

Please Keep Your Narcotics

Category: Pills

written by Sara Ann Conkling | July 6, 2023

“That isn’t Tylenol.”

It had taken more than half an hour for the nurse to arrive at my bedside with the pills I’d asked for, following my grueling four-and-a-half-hour surgery. I had finally been wheeled into a hospital room at midnight, had pushed my call button, had asked for Tylenol, and then had waited.

“What is this?” I asked, as I handed the pills back to the nurse. The color drained from her face. “It’s pain medication,” she said. “I brought you pain medication.”

I pressed on. “You brought me narcotics when I asked for Tylenol?”

My mind shot back to the mandatory pre-op conference with the hospital pharmacist and my surgeon, during which I was politely informed that they would not perform the surgery to try to save part of my mistakenly ablated left kidney unless I consented to their placing an order for post-op narcotic pain medication. “I only take Tylenol after surgery,” I said. “You’ve never had *this* surgery,” responded my surgeon. (Indeed, I was only the third person in the world to be receiving the surgery that he was about to perform.)

I had finally consented to the post-op order for narcotics, with the understanding that I could take Tylenol instead if that is what I wanted. And that is what I wanted. But something had clearly been lost between my very specific request and the unfamiliar pills that being delivered to my bedside.

“What am I supposed to do with these pills?” asked the nurse. I was amused that she expected *me* to know the answer. “I have no idea,” I replied, “but I won’t be taking them.”

I looked down at my swollen, burning arm where an anesthesiology resident had infused potassium chloride. I looked down at my sutures, not knowing yet that I had received a “door prize” hernia due to a surgical resident’s poor closure of my abdomen. I looked across the bed at my catheter bag. I looked up at the clock.

It took another 45 minutes before my Tylenol was delivered. It took one minute after that for me to decide to leave the hospital as soon as possible, even though I had been told to expect a four-day minimum stay. By daybreak, my catheter bag and I had completed several laps of the hospital floor and had even traveled to another floor in search of something to eat.

Just before 8:00 a.m., my surgeon discharged me.

By 9:00 a.m., I was taking my own Tylenol.

Sara Ann Conkling

Cocoa, Florida