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Five Days?

by Lesley Dawson

He was not looking forward to going into hospital, especially so far away from home. The thought of five days in hospital with no visitors sounded miserable. Still it had to be done. The oncologist had said this professor and his treatment were the best in the business and what was five days compared to a life time of discomfort and pain, or even the possibility of no life time at all.

The ward seemed very quiet when he arrived on Sunday afternoon and he thought he might be the only patient but gradually three other men ,looking apprehensive and fidgety, were delivered to other beds in the ward and left by relatives and friends glad to be out of the antiseptic atmosphere of the hospital. The worst that happened to them that evening was hospital food and an enema.

By next morning everybody was talking to each other as they were all due to go to theatre to have the dreaded radiotherapy rods fitted. He was the last of the four to have this done and he saw Brian, Fred and Philip slid on to a trolley and wheeled away from the ward. Finally they came for him and, amid drowsy good wishes, he was wheeled off to oblivion. Having been asked to confirm his date of birth and his name and address so many times, he wondered who he was when he woke up. This was to find he was flat out in a bed, catheterised, with instructions not to sit up, even a fraction.

The difficulties in lying flat soon became apparent when the soup and cottage pie with broccoli he had happily ordered the night before arrived and was plonked on the bed side table. This was a problem to be overcome three times a day.

A problem that was not solved as most of it came back on his pillow. After that he didn't bother eating much for six days. Yes, the five days had stretched into six and more.

Lying on your back, he discovered, caused at sorts of old and unremembered aches and pains to start up. He thought back to the times he had lifted heavy objects without thinking and then developed back pain. Especially one occasion when he had lifted up the end of a manual tipping bed on which lay an unconscious, twenty stone woman. That had hurt, but over the years you forget. Now he remembered it well. What was a surprise was that the nursing staff had old-fashioned ideas about rubbing backs. When this happened it was heaven. The noises coming from behind curtains where this was happening sounded like someone was having an orgasm.

All this was bad enough but even worse, twice a day, he was wheeled off to have his rods connected to a machine which zapped him with large amounts of radiotherapy. He listened to the radiotherapists measuring distances and strengths in numbers he couldn't imagine but he could count, to the nearest second, the twenty minutes he lay there before being wheeled back to the ward and slid on the plastic moving and handling sheets back onto his bed.

At the end of day four Brian was taken back to theatre to have his rods removed and returned looking like a new man and sitting up. At the end of day five Fed and Philip also received this reprieve. The sixth day came round and finally he himself was free of pain. Great I can go home; he thought and prepared to text his wife to pick him up that evening. Before he could do this, the professor arrived saying the procedure had gone well and he could home, tomorrow. The five days had now extended to seven days but fortunately no longer. He mused on this as he sat awkwardly on cushions in the back of the car, wondering how radioactive he was. What was it going to be like once he got home? How many other numbers would be involved? Well, I'm afraid, that is another story.