And So It Begins

November 28, 2016 By Justin Birckbichler

One month and eighteen days since this journey had begun, the first day of chemo finally arrived. I was oddly excited - partially because it meant that an end was in sight and also because I get weirdly fascinated with new experiences.

My appointment was supposed to start at 9 AM. The first thing I had to do was to numb my port with a cream the oncologist gave me. If you're not familiar with the concept of a port, it's a medical device that was implanted in my chest about a week and a half ago. A thin membrane on the opening allows them to administer the chemo drugs or draw blood. (Think of a sport water bottle that doesn't have a lid and you need to squeeze it to get the water.) A catheter runs from the opening of the port and into a vein. The whole purpose of having it is so I don't have to get stuck with a needle all 21 times I receive chemo. The port is on my upper right side of my chest and feels like a little bump. It's not so much painful as it is just bothersome. Essentially, it is something that was surgically implanted and connected to my heart to help keep me alive. That's right - I am Iron Man.

I had to apply the cream an hour ahead of time so it would numb the skin before I arrived. Once I was all done with that, I had to cover it with plastic wrap to keep the area clear. I wore a polo and a zip up hoodie so the nurse who would be administering my treatment could get to the port easily. No Magic Mike show for the other patients, unfortunately.

Mallory and I arrived (Mom would take me tomorrow) to the office and were directed to my own personal pod with the world's most comfortable chair. One of the nurses came by and removed the plastic wrap. She also drew blood to run labs by accessing my port (and apparently the numbing cream worked, as I felt nothing when she stabbed me). She also took my vitals, which was a pretty customary practice for me by this point.

The labs came back, and they were clear. It was time to hook me up.

First, Nurse Jenn (who would be my primary chemo nurse for all 21 treatments) administered Dexamethasone, a steroid that helps reduce the risk of reaction, increase the effectiveness of anti nausea medications, and increase appetite. It also would increase my glucose levels and possibly cause slight insomnia, in which case they could prescribe sleeping medicines.

Next up was Aloxi, which was an anti-nausea drug that would last for 48 hours. We also briefly reviewed which medicines I should be taking at home. She stressed the importance of keeping up with nausea meds because if I started vomiting, oral medicines wouldn't help. After that was

complete, I was given Emend, which was an anti-nausea medicine that would last for 72 hours.

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