

April 1, 2017



Bleeding Ulcer, at the Rick Steves Conference

I was attending the Rick Steves Yearly conference concerning travel to Europe on March 18, 2017, and had attended the sessions most of the day, with just the “Travel as a Political Act” talk as the remaining session I was planning on attending. I had gotten up, to go out to my Van, to put the hand-outs, and my iPad, from the day’s talks in the Van, when I realized, as I got up, that I could not do so, and fell to the ground. To make things more embarrassing, I was in the second row of the Auditorium, very visible to most of the audience.

Luckily, there were a lot of Nurses and Emergency Personnel attending the conference, and they came to my side, to help me out. I had almost fainted, barely maintaining my consciousness. Someone called 911, and the EMTs arrived quickly. I actually couldn’t tell, since my understanding of time was hampered. After the EMTs arrived, and they checked me out, they moved me to a gurney, and took me to the Stevens Hospital Edmonds Clinic Emergency Room.

They attended to me there, and stabilized me, and then sent me to the Swedish First Hill Hospital Emergency Room. They did lots of tests on me, to find out what was the matter that night. In quick fashion, they found out that I was seriously short of Blood. My blood quantity and oxygen saturation was low, with my Hematocrit about 21, where 27 is more normal. Since my Leukemia, I’ve been very aware of that level. I was started on replacement Blood, and other IV Fluids. They were watching me very closely, as you would expect in an Emergency room.

I was then moved to an ICU room on the Seventh Floor, where they watched over me very carefully. I ended up staying in that room for the next four days. They asked me, quite often, what my Name was, and what my Birthday was. That’s standard procedure, to make sure they’re attending to the right person. But they also wanted, I’m sure, to make sure that no damage had been done to my brain. They were ready to send me Home on March 21st. I had started to improve, and they had moved me from the Liquid Diet, to the Partial Liquid Diet, to the General Menu.

On that Wednesday, I had ordered Dinner from the General Menu, including Salad and a Burger. By the way, placing the “greens” under the heat lid isn’t a good idea, as they will get wilted if left very long there. As to the meal, the problem was, apparently I wasn’t quite ready for the salad, and proceeded to get nauseous, and very sweaty from that. I wasn’t feeling well, and I had rung the nurse. Shortly after that signaling, when they arrived, I started to throw-up, including Blood. Apparently, I went as white as the sheets around me, and around a dozen personnel came into the room and attended to me. I was Code Blue, which is very serious, as in ‘Near Death’ serious. I was in quite serious shape. I actually was near death. I remember hearing someone call for Nail Polish Remover, since I have long, Red nails, and they were trying to get the Blood Saturation Level. Luckily, I pulled through very quickly, with the help of the

Docs and Nurses who came to attend to me. Needless to say, I stayed in the ICU room for a few more days. After staying there for 3 more days, I was moved to the 11th floor, which is a normal hospital room floor.

Throughout the stay, I had lots of Docs rounding through my room, including my Primary Doc, Dr. Molly Garbus. She said she was both pleased, and concerned at seeing my name pop up on her rounds. It was happenstance that she was doing rounds at Swedish, although Swedish is now the Hospital for Group Health/Kaiser Permanente, replacing Virginia Mason. The Docs were a little concerned about my spirits over this long stay, and I think they were concerned because I had been so close to death, although they hadn't said I was in that bad of shape. I just looked upon it like a Spa stay, where they were looking over me, making sure everything was going well. Marikay, my older sister, had the same advice. I would suggest the same attitude, if you're stuck in the hospital for more than a few days.

In my stay at Swedish, I received 5 units (pints) of Blood. Consider that the human body regularly has 5-6 Liters of Blood in it. That's a lot to have replaced! I got a lot of rest in there, and watched a lot of TV. They didn't have the greatest number of channels, with mainly A&E, Discovery, and Turner Classic Movies as the standouts. I was lucky enough to watch 2001: A Space Odyssey while there, all the way through.

By Monday the 27th, I was feeling better, and they had decided that I was ready to go Home. What the whole incident was about was a Bleeding Ulcer that happened because of taking two 200mg Naproxen 3 times daily, to supplement my Morphine and Hydrocodone for my Fibromyalgia. That had done nasty things to my Stomach and upper Intestinal Tract. My suggestion is to not to take that for very long, as it can have deleterious effects on your GI system. I was taken, several times, to the Endoscopy room, where they did them on me. As was the case when I had a Colonoscopy, I don't remember a thing, which is good, since I have a good gag reflex, and wouldn't have tolerated the Endoscopy very well. Propaphyl is good stuff!

I was lucky with my Van. I was worried all the time I was staying at Swedish, that either it would be towed, or broken into. I had called the Ticket Office of the Edmonds Performance Center on Monday, March 20, and left a message with them that my Van was parked in their lot, in the Disabled Parking area. On the day I was let out of the Hospital, I asked my friend Dave (it was like pulling teeth!) to drive me from Swedish to Edmonds, so that I could pick up my Van. He's Retired, so there isn't any big deal with taking off work. I had been worried that someone might have broken into it, since it was sitting so quietly in the Edmonds Performance Center lot. Luckily, when Dave and I pulled up, there it was, no break in, nothing out of place!

Although there was a very negative report in the Seattle Times about Swedish Hospital recently, I have to say that the stay there was pleasant. The Nurses were quite friendly, and I was friendly back to them. I was very thankful of their service. I know it's their job to attend to me, but letting them know that their work is appreciated is the least I can do. The problem, apparently, is with the Docs, and how they double and triple book the Neurology O.R., to raise their completion rates.

One thing that is a problem, though, is The Food Service System. I had noticed problems, and complained about it. As I'm sure you know, Hospital Food isn't known as the best in the World, and one thing they didn't have there, was any kind of feedback system. They have no idea if the patients like or dislike what they're getting. And I complained to the Food Service Supervisor about it. She sent up some paper for me to note what I felt could be better about it. I ended up hand-writing 8 half-pages, including my contact info. For one thing, I mentioned that what doesn't get measured, doesn't get fixed. They

need to have some kind of survey going with the patients, like every meal, at times. I would suggest for them to try an iPad survey, to make it easy for the patients to leave their opinions. It would be very good if it was a Web-based survey, that way they could also have patients take the survey AFTER they had stayed at Swedish Hospital. But, having an iPad to take that survey would allow the patients to give their opinion while it is still fresh in their minds.

There were incidents like my Tea coming to me around 170 degrees hot! And my Soup, too! I burned the upper part of my mouth when that happened. It was also very difficult preparing the food to eat. When you're in bed, and don't have a lot of mobility, it is hard to make the food ready to eat. Like French Toast. Having two half slices of Toast, and not having it cut up, and placed on a plate with Scrambled Eggs and Sausage makes it near impossible to prepare and get ready to eat, and not get them mixed together. And, having two eggs scrambled, in a 4 oz Ramakin doesn't make it easy to eat. More than once, they didn't supply the requested amount of sugar and cream for my Tea. That required a 20 minute exchange, with the helper having to traverse 7 or 11 stories of the Hospital. Guess what. The Tea got cold, in that time. Not time or patient positive. Also, the menu was very Savory-focused, with lots of Onion and Parmesan cheese being the focus.

And, the servers never introduced themselves. Pride in Service! If someone announces who they are, the patient will feel a connection with them. I did that with Consuela, the room cleaning attendant, who did Room clean up. I could tell that no one had even said hello to her, much less ask her name. It was amazing to see how she reacted when someone actually talked with her, and treated her as a Human Being.

And, I had a real problem with their Tomato Soup. When I ordered it several times, I got different soups, at the different times! One was a very nice, kind-of sweet version. The second was an herb-infested version, which was very savory. And the menu mentioned no difference, not that there was two different versions, just Tomato Soup! The Food Service call-in line didn't even know there were two different versions. Like I said, Food is one of the things that can improve a person's stay in the Hospital. The Tomato Soup, the sweet version, was such an item. While I was stuck on the all-liquid diet, that Tomato Soup was one of the good things at the Hospital, that improved my disposition.

The Food Service is a very important part of a Patient's stay at the Hospital. It can positively or negatively affect how their improvement happens. So, I did let the Supervisor know she should contact me, and I'm going to follow up on that, to make sure that they improve that part of the care. I had done some of the same routine when I was at Bailey Boushay House, when I was under Palliative Care for my Leukemia in 2010. The Executive Chef was very happy to get feedback, and I'm pretty sure they changed the way they did things. I'm going to make sure they do so at Swedish. I was literally in tears, at times, when they would screw up my order, that's how much it affects you in the Hospital.

I followed up, again, like I did with the Bailey Boushay House, and took some giant (8 ½ x 11) Thank You cards to the Nurses Stations at Swedish on Friday March 31. At the 7th Floor Nurses Station, the Lead Nurse remembered me, and said I looked so much better, and took a picture, because she thought the other Nurses wouldn't believe I was there, and looking so good. I seem to have that affect on those I stay with. I am Memorable! The 11th East Nurses Station was also very happy I stopped by. I put my email on the card's exterior, so that they could write to me, if they wanted to.

Oh, and I sent a hand-written letter to Rick Steves, apologizing for interrupting his conference. I think it's important to hand-write a letter of apology for an incident like that, even though it really wasn't my fault. It's just good manners.

As an end note to the apologizing letter, I was going out to Dinner on Sunday, April, 9, when I noticed something leaning up against my door. It was a package delivered by the Post Office on Saturday, the 8th, and inside it was both a note and a book. It was from Rick Steves Europe. And the note said,

“Thank you so much for your letter! No need to be sorry – we are just happy to hear that you are all right and doing well! It’s one of those things that are out of anyone’s control and can happen to anyone. We understand how excited you were to see Rick’s Talk, so we decided to send you a copy of his “Travel As A Political Act” book!

In addition, you can also watch a recording of his talk on our website free at (URL).

We continue to wish you all the best in your health and hope you can join us for another future event!”

Wasn’t that nice? That way, I felt quite justified in writing that note by hand, instead of by Computer.