

# Drowning in Paper

Category: Paperwork

written by Ronna L. Edelstein | January 2, 2018

On December 13, 2017, I had major surgery. That operation involved hours of paperwork, both before and after the procedure.

Once my surgeon and I agreed upon the surgery, I had to fill out health forms in his office—forms about past procedures, about my current medications, about my physical and mental state of being. The forms even asked about my marital status. Does being divorced really affect how I will handle the surgery? Completing the forms exhausted me, causing my pain to exacerbate.

Then, I had to send papers to my out-of-state insurance company. So many letters went back and forth that I joked I had a new pen pal—Blue Cross/Blue Shield of Michigan. (I live in Pennsylvania, but I get my insurance from my pension as a retired Michigan teacher.)

Ten days prior to my surgery, I went to the hospital for pre-surgical tests. The paperwork associated with these tests took more time to fill out than the tests themselves. Again, I had to write in my medical history and list of medications; I had to read forms about privacy, and I had to give detailed information about my emergency contacts. I felt as if I had entered a “déjà vu all over again” moment. Hadn't I already done this?

I left the hospital with a pile of paperwork to peruse. Only three weeks after the surgery, I am already getting statements from my insurance company and the physicians associated with my operation—surgeon and anesthesiologist—and the hospital itself. One bill has been refused; it seems to have been wrongly submitted. Another bill has been paid, but it seems like I owe more than I should. I now have to Xerox the forms and send the originals, along with a letter explaining what I think is delaying the payment, to my insurance company. I have to do all this while trying to recuperate.

I understand that documentation is important—that keeping written records of a patient and her history matters. Yet, too much duplication exists; repeatedly answering the same questions becomes tedious. Maybe we need a more effective communication system among insurance companies, physicians/hospitals, and patients. Maybe we need to switch to electronic medical records.

In the meantime, I drown under a sea of papers.

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