

“You’ll Catch Your Death of Cold.” Really. (But Not Really.) — Part Two

I have a steadfast belief that the last place one wants to be when ill is at the hospital — after all, there are all manner of sick people there.

December 13, 2019 By [Jeff Neurman](#)

When [last we left](#) our most unwilling protagonist — me — we were preparing for a trip to the emergency room due to my high fever and myriad other symptoms. Although this may strike many as completely nonsensical, I have a steadfast belief that the last place one wants to be when ill is at the hospital. After all, there are all manner of sick people there. This is even more troubling for someone like me who, as we know, has the immune system which at this stage could most charitably be described as nonexistent.

Alas, we were really not left with any other options. Because this was Sunday — as these types of emergencies only occur outside of normal business hours — my only choices were the ER or an urgent care. Melissa and I briefly contemplated the latter, but we felt fairly confident that as soon as they heard I had cancer then they would wash their hands of the matter (the matter being me) and send me off to the ER anyway. So we decided to cut out the middleman — and the extra co-payment — and go straight to the hospital.

One of the oddities of being married to a doctor is that health issues that would cause most of us, by which I mean me, to totally lose it barely seem to faze Melissa. She was very organized and calm, marshalling the children and making sure she had pick-up and drop-off coverage for the boys’ various activities. In fact, she was so dispassionate about it that I began to think that I might die right there in our foyer while seemingly unimportant administrative matters were addressed. Although she was in fact the one who determined I needed to go to the emergency room, I was the only one who felt that there was indeed an emergency. Of course, with a fever over 103 F I can’t really claim to have been overly lucid.

So while everyone was doing their less important admin tasks, I decided I should get my “go bag” ready to, well, go. Fortunately, I never unpacked it from my months of chemo, so although the unmentionables in there probably could have used at minimum a quick freshening up with some Bounce dryer sheets, everything was still clean and thus serviceable. Melissa, upon seeing the emergence of my bag, stated that she did not think they would be admitting me. But she did not know the full depths of the state of woe in which I was mired, so I thought I would take it nonetheless. Plus, she had already informed me that certain doctors, when it comes to even the

least complex of cases (which mine certainly was not), are quite happy to admit a person. I did not want to be so incarcerated without as much as at least one semi-fresh pair of boxers.

At last the Neurman train, which was moving more like a wagon train than the Acela (which, frankly, isn't much faster), pulled out of the station. When we arrived at the hospital, Melissa was forced to drop me off while she tried to find a place to park. This was my first impression of what is only the second visit to an ER in my life. The first incident occurred around the age of 2 when my great uncle's Boston Terrier, who "only wanted to play," chased me around and around the living room including a coffee table with especially pointy corners. Given my innate dexterity, I managed to trip on one corner perfectly positioning myself to hit my temple on the next corner upcoming. Several stitches later and a scar that should have receded into my memory but is more visible than ever thanks to my hairline doing the actual receding was my one experience in such a facility. It was, naturally, a traumatic experience and thus one which I was most definitely not looking to recreate.

But have you ever been to the emergency room? I was shocked as it seemed like it was anything but for emergencies. People were sitting semi-patiently, filling out forms or chatting on their phones while awaiting a doctor or PA to see them. In fact, I was asked to fill out multiple forms — and asked to wear a mask, which allegedly was for my own good (as my good buddy Rudy Fischmann had suggested) but given that I was coughing incessantly — yet still "unproductively" — had me wondering if it were not to keep the others awaiting their turn from concern of contracting tuberculosis or, perhaps, whooping cough. It is, as I said above, the hospital after all.

Finally, my turn came. After answering the same questions for the umpteenth time, a few pokes and prods, a listening to my chest and some additional interrogatories — came taking anew my temperature. Now, in a bizarre twist of events, I had a much lower fever — just under 100 F. With that, the ER doctor seemed to lose some degree of interest in my case. Nonetheless, I was told I would need a chest x-ray because, after all, when one already has cancer what is more exposure to known carcinogens. I also was asked to contribute a urine sample to this data-gathering process. It was this last task that had me quite aflutter.

Without going into unnecessarily graphic detail — this is a family-friendly blog, after all — let me suffice to say that I do not like carrying around a cup of tinkle. More problematic, however, was that I suspected from the moment I arrived at the non-emergency room that peeing in a cup would be on tap (pun sort of intended). Given that, plus the great efforts I had been undertaking to stay hydrated, resulted in quite a need to get this task completed. I suggested to the nurse that perhaps I should provide my sample currently, but she insisted that we would pass a facility on the way to Radiology that would allow me to address the issue — and the beaker. She was mistaken. But before we could head for the x-ray, I was required to don a hospital gown, which regrettably tied in the back. Can anyone possibly tie those things without some assistance or, at a minimum, a mirror? Great dexterity I have not — see my first trip to the ER — but I do not know why someone can't invent one of these that ties more easily. What about Velcro? It works for kids who can't learn to tie their shoes.

When the nurse deposited me at Radiology, I was told by a friendly tech there that my turn to be irradiated would soon come. “Great,” I said, “but I really need to address this currently empty beaker. Is there a facility nearby?” He pointed me in the direction of a lavatory, and then, in what is so embarrassing I should not even mention it, I had what may best be termed a wardrobe malfunction. You see, I am not accustomed to relieving myself while wearing a dress and, consequently, as I struggled to manage the beaker, my now painful urge to express my bladder and to keep the rear-fastening gown out of harm’s way, there was a form of miscalculation that resulted in the front of my hospital gown swooping directly into harm’s (i.e., urine’s) way. Although I did manage to collect a full cup’s worth of “sample,” I also managed to douse my gown. Sadly, there was no way to disguise my bathroom error. I tried walking out of the bathroom with my hands strategically placed over the dark spot on this gown, but it was such an awkward positioning of my limbs that doing so would only bring more attention to the embarrassing discolored portion of my hospital-provided apparel. To make matters worse, as part of the x-ray process, I was required to raise my arms in various positions thereby forcing me to leave the target area fully exposed.

To tabulate, at this point, I had an on-and-off very high fever, a completely unproductive cough, a mask further winnowing the little bit of air my lungs could get in to begin with, an irradiated chest cavity, a now empty bladder but a now embarrassingly damp gown. Whether this had anything to do with what came next I do not know, but I was shown a place to sit where other “emergency” patients were also lounging and told that “the wait won’t be long.” I am not sure what the definition of “long” is in an emergency room, but I think over an hour seems to be beyond its scope. All I had to distract myself was wondering why the other patients were there. Severe headache? Seizure? Broken bone? Vertigo? No insurance?

Finally, a nurse came and discovered me. She asked, surprisedly, why I was sitting where I was. I replied, “This is where I was told to sit.” Apparently, that was incorrect. Despite the faux pas, she gathered me and took me to my own little room, where I was literally quarantined until they determined that the cause of my visit this day was not influenza. Sadly, I had to once again — after all of this time — address the build-up of fluids I had been ingesting. Since, however, I was theoretically a threat to the entire ward, I was told I could not leave the room and thus must use the jug/hand-held urinal. I waited as long as I could, but eventually I had to avail myself of its capacity. After a couple of hours of additional fluids pumped directly into my veins (which still have not forgotten nor forgiven the torture they underwent during chemo) — and determining that I did not in fact have the flu — I was told that I could leave. Since I had been given some Tylenol — which of course I could have taken at home — I felt marginally better. They allowed me to walk out and I hoped this sad saga would soon come to an end. Of course, I was greatly mistaken.

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