

A History of Complications

Category: Surgery

written by Ronna L. Edelstein | October 1, 2022

A tonsillectomy at age nine that led to hemorrhaging and a return to the OR. An operation on four impacted wisdom teeth at age sixteen that kept me in a coma for three days. A hysterectomy at age thirty-six that involved the wound opening up, internal bleeding, and two additional hospital admits.

There's more! A seemingly simple procedure on a damaged toe at age fifty-two that produced a stubborn infection, immobilizing me for months. Five jaw surgeries, the third of which, at age sixty-three, necessitated that the maxillofacial surgeon call in a general surgeon to stop the hemorrhaging in my stomach, where tissue had been taken for my jaw.

My surgical history reads like a poorly-written Stephen King horror novel. These days I have a profound fear of surgery—and hospitals, IVs, and even routine visits to my primary care physician, whose office happens to be located within a major local hospital. When I fell July 2 in New York City during a visit with my daughter, I would not let her take me to the nearby emergency room. My angst about entering a medical facility and possibly needing surgery overrode my common sense of having a physician examine me. After returning home, the excruciating pain left me no choice but to seek professional help. I sighed with relief when the diagnosis was “only” a fractured pelvis, an injury that heals with time, not surgery.

While innocently rubbing cream over my dry skin several weeks ago, I discovered a hard nodule on my abdomen. A doctor's appointment set off a domino effect: a contrast CT scan to ensure no stomach tumors, an at-home test to check my colon, and an upcoming meeting with a surgical oncologist to rule out any type of cancer. The entire process has turned me into an emotional wreck. Although I worry about a cancer diagnosis, I am more focused on the surgery that would be required to determine whether the lump is benign or malignant.

If only I could delete the word “surgery” from my personal lexicon—and life.

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