A New Game Plan for a New Scan

CT scan number four post-chemotherapy for testicular cancer is different than the first three

June 25, 2018 By Justin Birckbichler

Though I completed chemotherapy to treat my testicular cancer about 18 months ago and was told I was in remission in March 2017, I'm still on a six-month cycle of CT scans. The risk of recurrence is highest in the first two years after treatment so my doctors want to be vigilant about follow-ups.

My last scan was in December, and it was a clean one. The follow-up visit was very productive, because that's when I got help for the depression I was facing. I can math well and knew that June would be my next scan month.

Somehow, the ball got dropped in scheduling the scan. Realizing this, I decided to make a last-minute phone call to make sure it was on the calendar. Interestingly enough, I made this call while I was advocating for young adult cancer patients on Capitol Hill, which coincided with both the first anniversary of my port removal and National Selfie Day. One of these is more vital to me than the other (and it has nothing to do with surgery).

The day of my CT scan

After some battles with my insurance (shoutout to HOAF staff for going to bat for me yet again), I had my scan on Saturday, June 23. The best part is that they changed the prep protocol, meaning I no longer have to drink the gross barium solution. I arrived at the imaging center, after following the new requirement of drinking 32 ounces of water in the half-hour before — child's play, in my opinion. The scan was pretty standard and followed the same pattern as my other scans: "Breathe in… Hold your breath…" In and out of the machine. See you in six months!

The most notable thing from the scan was that the nurse took what is possibly the best scan picture I have to date (see below). The second item of note was that I didn't feel scanxiety immediately after the scan like I usually do. I was oddly at peace, perhaps since I just had a balltrasound a few weeks earlier and that was clear.

Seriously, this pic is gold

Slight scanxiety sets in

However, this was short-lived. The Sunday night before my follow-up appointment on Monday, I began to feel the tendrils of the anxiety monster creeping slowly closer. I checked into my online portal, which is a stupid thing to do since I never understand the results page, but luckily, nothing was there. I thought how the radiology tech asked me if I had a follow-up scheduled with my

oncologist. I told him I did and I can't remember if he said, "okay" or "good." While these are both four-letter words, there's a vast sea of difference, especially when the anxiety Kraken is coming closer to my remaining Black Pearl. (That's enough with the monster metaphors, Justin.)

The next morning. there still wasn't anything in my portal, and I resolved not to check it again until my 2 pm appointment. I decided to keep my mind occupied by reading (inching ever closer to my 100 books in 2018 goal) and cleaning toilets (being so glad that the epic post-CT barium poops were no longer an issue).

2:00 pm — time for the CT scan results

I stepped ~~off the plane~~ out of my car at ~~LAX~~ HOAF with my dreams ~~and a cardigan~~ of a clear CT scan. They were running behind but eventually Dr. Maurer came in. Instantly, he gave me the good news… I'm still in remission.

After checking up on my other stats and asking how I'm doing with my antidepressants, he looked at my tonsils (since I mentioned that I wasn't feeling well). Pretty much immediately, he ordered a strep test upon seeing that my tonsils were swollen. I decided to wait on the results since I was going to my grocery store and pharmacy anyways after. It also gave me time to finish up this post (thanks, Google Docs app).

Looking to the future… and reflecting on this scan

My next scan is in December, to round out my two years of scans. Assuming those are clear, I can go to yearly checks. Hopefully we can do a January/December split so I can save my deductible, but discussions about medical bills are neither here nor there.

My biggest takeaway from this scan is that I'm learning to have less scanxiety. While I was a little anxious the night before and it was spiking while waiting on the doctor, overall, it was much lower than usual. This is also the first scan since the antidepressants have been in my system and at the right dosage. Chalk it up to that or maybe just getting used to this life as a survivor, but I'm happy with how I handled my scan this time.

Thus concludes the story of scan number four. I went in with a clear mind, got a clear bill of health… and finally came out with a clear diagnosis of no strep.

Author's Note: The next morning, I woke up and felt 100% fine. Almost makes me wonder if my feelings of sickness were scanxiety manifesting as an illness instead of worries.

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