



A DOCTOR'S EXPERIENCE IN ISOLATION

Text by Anonymous

Some years ago during the H1N1 pandemic, I was infected with it. It mostly felt like a bad, prolonged flu, but one night as I laid in bed, I had difficulty breathing. I asked my husband to ring my friend B, an infectious diseases consultant at a large public hospital. B quickly secured a bed for me in the isolation ward for observation and instructed us to go to the A&E for direct admission.

But when I was wheeled in at around midnight, the staff appeared to be unaware of the arrangement for my direct admission. I was seen by the medical officer on duty, Dr A. My husband explained that we were both medical doctors, and that B had already reserved a bed for me in the isolation ward. Dr A did not believe us and told us that the hospital was full. We asked Dr A to call B; he did not.

Drawing the curtains, Dr A did an unchaperoned examination. He then applied a tourniquet to my arm tightly with a latex glove. As he was preparing his blood-taking equipment, a nurse came in to look for him, and he left the room without a word. He was gone quite a while, and my arm grew blotchy and numb with pain. I asked my husband to release the tourniquet as I was too fatigued to do it myself.

After Dr A returned, he took my blood without a word of apology. He set a plug and sent me for an X-ray. Alone and drowsy in the cold X-ray room, I bumped my head on the machine.

A long wait begins

For a few hours, I waited in the wheelchair, coughing and fatigued, unable to lie down and rest. It was

a quiet night at the A&E. No one checked on me – at one point, a registrar walked by and my husband asked her if she could help process the admission. She said no, and quickly disappeared around the corner. Dr A, too, was nowhere to be found. The wait felt like an eternity.

Around 4 am, Dr A reappeared. Without warning, he shot a bolus of unknown liquid into my plug. Excruciating pain shot up my veins. I asked him what he was injecting – it was intravenous Augmentin. He commanded me to bear with it, then rapidly forced in the remaining half of the injection.

After another long wait, the porter arrived. She wheeled me up, though not before taking a huge detour and quarrelling with the nurses from the neighbouring ward. I was finally



delivered to the isolation ward at around 5 am in the morning, to the surprise of the nurses. "Where were you? We expected you hours ago!" they said.

The ordeal continues

The airlock of my isolation room slid shut behind me. It was a relief to lie down and I soon fell into a deep sleep. Dawn had broken and my husband left for work.

Three hours later, a loud drilling noise reverberated through my room, waking me up. This was followed by knocking, then more drilling – it turned out that the ward upstairs was under renovation for the next few weeks.

A nurse assistant stopped by briefly to deliver my breakfast – chicken porridge. It was the wrong order, but I slurped it down anyway. They had also given me thermos jugs of water – but strangely, no cups to drink from. After eating, the dirty dishes were left uncleared till the next meal was delivered. In the meantime, the drilling went on non-stop for the whole day. I dozed off a few times,

but between the drilling and my coughing, it was hard to stay asleep.

The room then turned very hot and stuffy. I pressed the air conditioning controls on my bed, but nothing changed. The other air conditioner dial was at ceiling level. A visiting friend tried to help me by holding up my drip pole and poking the dial. No luck – it was central air conditioning. It remained stuffy for my entire stay.

After lunch, a nurse came to take my blood. She almost withdrew the needle without releasing the tourniquet until I stopped her in alarm. At some point, B dropped in as well. His visit was brief, but comforting. Apart from that, the nurses rarely checked on me. They seemed to be very busy. There was a call button, but I did not want to press it for non-urgent matters.

As dusk fell, the drilling mercifully faded. I was alone in the room, sitting up in bed when suddenly, I felt very faint. Worried that I might lose consciousness, I laid back down, pressed the nurse call button, and

waited for help. A few minutes passed. I pressed the bell again, and again. No one came. Shouting would be no use as the room's airlock blocked sound, so I could only lie still, close my eyes and hope the fainting spell would pass.

A nurse walked in some time later. She did not know I had pressed the call button; she was there to deliver dinner (and clear the dirty lunch dishes). Fortunately, I felt better after eating, but my friend was alarmed when I told her what happened when she visited. She questioned the nurses, who admitted that the call button was not connected to their nurse's counter. It was connected to the neighbouring ward, which was sealed off from the isolation ward by a perpetually locked door. The nurses in the next ward ignored the call because it was simply not their responsibility! In short, my calls for help just went unheard.

Thankfully, I was discharged shortly after and could go home to recuperate. Although I recovered in the end, the whole hospitalisation episode was like a nightmare. ♦