

Dear Judith,

I have just returned from an adventure. It was as exciting as anything I have ever done. My odyssey was a trip through the Ontario medical system. I'm sure many others have had similar or worse trips but for me it was, as always, an educational experience.

Perhaps I should add that I am familiar with the territory. It was not always thus. From the time I was a young chap in the 1960s to the mid-1990s, I never saw the inside of a hospital. Oh, yes, I had the normal bumps and bruises, even the odd stitch or two as a result of what I might refer to as "an active life." (The Better Half would likely call those interludes "male stupidity" but that might more properly be the subject of another letter.) In any case, a dozen or so years ago I was diagnosed out of the blue with a chronic disease that has resulted in my becoming acquainted with hospitals more frequently than I cared. However, most treatments were of a routine type, expected almost, still serious for all that but manageable. This time however, events crept up on me and caught me unawares.

The trouble started one morning. I had been feeling a bit under the weather for a couple of weeks and had visited my local doctor a day or two before, assuming that I was just having trouble shaking a cold. The Better Half's first clue that something was not quite right was when I almost fell down the stairs en route to breakfast. Then, when she tried to sit and talk to me, I responded as if I was drunk (all the effects and none of the fun, so to speak). She termed it, "speaking Klingon." Obvious weakness on my part sent her scurrying to the kitchen to check the fridge magnet listing the signs of strokes. Check, check, check. Call 911.

Here's a tip for those who have sat in an ER for hours on end. The fast track is to arrive by ambulance, delirious with your eyes rolling back in your head, categorized as a possible heart patient. The ER teams thrive on people like that. Not that I remember much of it. The Better Half gave me a blow by blow description after I came out of the fog about 30 hours later. By this time, I had been poked, prodded, tested, scanned, examined, diagnosed and my medicine had been changed twice. Suffice to say that I was not a model patient but the restraints apparently stopped me from ripping out my IV more than once.

When I regained consciousness, I wasn't sure exactly where I was. Obviously it was a hospital but most of the staff and all the visitors were masked and gowned. Turned out that they had put me in the isolation ward, not quite sure what sort of bug I had picked up. (To be clear, it wasn't swine flu.) It seems that pneumonia bacterium in my lungs had skipped into the blood stream and, as one doctor said, "...your blood was boiling and your brain was steaming." Oh, is that all?

My subsequent week in isolation and on a ward gave me a lot of time to watch and think. I guess I have been as critical as the next person about the medical system. Believe me, that is in the past. The medical care that I got was top notch, in my layman's opinion. It was worth every tax dollar I have ever paid. And speaking of payment, there was none except the standard \$45 charge for the ambulance. I must have gone through a whack of specialists, tests and treatments. The cost was included in the taxes, a sort of prepaid cover charge.

After I was discharged, because of a suppressed immune system, another infection took advantage of me. (Polite company precludes me from being more specific.) Over the space of three or four weeks, oral and IV antibiotics were administered at home, partly by me and partly by a visiting nurse. Again, my GP and the nurses were caring and keen to sort the problem.

I relate this story to you in order to dispel some of the myths of our medical system. I'm not sure that I could have afforded the medical care I got if we did not have our universal Medicare system. On the other hand, how could you not afford it? Really, people have died in less serious medical situations. I realize that my situation is only one tiny part of the medical work that goes on daily in this city, province and country. Not everyone may be as happy as I am with their own results. But when you're flat on your back watching shadows flick across the ambulance roof, I'll take our system any day.

Yours ever,

Dom

(Doddering Old Man)

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