



# MY *First* *Experience* WITH SURGERY

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I was asked to share about my experience with doctors and hospitals in Singapore, so let me share a short story. However, it only reflects my own limited experience as I know there are many different kinds of doctors in Singapore.

## An unsuspecting patient

What seems like a long time ago, I was a young 18-year-old who had just finished my examinations. I was full of energy and enthusiasm, with lots of time on my hands (I suspect this will prove significant in the little tale I'm telling today). One day, possibly after learning about breast self-examination, I discovered a lump in my right breast. It wasn't particularly big and it did not worry me at all. *Ah, the headiness of youth!* However, I had enough good sense to mention it to my mum who, being the very responsible person she was and still is, promptly booked an appointment for me to see a doctor.

There was a lump after all – it wasn't my overactive imagination! After further

checks and referrals, I was advised to have the lump excised and have a biopsy done. The doctor assured me that it was unlikely to be anything to worry about. She explained about the kind of lump they thought it was and that they would do a biopsy to be sure, and also told me what to expect before and after the surgery. Still shielded by my baseless belief in my invincibility (don't ask me why I was still not worried; it wasn't logical), I went home happily and carried on with my life. I didn't even think of mentioning it to my boyfriend at the time. He didn't take it well when he found out and we broke up soon after.

My surgery date soon came around. I turned up at KK Women's and Children's Hospital nice and early (all credit to my mum again, who has been punctual all her life unlike me) and met with the doctors and nurses. They were mostly young and really kind to me. Is this the so called rose-tinted glasses through which we view good memories? But honestly, this is how I remember it. I remember the anaesthetist explaining what she was doing and asking me rather lame questions (which I later learnt is what they all do for good reasons; the specifics of which I'm sure all of you know better than me). Then,

like an old-fashioned television blinking off, I was out like a light.

## Dr Handsome

Now, this next memory makes me smile just recalling it. If it were rose-tinted glasses I am looking through, this may have the deepest shade. During the surgery, it was like my consciousness was a video put on pause. At some point, someone put it back on play again and, with my eyes still closed, I was awake again. I felt comfortable and rested. I opened my eyes. The room was bright but not glaring; a soothing peachy shade comes to mind. There, before my eyes, gazing kindly down on me, was the most handsome man I had ever laid eyes on. I don't normally notice handsome men but the first thought that burst in my head, like neon lights in a desert night, was: "Wow, this guy is SO handsome!!!" Yes, the capital letters and extra exclamation marks are totally necessary. Is this the after-effect of the drugs they administer during surgery? Good stuff.

Dr Handsome asked me a few questions about how I was feeling as I grinned giddily at him, positive vibes pouring out. (Do all patients respond this way after surgery? How does one

get this gig checking up on patients post-surgery?) Dr Handsome was very charming and polite, and he must have been satisfied with my answers because he moved on to his next patient.

### **A full recovery**

At my follow-up appointments, my surgeon assured me that the biopsy results were good. She checked on my wound and ensured that it was recovering well. She scheduled me for more follow-ups and sent me on my way. Alas, I never saw Dr Handsome again.

After a few more follow-ups, my doctor was confident that I was doing well and gave me the option to stop coming back for checks. Looking back, I really appreciate that I was given that decision to make. Many patients, especially young and inexperienced

ones like I was, would have just kept going back as long as the hospital kept scheduling a "Next Appointment". Throughout my interactions with the staff at the hospital, I felt taken care of and confident that they had my interests as a foremost priority. I felt informed and respected. After other health and hospitalisation experiences over the years, I now realise that I had won the proverbial lottery for my first experience with surgery. It is not like this everywhere!

### **Looking back**

Perhaps I had little expectations and a lot of time, so waiting to see the doctor didn't bother me and I don't remember waiting a long time. Perhaps I was a young student in the pre-Google era who was accustomed to having questions, so I felt like I was given ample information.

Perhaps I was unjaded, full of naive optimism and not yet cynical about people – I saw the best in everyone.

Or perhaps, I was simply fortunate to have met a wonderful team of healthcare professionals. I appreciate that they could have just as easily done their jobs competently without being so pleasant to me. I appreciate that they had put my interests first when advising me and gave me options I would not have known I had. I appreciate that the doctors and nurses made many little decisions on a daily basis about the way they did their jobs that contributed to my positive experience. I also appreciate that a well-managed hospital and healthcare system makes it significantly easier for them to do that. Thank you to every person who contributes rather than takes away. You know who you are. ♦