

Optimistic Aly

Hi everyone, optimistic Aly here.

After contracting polio when 6 or 7 years old, my post polio journey has not been easy, as I'm sure some readers have also experienced. It's only in recent years the medical profession are learning about the long term affects of Polio.

I'm in my mid 70s now but was one of the 300 children back in the early 1950s who were chosen to trial the, now successful, Salk vaccine used today. The metal and leather callipered boots worn for 18 months were a small price to pay for my life. Anyway, once mastered, they enabled me to inflict substantial damage on anyone who took the Mickey as they had metal side rods, so not all was doom and gloom.

Other children trialling the Sabine and placebo inoculations did not fare so well at all. We lucky survivors will never forget them.

Two years ago, misfortune struck resulting in admission to DORSET COUNTY HOSPITAL and two major bowel surgeries in 10 months. The first nearly costing my life, when the obstruction burst hours before the scheduled operation. My internal muscle power diminished rapidly around this time which left much tiredness and general lethargy.

At a prior consultation, I explained to my wonderful NHS Surgeon my fears that were solely around Anaesthetics. I asked if I could meet the Anaesthetist first. Polio as we all know, affects our already weakening muscles. The heart and lungs are muscles, anaesthetics disable muscles. I wanted to be sure of what these guys knew about my polio beforehand.

I had an amazing hour with the Chief Anaesthetist and came out feeling super confident in my medical team. We also discussed my heart problems, hiatus hernia, aneurysm, scoliosis, diverticulitis, cervical neck bone collapse and arthritis...among other stuff ...and their correlation with polio. I was complimented on the fact I was still alive and in such good spirit. We both learned a lot about how ones mind can overcome a lot of pain and also that occasional feeling sorry for oneself.

After the first operation, hastier there, due to the obstruction bursting, confidence crept in on seeing that handsome anaesthetists face. It does help if they're nice to look at! Feeling relatively calm I was put out cold in 20 secs flat with my individual "specially prepared" anaesthetic. Trust your anaesthetist everyone. These guys KNOW what they are doing.

Recovery was good I'm told, but I do first recall crinkling sounds on coming round, after which I CLEARLY recall fleetingly looking at the handsome man (anaesthetist number 2) in the recovery room, at bottom of my bed. He was central to a clutch of about 5/6 uniforms calling for more rescue blankets. The crinkly space age silver stuff with warm water pockets all over them. As said above, I have other conditions and my B/P sadly went bit low. Its a family trait. Brilliantly upfront in any crisis, fall apart after.... as I laughed with the anaesthetist earlier. He listened and came prepared for just that in case.

Later next day on ward it was more comfortable playing with the bed zapper to lie in a Z shape on my back to prevent sliding. Turning gently later in the day, was doable but uncomfortable and slow. More of a slide for first 48hrs, due to 3 of the 7 of illnesses above. Nurses have slide sheets to turn people as well.... much easier as it turned out.

All the above aside, day to day I noticed how the post polio symptoms are getting more debilitating as age encroaches. Good days 200yds upright walking, other days 70 feet if lucky. Aging naturally compounds these existing mobility problems. Occasionally I get out of breath easily and use a stair lift to get up stairs some nights. Exercising any muscle nowadays also causes muscle fatigue quicker than it used to so my GP monitors lung capacity annually. I have crutches if I need them as they are useful to lean on when muscle fatigue hits.

One other thing noticed of late is the occasional kind of excess saliva I can get in my mouth. Regardless of sitting or laying my brain doesn't warn the swallow reflex quick enough. With not much warning it feels like something went down wrong way and coughing occurs. If I rapidly get upright swallowing hard between coughs helps clear it all. ***Does anyone else have problems with their swallowing muscles?***

Anyway lovely to read each of your own stories. It makes us feel less lonely and dismissive of life knowing we share a common bond, I think. ***WE ARE ALL SURVIVORS*** in our own way. My own mantra is not to make a drama out of a crisis on a day to day basis, do your best for you and ***NOBODY*** else. Find something you ***CAN DO***, rather than feel sorry for yourself and concentrate on what you ***CAN'T DO***. We still have a life to ***LIVE***, we just need a smidgen of adaptability don't we?!