

The Story I Was Never Able To Tell a Grateful Man In Hospital

Reading Time: 12 minutes

Many of you know that I end up spending time in hospitals. Sometimes because I'm an idiot, sometimes because my body just has enough of the 30 odd pills and 4 injections I have to take in any given day, and just decides to fuck up like a random teenager in a mood. (Mood, apathetic. If you know, you know...)

What initially started as general monitoring led to me once again being an inpatient at Russells Hall Hospital. I'm at the point that nurses and CSWs come and say hello to me when I'm having my morning cigarette and they're on their way for shift change. If the diabetic team see me on their list, I normally get first in the queue unless someone's in an even worse shape as me, mostly because they know that everything I'm telling the nurses and doctors is correct, but they just need to remind them of certain things. Such as removing a glucose saline bag and replacing it with a normal one if my blood sugars go above 13.5. Even though I know how to switch it around myself, I don't as I do try to behave in hospitals, and pissing around with drips isn't the best of ideas in the world.

Because I was throwing up blood before going into hospital, I ended up on a gastrointestinal ward, as they wanted to drug me up and shove a tube down my throat again to have a look around. I hate endoscopies, so this time I was *properly* drugged up. Diazepam, Promethazine and whatever Prozac is called in the UK. Because of the fact I live alone, I normally can't have 'sedation', but this time, I was on a ward in a bay, so all was good... Except for the fact that it completely messed up coming off of an insulin infusion, which is one of the most complicated things a nurse has to deal with. Finger prick tests every hour, BBG blood tests in the hand every two hours (More fun when your veins collapse), and constant maths in terms of what insulin to pump into me, and what I need to inject to kick things along further.....

..... That though, is not the purpose of this blog. That's just the scene setting. In a ward, in a bay, with 3 other patients. None of whom could really get out of bed, or, to use the technical term, mobilise. Of the three patients, one was lucky to have (More than they should have at any one time, way beyond visiting hours) relatives come to visit and look after him, one was rarely conscious but still had visitors, and then, diagonal to me, there was a 92 year old man called Gordon. Gordon was in because he had a fall during the last cold snap before the weather warmed up in and around Dudley, and had come infection complications to boot. He would have visitors, but not every day, and sometimes felt a bit overwhelmed with the number of visitors to the bed next to him.

Gordon had the nickname of 'The Bay Dom'. He was in charge, at least in the eyes of the nurses and the clinical support workers (CSWs). If any of us acted up, he would spill the beans, and he would always tell the day staff what the night staff did and didn't do, and kept his keen eye on us all. He had an incredible back story, being first in the Army just after World War II (When National Service was still a thing, and a rite of passage into adulthood for many a young man at the time), then owned a total of three barber shops around the West Bromwich Area. He would recall stories of how he would have half of the West Bromwich Albion team as his clients, and would tell stories of his time building

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his mini barbershop empire, then buying a betting shop just so he could build a house on top and behind it (Back before the 1990 Town and Country Planning Act, when you could get away with such things).

Gordon told me that this was the first time that he had ever been away from his wife, since they were married. They were about to move to a new care home closer to family, and he was looking forward to getting back on his feet, back to the love of his life, and living out his final years. He would joke with the nurses every morning when the cereal cart came around that he was craving a bacon sandwich, but sadly unless you get a special dietician's breakfast (Which is stone cold but the time it hits the ward anyway), it was cereal, tea, coffee and toast. At least our ward would work out who wanted toast in advance, and then make it fresh. Whilst tea and toast is the lifeblood of the NHS, it's warm tea and cold toast. You learn to deal with it.

The thing I always feel bad about is how the days drag on in hospital. When I was in the Acute Medical Unit, the doctors would see you by 9AM, you'd have a plan of action for the day, and unless it was being told half way through a cup of tea that you had to be immediately nil by mouth for tube shoving fun, you could visualise your day. If you're lucky like I was this time around, you had a phone charger, occasionally some wifi so you could stay connected with the world, or if you get really lucky, you have a tablet with Netflix and a load of downloads of documentaries. On a 'General Ward', even though they are highly specific wards, there's a lot more waiting around, a lot more not knowing what's happening, then being woken up from a boredom nap by someone you may or may not even know the reason for them being there.

I got lucky with Consultant rotation. I had an amazing, thoughtful, empathetic and diligent consultant. I discussed with him how I needed to attend a flat viewing / signing etc at a certain date, and we immediately worked out a backup plan of action if I had to stay in hospital for a longer period of time. Of all the Doctors I've seen through the NHS, he was one of the best Consultants ever, hands down. Thing is though, I was making some positive progresss, but others were not. The guy next to me wasn't doing great, and although the Consultant was amazing, thoughtful, empathetic and diligent, he was also honest, and one thing the NHS hasn't learned is that the blue curtains are not soundproof. It became about making him comfortable, and have the opportunity to return to his family one more time.

This all meant that a lot of the time, it would be Gordon and I chatting, with ironically a patient who was in hospital about 3 years ago when I was in for the same issue, coming to say hello as he was in the bay next to us. We would have random conversations about life, experiences, and so on, and it would always pass the time. I told the nurses that if I had to watch another episode of Pointless, Tippling Point / The Chase that the bay's TV would go through the window, and because it was really only the two of us even paying attention to the magical picture box, we would just chuck on BBC News. It helped that this was during Seagull Watch 2025 next to some random chimney at the Vatican, but we had a good rhythm going on. I'd occasionally help him find his phone, and he'd chuck me over sugar free Werther's Originals as a thank you. We had hoped to get him into a wheelchair and out for a bit of fresh air, but as he was on oxygen, the nurse would have to come with him, and the poor woman was overworked to high hell, but still absolutely fantastic. You could see that she was gutted that she couldn't wheel him downstairs, but rules are rules, and sometimes things just don't go to plan.

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I don't know why, but every time I'm in hospital, I too crave a nice bacon sandwich, especially at the weekend. Thankfully, Russells Hall Hospital now has it's restaurant open at weekends, so I don't need to play the game of calling up Greggs and asking them to cross the road with my order so I don't leave hospital property. It's not a massive issue if you don't have any cannulas in your arms, but most of the time, I have a collection. So Saturday morning, I waited until both the Cafe and WHSmith was open, and went downstairs to get a bacon sandwich for me, and one for Gordon. At the same time, I said about 50 Hail Mary's, and picked up a copy of the Daily Mail, as I could see that his relatives had brought him that paper when he last came to visit. At least it wasn't The Sun. Don't fucking buy The Sun.

It made Gordon's day, and I had to reject him trying to give me money about 40 times. Later that afternoon I went again to the WHSmith, playing the game of if the woman could keep the shop open enough to allow anyone to actually purchase anything before her 14th 'Comfort Break' of the evening, which always lasts about 20 minutes. I noticed that he'd run out of flavoured water and his favourite boiled sweets, and even though shops in hospitals should promote healthy eating, this one clearly doesn't and in fact his needs were the cheapest thing in the damn shop! Again, I told him not to worry about paying me, and that I'd tell him the story why the following day. (Gordon liked his early nights).

The next day, everything was going well, we were chatting, but I'd forgotten to tell him the story, and just as I remembered, Gordon was in a panic. Blood in his catheter bag. Whilst there are times when this can be 'normal', because of things being pulled around a bit, it quickly turned out that it wasn't. I spent my afternoon trying to stop him from panicking too much, and answering his phone for one of his relatives, who said that they would come in the morning as they were moving his wife to the aforementioned nursing home, and that everything would be OK. His brother was a former Charge Nurse (The male equivalent of a Sister / Senior Nurse), and would discuss things with the doctor the next day.

I don't know why, but I woke up really early that Monday morning, and the magical blue curtains once again failed to be soundproof, and I heard the words that would make anyone sick and worried for another: 'I don't think that you will survive this admission as your infection's spread, so all we can do is make you comfortable'. If someone can tell me the right way to react to hearing a Doctor say that to a patient, any patient, please send your answer on a postcard. It's one of those things that even though I'm a frequent flyer with the NHS, you just can't get over. At this point, his curtains were drawn, but the nurse said that I could pop my head in to make sure he was alright until his family came, which ended up being about 8AM. By this time Gordon was in a deep sleep. I was just waiting for my blood work to come back, and was told that I was ready to be discharged by whatever people like to call their 5:30PM meal....

... Two hours later, I got a text from the person whom I had met 3 years earlier on the same ward. Gordon had passed on. I was due to pick up some meds the following day from the ward, and it was weird just seeing someone else's name on the bed space, knowing that Gord didn't make it. To be honest it was gut wrenching, and the nurse who had worked my bay had to work on another part of the ward that day, because it affected her too. People forget that a massive part of nursing care is building a connection with a patient, to know how to communicate, bring happiness, and hopefully

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make them fit and ready to go home (MFOD / MFD in technical world). When they don't, I can only imagine how hard it can be, especially if it was a long stay like this one.

The story I wanted to tell Gordon was one that's nowhere nearly as long as this ramble, but one that's stuck with this old punk rocker at heart. Back in 2013, a coursemate and (only) friend went out for a night on the town. In our happy walk back to my flat, we wanted to stop off and get a bottle of vodka for whatever post night out drinks are known as. One issue. The card machine had broken down, and I try very hard to never carry cash unless I absolutely have to. My friend had no cash either, and we were about to walk out of the shop when the man behind us said 'You know what, I'll get that for them, I have cash on me'. When we asked why he would do such a thing (Especially as they were charging pretty premium price over say a Tesco), he just said 'One day, you'll have the opportunity to be impulsive and make someone's day by the simplest of gestures. I just hope this moment will pop up in your memory when the opportunity comes'.

And you know what, it has. I'm often lucky in hospital. Even if I've got enough cannulas in my arms to make me into the greatest puppet since Pinocchio, I can normally still walk. Be it to the toilet, the water fountain, or the shop. Others can't, and I know first hand how lonely hospitals can be. You lose track of time, what's going on in the world, and aside from watching the TV (If you can even see it if you're bed boud), there is literally **nothing** to do. And I always think back to that 3AM moment in a random 24 hour off-license. I can't take bottles of vodka onto the ward, but I can do something small to bring a smile to someone's face, so whenever I can, that's what I do. Random act of kindness, no strings, no bullshit, no Tik Tok video showing off how nice you are as a person...

... It actually took me a week of thinking to even write this, as it can come off as condescending and 'look at me'. That's not the point though; I'd make a video for my 4 Instagram followers if I really wanted to go down that road, but the point is simple. If there is something you can do to make someone's day a little less shit, and it doesn't impact on you, your finances or your day to day life, you have the opportunity to see the realest of honest, grateful smiles. And smiling and feeling wanted in this cruel, evil world of self greed and 'me, me, me' can go a long way, much further than you may think. To quote the greatest punter in the history of the NFL 'Be a Friend, Tell a Friend Something Nice, It Might Change Their Life'.

Even though Gordon's passed away, I hope that bacon sandwich and Daily Mail gave him a little bit of normality and respite. Us lot, we don't knock bins over, we pick them back up, and in a world where people are paying \$12 for some eggs, what's a few bob here and there. I can't imagine how he must of felt in those last few days, knowing he'd never see his wife again, but I hope he's in a better place. And he reminded me of a really important lesson in life:

If you have something you want to say to someone, that you've been keeping in and holding back from, open up and tell them. You never know if you'd get another chance. Share your stories. Share your passions and love, as none of us have a 'Use by' date stamped on us; it so often happens at random.

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This may well be the biggest ramble I've written in a while, but I hope it sends a message to someone out there. Be a Friend, Tell a Friend Something Nice, It Might Change Their Life.

Peace, Rage And Love xx