

THE UROLOGIST

For several weeks starting September 13, 2002, José suffered from severe pain in his right thigh, present only while in a prone position. (It eventually got diagnosed as a form of myofascia and was taken care of by a pain specialist at Presbyterian Hospital and physical therapy treatments.) Among the eleven physicians of varying specialties that José consulted during this time (all of whom assured him that it was neither life-threatening nor serious) was one who suggested a colonoscopy.

“I can’t bother with that now,” José objected. “It’s the middle of the Biochemistry course, and I can’t do anything till it’s over.”

Accordingly Josy called for an appointment to be handled in December, and Lankenau Hospital scheduled this for the morning of Tuesday, December 17th. Told that the day before, the patient was instructed to stay close to home and bathroom while preparing for the procedure, and noticing from the family calendar that a day earlier (December 16th) José was down to have his biannual urology check-up, she called the urology office to reschedule.

“The latest we have open before the holiday is Thursday, December 19th,” they told her, and she accepted this. It was now only early October, and she was pleased to have that taken care of and out of the way.

It happened that back at José’s last urology checkup in June, Dr. K. had noticed a very slightly elevated sugar reading in his urine sample. (José had just come directly from lunch, but that had failed to keep the urologist from panicking.) Even though José checked his own blood sugar repeatedly after coming home and each time found it within normal limits, Dr. K. insisted that he have a blood test taken a week before his next appointment.

“Never mind the PSA test,” he insisted. “You don’t need that. Let’s just make sure your pre-diabetic condition hasn’t gotten any worse.”

Accordingly, a week before his December 19th urological examination, José presented himself at Lankenau Hospital at 9 in the morning for a blood test, with Dr. K.’s request-paper in hand. Due to be at the VA Hospital at 11 for one of volunteer committee meetings, he felt this gave him sufficient time, planning to go directly from one hospital to the other.

They drew blood from his arm, then thought to ask, “By the way, when did you last eat?”

“I just had breakfast,” he replied.

“Oh, that won’t do,” answered the nurse. “You’re allowed no food for two hours before.”

“Nobody told me,” he countered.

“It’s down on your paper, right here,” she replied, pointing to a five-digit number. “That means ‘no food’”

“How was I supposed to know?” he asked.

“Well, they should have told you,” she responded. “Now we’ll have to take your blood again. But you’ll have to wait two hours.”

“I can’t,” he objected. “It’s already almost ten o’clock, and I have to be at my meeting at 11.”

“Let’s compromise,” she said. “Wait half an hour and I’ll take your blood then.”

So he waited, and at 10:30 she again drew blood and he was on his way.

Later that afternoon the phone at home rang. “It’s Dr. K.’s office,” a voice told Josy. “Dr. Rabinowitz has to have a blood test today.”

“He already had one,” Josy told her.

“Well, I hope he fasted twelve hours beforehand.” came the reply.

“Twelve hours,” cried Josy. “How was he supposed to know?”

“It’s right down there on the paper we gave him last June,” she answered.

“That was six months ago,” Josy objected, “and it never said anything about fasting,”

“Oh yes it did,” came the voice. “It’s that five-digit number on Page 2. That’s what it means. No food for twelve hours!”

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December 16th came and went, and on Tuesday morning, December 17th José had his colonoscopy. Fortunately the results turned out fine. While he was recuperating in the lobby, he turned to Josy with an idea.

“Why don’t we go over to the Dr. K.’s office while we’re here and make sure everything’s all set for Thursday’s appointment. They’ve had so many mix-ups in the last couple of days. It wouldn’t hurt to double-check.”

“You wait here and rest,” Josy replied. “I’ll go over and make sure everything’s straight.”

She took the elevator to the third floor and entered the Urology Suite.

“I’m here to check my husband’s appointment for the day after tomorrow,” she told the receptionist.

“Where was he yesterday?” the receptionist snapped. “He missed his appointment!”

“I called to cancel and reschedule that six weeks ago,” Josy explained.

“Well, we’ve no record of that,” the receptionist sniffed. “Our next available appointment is three months from now, in February.”

“Let me talk to the doctor,” Josy demanded.

“Doctor’s with a patient now. You’ll have to wait,” came the reply.

“All right, I’ll wait,” Josy answered.

Seating herself in the waiting room among a few other patients there, she picked up a magazine and settled back in her chair.

Half an hour went by. Finally a nurse came out from the office.

“Mrs. Rabinowitz,” she called. As Josy got up and approached, the nurse handed her a small plastic bottle and ordered, “Give me a urine sample, please.”

“A urine sample,” cried Josy. “What for?”

“Nobody sees Doctor without a urine sample,” responded the nurse firmly. “Second door to your right, please!”

It took an argument of five minutes and finally a personal interview with the doctor to straighten things out.

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When Dr. K. did see José that Thursday, he came out with the announcement that José needed a hernia operation.

“I’ll do it immediately,” the doctor announced. “It’s a very, very big hernia, and it has to be done at once. It’s not going to get any better by itself. It’ll be a very quick procedure, since I don’t believe inserting a mesh. You’ll be in and out the same day. Shall we say next Monday?”

“Let me think about it,” José responded.

That was the last he ever saw of Dr. K. Confirming the diagnosis early in January, José’s family physician and cardiologist Dr. Sellers ordered a PSA test while he dismissed the pronouncement about diabetes. He got Dr. Ernest Rosato, Head of Surgery at the University of Pennsylvania Hospital, to perform José’s surgery early in February. It involved a two-and-a-half-hour operation, insertion of a mesh, a drainage tube, a four-inch scar required by the size of the hernia, and three days as a patient in the hospital.

Needless to say, after a six-week recuperation José, fully recovered and feeling better than ever, went in search of a new urologist.