The Results Are In!!

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November 12, 2020 By Jeff Neurman

Finally, after what seems eons of waiting, I think it is finally safe to say that the results are in and we know where things stand. It was an anxiety-ridden period, one of the most ever, which helps explain the lack of inventory left in my liquor cabinet. But finally, it seems at least, the waiting is over and a reprieve of some length is on the horizon. It was arguably the longest four months of my life.

Before I get some allegedly helpful texts or emails pointing out my use of the word “months” in the immediately foregoing sentence, I want to cut you off and affirm that this was indeed the right choice of time periods. Although I imagine many of you were expecting me to say this was the longest four years of my life—which may or may not have been true as well—I was instead of course talking about the four months from my last oncology visit and the anticipation (read: hyper-anxiety) about tomorrow’s appointment.

Some might say that rejoicing over my numbers at this stage is slightly premature. And as a person of the Jewish faith and heritage, by which I mean two-plus millennia of somewhat suboptimal events befalling my ancestors, I am certainly one who is susceptible to superstitions of most every type. (My beloved childhood rabbi once tried to tell me, as he probably should have, that Jews are not particularly superstitious people. Far be it for me to disagree with some as wise and learned a man, but I am not totally convinced. Besides for the fact that my own very large family had more superstitious behaviors than I could even begin to catalogue—I mean, why can’t you put a hat on a bed?—the Jewish vernacular, by which I mean the exuberantly colorful language of Yiddish has its own term for this type of thinking: kinehora. It basically means to jinx oneself (or others) by counting one’s kosher chickens before they hatch. I don’t think I have met a fellow member of my tribe who doesn’t immediately follow any positive statement with, “I hope I didn’t just give myself a kinehora.”)

So although the appointment with my beloved oncologist is not until tomorrow, thanks to the miracles of modern technology and the ever-resourceful people at Apple, I have an app on my phone that allows me to see the results of my blood work before the appointment. And since this will be a “telehealth” visit, which is just a fancy way of saying a Zoom call (or maybe FaceTime), there really won’t be any more to the exam than talking about my numbers. Unless, of course, she has figured out a way to virtually check my lymph nodes for unwanted girth. I imagine an app for that is just around the corner, though.

Thus there is the possibility that my doctor could look at the numbers and see something in them that I, as a mere lay person (although a reluctantly experienced one when it comes to understanding things I wish I didn't such as a Comprehensive Metabolic Panel), have overlooked. Fortunately, however, after days of checking my app incessantly to see if the numbers were in, I discovered that this morning they had finally arrived. And while I am prone to misinterpret these things (see earlier discussion of kinehora) I had my own Steve Kornacki review them for me, by whom I mean Melissa. Although she is not a hematologist, she is an M.D. and knows what my numbers should or, more importantly, should not be. So she went to the big board—which is how I think of my iPhone—and tabulated the numbers. (Like Kornacki, she is also quite adept at math, although she does not own any pairs of khakis of which I am aware.)

But since I am superstitious, I won't feel totally relieved—ever—but certainly not until after the appointment tomorrow. Rather gratuitously, I thought, Melissa asked me after reviewing the final counts if I felt better. I said, "no." Why lie? At the risk of overdoing this already overly-attenuated attempt at a timely thematic connection to tabulating results of another type, I do think it is an interesting parallel. We all hang on these numbers over which we really have no control, viewing them as life and death matters. And, frankly, in both realms it does not seem like much of a stretch to say that such an assessment is probably fairly accurate. But I do think that if one wants to have an inkling of what it is like to live with scanxiety or awaiting a CBC panel, the very recent (ongoing?) waiting for political numbers to come in is really a decent starting point. The constant worry, the countless dire scenarios that the mind can concoct, the fear of what will come next. These are all very similar and, sadly for those of us with cancer, all too familiar. About the only difference between the two is the lack of pending lawsuits. So far anyway.

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