The Dangers in Modern Medicine

I had originally planned to simply write a rant on the many common, avoidable and dangerous mistakes I have been witness to and experienced in modern hospitals. Unfortunately, the errors are so numerous that I have decided to create a new category entitled "Medical Mayhem", where I will write a series of posts broken down into several chapters.

I am presently writing a manuscript for a book about my ordeal, so some of these posts will be sort of a sneak-peek at some of what my book will entail. Trust me when I tell you that the page on this blog which covers my story is not but a fraction of what I endured and experienced over the last two years due to a sequel of medical errors. The purpose of these articles and my book will be a bit of an exposé on life in a hospital from a patient's perspective. Unlike the ridiculously over-glorified, god-like images portrayed on television, I will paint the image of a true extended stay in a hospital in the U.S.. House, ER, Grey's Anatomy or any other pretentious heap of dung that's excreted from the minds of Hollywood writers are far from an actual depiction of doctors, nurses and hospitals and have only served to elevate these practitioners to the level of a deity that no human could live up to.

Medicine has become a multibillion dollar industry and never lose sight of the fact that IT IS AN INDUSTRY. It is no different from any other fortune 500 establishment or publicly traded entity that places the fiscal bottom line above all else, including the lives and safety of its consumers. The

exact same misinformation, media manipulation, falsification of data and suppression of known dangers are implemented. Those in the medical industries are not a more ethical brand of creature just because they chose to go into medicine or pharmaceuticals for a profession. The same congressional lobbying, controlling the media by flexing their advertising muscle and even the same revolving door government appointments are in play – and perhaps implemented better than anyone in the tobacco, alcohol, insurance or oil industries (here I'm referring to the medical supply and pharmaceutical corporations and hospital financiers, not the doctors).

Thanks in part to the media, the medical industry conducts services under a misguided public's incessant belief that they operate on a higher level of ethics (here I include doctors). Maybe it's because of all the years they have been portrayed on television as saints in white coats, who are always right, and never lose a patient due to incompetence or negligence. The image of doctors fretting late into the nights and weekends, like a detective on a tough crime case, is sheer and utter bullshit. Doctors rarely spend more than 5 minutes with a patient and whatever diagnosis first pops into their head is the one they stay with irregardless of evidence to the contrary, or at least up until the point the patient crashes. (It's rather convenient the first diagnosis is usually whatever the "fad" disease at the time is; think "Fibromyalgia").

I am not out to overly criticize nor paint those in the medical profession of possessing any lower values than any other human, but to illustrate that they are not divinely given any higher set of ethics, intelligence nor devotion to their patients (customers) than any other business professional. They are mortal beings, capable of the same human error, temperament, loss of concentration in their work and annoyance with their customers as any other merchant. More importantly, they are just as subjective to

the effects of advertising and misinformation from large corporations, including pharmaceutical companies, medical equipment manufacturers and food processing companies as is the general public. It is the fact that they are held less accountable for their conduct that leads to a higher rate of incompetence than other occupations.

Doctors are simply the liaison between the medical corporation and the patient. They're the "kind face" or trusted salesman for the corporate giants and the legal license from which to distribute whatever drug or diagnostic device they're marketing today (hence, why commercials always say "ask your doctor if…"). Sort of a highly educated "stooge", who get all of their knowledge and information based on the research conducted by the very people whose products they distribute, and rarely from any unbiased or independent studies.

Ethically speaking, there is certainly a difference between those who practice medicine, from those who sell it. The ones who practice medicine are typically snowed, bullied and manipulated by the ones who sell it (you know, the creators of the "disease-of-the-month"). Practitioners may have more than just money as their motivator as opposed to their corporate partners, but their profession seems to lead them to a great degree of cynicism and imperiousness. This is understandable, given their omnipotent portrayal in the media. But, when you mix the greed of the money-makers with the arrogance of the practitioner, you simply get an inferior product or service – which in this case means suffering and death. Sort of like when you mix the greed of the record company with the arrogance of the performing artist, you get pop music (total crap). The U.S. spends more on health care than any other nation, yet we're ranked 37th in the last WHO ranking in 2000.

It is culturally implanted in americans to have some level of distrust towards their government, corporations and salespeople, but these same skeptical people will give a

theist's faith to their doctors. Too bad the doctors do not reciprocate even a fraction of that trust back to their patients. Typically, practitioners consider any query as a challenge of their knowledge or competence as a doctor and quickly ignore or dismiss any questions or observations made by family members. Family members have a much higher degree of perception when their loved one is not "acting right" or in pain and any good doctor should listen (I will cover this more in "The Cynical Attitude Of Doctors"). About 50% of the nurses are much better at listening to family than doctors. My wife and I both practice the same level of caution and skepticism towards doctors than we would any politician, salesperson, corporate advertiser or anyone else vying for our business. Unfortunately, two patients we befriended were much more trusting and are no longer with us.

The biggest surprise to me is that Doctors enjoy a greater protection under the law than any other profession and are held to a lesser degree of responsibility – which seems rather ass-backwards given the fact they deal in human lives. No matter what you've been led to believe, it is virtually impossible to seek financial compensation for damages inflicted on you by a doctor. Even if successful (which is rare), there are federal caps set on medical torts far lower than on any other type business or product liability. I cover this topic in great detail in my post in this series entitled; "Malpractice Law: Reserved Only For The Frivolous"

There was a character on the television series "Scrubs", named Neena Broderick, who was a ravenous malpractice attorney, hell-bent on suing the doctors for every little mistake. Once again, more Hollywood bullshit misguiding the general public about the doctor's responsibilities if mistreating a patient. If people knew the truth, they might be more careful when following their doctor's advice. After all, you alone will bear the full brunt of any errors made by your doctor, both physically and financially. I am talking

here about doctors and not pharmaceutical and medical supply companies. These medical corporations are held to the law under product safety – not to be confused with malpractice. Nurses and other hospital employees are covered under the hospital's policy, but doctors are virtually untouchable, because they are not considered a hospital employee. With no system of checks and balances in place, any industry could easily decline into a money-making racket, and the medical industry is no exception.

I am in no way attempting to persuade people to avoid medical attention when necessary. Modern technological advances have the potential to save more lives and improve the public health like never before in history. I use the term "potential" because like any technology, it is only as good as the technician and their level of commitment. The real truth that the television medical dramas and pharmaceutical commercials will never reveal is that the number one killer in the United States is death due to pharmaceutical drugs – more people than are killed in traffic accidents. Nor will you discover that the third highest killer in the U.S. is due to medical errors. [source] [second source]

Given the fact that neither my accident, nor the ones that killed my friends was reported as the medical blunders they were, would imply that there are thousands more swept under the carpet – possibly making medical errors, in reality, the number one killer. Modern medicine does save lives, but all totaled, it is certainly the number one killer of humans beings in the United States, by far. If we were able to add in the unreported and undiscovered errors, I am sure that it takes many more lives than it saves. Sorry to be the bearer of that news.

This is not to scare you from seeking medical attention when warranted, but a stern warning that you must be your own advocate , do your own research (all hospitals I resided in had wi-fi internet connection in every room) and to not be

afraid to question doctors and nurses. You are allowed to refuse any medication, treatment or procedure you believe to be in error or too much of a risk. I have heard and read blogs where people claim "my doctor is making me take…". A doctor cannot make you do anything. Read your Patient's Bill Of Rights. A doctor must explain to you all the alternative treatments if asked. In other words, turn off the damned television in your hospital room and do some homework!

I spent over 14 months in hospitals and was nearly the victim of many common and avoidable errors. I was lucky that my loving wife took a leave of absence from her job and was at my side the entire time, diligently reading on her laptop. Thanks to her watchful eye and constant research, she helped avert several lethal mistakes nearly inflicted on me by hospital personnel. I spent several weeks either in a coma, heavily sedated or intubated, so it was important that I had her as an advocate when I was unable to respond or make decisions. Even when sedated or on a respirator (you cannot talk when intubated), she could always tell the doctors what I was feeling or needed with impeccable accuracy. No amount of training can teach that, it must come from someone close to the patient to read those expressions. Try to have a family member with you if you are incapacitated or unconscious.

I understand that my life was saved by an amazing transplant and those extremely skilled doctors worked diligently to give me back some quality of life. Though true, it cannot overshadow the reality that had I not been injured by a group of doctors and left to die as a result of their cynicism, I would have never needed that risky procedure. Nor can it change the fact that the same doctors who gave me back life with a transplant, nearly took that life on several occasions in the months that followed. How I survived some of the errors is still a mystery to the doctors, so it would be an overstatement to credit them with the survival. But these mistakes did prolong my stay in the hospitals by five months,

exposing me for a longer time to hospital borne pathogens and medical errors.

While in the hospitals, I had nothing but plenty of time on my hands to research. Though much of the puzzle is incomplete concerning where the line exists between innocent mistakes to huge cover-ups, I have arrived at a much clearer image of how the medical money-making machine and the laws that protect it coexists. There is obviously an avoidance by the media and the legal system to bring to light the real dangers that exist in modern medicine and how it is, in fact, our number one killer. I am left to conclude this is due to the enormous amount of money that it generates for our economy and the idea that people "want to believe" in a group of highly intelligent people who can save us from all of our ills. Probably based in the same brain mechanism that makes people want to believe in aliens, gods, fortune tellers and psychics – and the healing powers of doctors is just as much a myth.

Mostly, I believe it's just considered too politically incorrect and audacious to speak out against the medical system, which is why attorneys never want to point the finger of blame at doctors. Doctors have obtained an almost divine aura of goodness around them and anyone who expresses a negative thought is treated as an infidel. I, on the other hand, have never been considered politically correct and have little to lose at this point – so, I will begin my series with the procedure that ignited the nightmare that would become my life.

"The Dangers Of Colonoscopies"

"The Effectiveness Of Colonoscopies On Cancer And IBD"

"How Common Are Medical Errors?"

"Malpractice Law: Reserved For Only The Frivolous"

"The Cynical Attitude Of Doctors"

“Is Your Surgeon Licensed? Are You Sure?”

Please leave comments. I get a lot of readers, but few of them leave comments. Let me know if you like what I offer or if you think I’m full of shit. Really, I’d like to know how I am being received.

I apologize for the extra step it takes to leave a comment, which I’m sure deters some from leaving a note. I was getting hundreds of spam comments from robot softwares, so I had to set up protection rather than shut off comments all together. I’m sorry for the inconvenience.