

Medical Manners

Category: Aging

written by Deborah Levin | February 7, 2020

"So, how much do you love the new knee I gave you?" he asked as he walked into the exam room. I stared at the doctor in disbelief. This was his introduction at my first post-op visit after knee replacement surgery? My husband had been an orthopedic surgeon himself, and I'm quite sure that, in his thirty years of practice, he never said that to a patient.

I already knew this doctor had no bedside manner; my short hospital stay had given him several opportunities to display that. No, he didn't much care about my level of comfort. He certainly wasn't the hand-holding type. And, clearly, he had never read the Patients' Bill of Rights.

"Excuse me?" was all I could manage to say. Stunned, I hopped up on the exam table and showed him what I could and could not do with my knee at that point.

Then down to business. As the doctor started to remove the continuous subcutaneous nylon suture that was supposed to come out with one smooth pull, it became evident he was having a problem. He was tugging and tugging, and it was hurting. When I told him so, he said, without looking up, "What did you do during childbirth?" I was too shocked to even answer. My adult daughter, who was in the room with me, did not hesitate for a moment. "How dare you?" she screamed. He dared, and did not even apologize.

The *coup de grace* came three months later, though, when all the swelling had gone down. One day, I noticed a faint black line under the thin scar that fell over the front of my knee. Could that be a stitch, I wondered? I showed it to my husband. With my finger I traced a two-inch squiggle down the bottom half of the scar. Ironically enough, it looked a bit like a caduceus: the image with the two entwined snakes, often used to symbolize the medical profession. "Yep," my husband declared. "Looks like he left half of it in."

I snapped a few photos and emailed them to the doctor. He replied with even more hubris than I had come to expect. "If it bothers, I can remove," he wrote simply. No sorry, no surprise, no regret.

No way I would go back to his office.

But my knee feels great and works perfectly, thanks for asking.

Deborah Levin
Mt. Kisco, New York