with me almost every therapy session and this made a difference in how I was treated. She was allowed to wheel me around instead of the nurses and even get me out of bed.

I was released on the following Thursday. She took me home. She fixed up the reclining sofa in the living room where I lived for the next few weeks. She slept with me in another section of the sofa for several weeks. She was not sleeping well and I finally made her sleep upstairs in the bedroom.

A visiting nurse was set up to take blood samples and also to provide home therapy 3 times a week for several weeks. I was finally able to go up the whole flight of stairs on my own and sleep in my own bedroom with Maria. After several weeks, I was also walking with a cane instead of a walker. I note again, I had no pain and was on no pain medication. I was very uncomfortable traveling in a car though. The week after I got home from BMR, it was Thanksgiving, and the family dinner was at one of Maria’s sisters. This car ride was terrible. In fact, there was nothing comfortable at the dinner to sit in. I couldn’t wait to get home and we did leave early.

In a few weeks, I had to start outpatient therapy and I chose BMR again. I was driven for several weeks. I gradually was able to go it alone. Therapy was the first place I started having some pains as they stretched me beyond what my body wanted to do. After a month or so of regular therapy and a visit to the surgeon, I was able to switch to water therapy, and this worked out better for me. I finally used up my Medicare benefits and I was on my own and without any walking device.

The following year, 2012, my leg muscles and knees started bothering me. I was directed to PT again. The problem never really went away. These pains came and went, depending on what I did. I used up my Medicare benefits for the year. Again in 2013, same thing, I did PT till benefits were used up.

In January of 2014, I saw Dr Sharkey, the surgeon for a checkup, still having problems. He took an X-ray and ordered a blood test for metals, particularly Cobalt. He also referred me to a back doctor who said everything was related to my back. He ordered an MRI which showed what I already knew, that I had a herniated disk. Most doctors will also tell you that anyone who has ever lived an active life has a bulging disk or 2, and herniation is common. I didn’t have any back pain. He gave me a choice of surgery or PT. I chose PT and he ordered water therapy for me. During the evaluation at PT, I was able to do all kinds of bending and flexing without any other pain relating to my back and they said my problem was coming from my leg muscles. Not my back.

Here is the latest scoop on my bi-lateral hip replacement of 4 years ago.

In October 2014, I was in a great deal of pain and decided that it was time for a second opinion. I went to my primary care, Dr O’Dell and told him my plight. He said he had watched me walk one other time several years after the surgery and that something didn’t look right. He referred me to an Orthoped that he personally knew, Dr Lyons. He evaluated me and took X-Rays and upon viewing them, he ordered a Bone Scan. He said there was something on the X-Rays that didn’t look right. He was looking to see if the implant was coming loose. After the bone scan, he determined that there was extra bone growth around the implant (heterotopic ossification or HO). He ordered a blood test for cobalt.

I was called into Dr Lyons office 12-8-2014 to discuss the latest blood test. The cobalt levels in my blood have increased over 40% in the last 10 months which may explain my pain. Although he determined that I do not have the Stryker metal on metal implant which has been in the news lately, the Stryker hip that I had did have a part of the hip replacement made of cobalt, namely the round ball attached to the stem that fits into the hip socket. It appears that the cobalt is fretting or leaching into tissue and my blood faster than my body can get rid of it. Cobalt destroys tissue and hence causes the pain.

Bare in mind that this is the Orthopedic that I went to for a second opinion. He told me yesterday that I have to be closely monitored and blood retested for cobalt in 6 months. If there is further cobalt metal elevation at that time, I would have to have revision surgery to remove the cobalt ball. He also said that I should take his findings back to the original surgeon, Dr Sharkey, for his solution. Dr Lyons is also going to contact Stryker for their solution. Also bare in mind that Medicare will not pay for the surgery unless proved absolutely necessary, and only after 5 years.

To answer the question about legal action, I have been in contact with 2 firms that handle these hip cases and both told me that I have to have undergone the revision surgery to qualify for any of these settlements. I also have to show another increase in blood poisoning.

As far as my knees are concerned which is another part of my problem, the doctor said this is referred pain coming from my hips.

Dr Lyons is recommending PT (land based as opposed to water) at a specific place in Exton, if I can stand the pain, to start in January when Medicare will again pay. (I used my allowance of PT last spring for the year). January came. After the eval, I was really hurting bad, so bad I was non functional. I was told to come next session and they would eliminate what caused to extra pain. I went and was not satisfied. I called Dr Lyons and said the PT was not working, could I do water therapy and he immediately wrote a script for Water Therapy. I took the script to BMR and signed up. Eval was scheduled next day, January 14th, and the water therapy started on the 15th. I felt pretty relaxed and better after the first water session. Additional sessions are also helping somewhat.

I saw Dr Sharkey mid-January (22nd ?) as I was requested. I asked what parts of my hip replacement was made of Cobalt. He started to explain that the stem was Titanium and then he was interrupted and went out of the room. He never came back in. I never got an answer from him. I tried to get an answer from his assistant. She stated that the stem was cobalt and I told her that was in conflict with what Dr Sharkey said. She tried to look the answer up on the internet and after 10 minutes, she referred me to the stickers on the hospital report. Oh, and Dr Sharkey ordered an MRI on my hips.

I did the MRI on Wednesday January 28th. I got the disks and later the report which I didn't understand.

I also arranged for the complete surgery report and stickers from Riddle Hospital and picked them up the following day January 30th. Was I ever surprised to find one of the stickers for my left hip having odd information and also that that particular part being recalled by Stryker the manufacturer.

On Monday February 2, Sharkey's office called and wanted me to come in immediately for a "hip aspiration". I asked what that was about and all she could tell me was that they draw out fluid and have it sent to a lab .I delayed the date till the following week as I wanted a second opinion again. I scheduled Dr Lyons on Wednesday Feb 4th for that. That night, I talked to Bob, my "brother-in-law" who had just gone through that and he told me his was done in Lansdale Hospital and it was the most painful procedure he had ever gone through. I could not sleep that night.

I saw Dr Lyons Wednesday February 4th and discussed the MRI and hip replacement. He said that the aspiration is necessary and that there is an abnormal amount of fluid around the left hip joint that shows on the MRI. The fluid is from an irritation around the metal and that a study will determine if there is an infection and any other particles that may be in the fluid such as metal from the implant. He also ordered a blood test. He also stated that the test should be in a hospital setting in the radiation department and that a good radiologist would not permit such pain as related by Bob. He also said someone should drive me. Both these last 2 points were not necessary according the Rothman caller. Dr Lyon's office is making the arrangements for the aspiration at Brandywine hospital. I cancelled the procedure at Rothman.

Regarding pain medication, I have tried 3 Advil at a time and that does not even begin to take the edge off the pain. As far as more potent drugs are concerned, I am not ready for them because I can not function on them. That would also mean I can't drive. When in the hospital for the original surgery, I found out how much a persons mind is affected, because I could not comprehend or even get into my favorite TV shows or answer questions about computers, which is my life. I am learning to live with pain, even though my family tells me that I get very irritable at times.

I still plan to do some computer repair and I will continue the radio show up to the point when surgery completely destroys my business and life. (Business has been dead slow because I am always at PT or a doctors office instead of my shop to catch the phone calls.)