

PETA, AUGUST 2019 - LOOKING BACK

Michelle's recent posting about her final review after 3 years, made me reflect on my own replacements. As it happened, I needed to see my lovely shoulder consultant on another part of my body – my (dominant) left hand's thumb was causing difficulties which needed a small operation to sort out. (www.upperlimb.co.uk)

When I went back to see him, I showed mobility in both shoulders by doing my “demented windmill impression”! I am fortunate to have had straight-forward replacements which possibly gives me a bit more movement than the reverse shoulder operation, but I am convinced that it is my daily half mile swim which has been a significant help in my recovery. On Physio advice, I always start with 10 lengths breast-stroke to warm-up the muscles and then alternate with crawl and backstroke. After the swim, I do a few extra exercises: holding my arms in the air for a count of 20, curving my arms over my head and bending sideways, and then putting my arms behind my back 10 times and then a holding count of 20 (fingertips only but at least I can reach behind).

I also took the opportunity to ask what my replacements were made of which might surprise many people that I did not know. Here I have to confess being a bit of an ostrich. I had total faith in my consultant and left the technicalities to him but I thought it prudent to check that a daily 40 minute swim was unlikely to wear out my shoulders in the near future. I received suitable re-assurance to continue to swimming and was told that he had not cemented in the prosthesis so that it would “pop out” easier if I lived long enough to need a replacement. Well, that as may be, but I think the best thing is for me to continue to treat my shoulders with respect, keep swimming so that the shoulder muscles keep them in place and drinking lots of lattes.

I can lie on both shoulders but the left one does become a bit uncomfortable after half an hour or so. It is often this one which might protest doing crawl so on those days, I might cut my swim a bit short. Whilst other days – such as this morning – I felt I could have swum several miles. So it is just a matter of listening to the body and using common sense. I have become slightly more cautious particularly in icy weather or uneven ground in case I fall with outstretched arms but perhaps that is because my 73 birthday is in a few weeks. But like everyone else, I do forget and lift something very heavy or awkward, which I did a month or so ago, and then had to abandon swimming for 3 days due to a pulled muscle. I am still a “twizzler” with my bra but could reach behind if needed. Putting on a coat can be tiresome as can a wearing a rucksack but these are minor nuisances compared to how I was before the operations. With my left shoulder in particular I could not lift my arm to reach the top of the steering wheel – very worrying!

I have now met several ladies who have had or needed shoulder replacements as well as corresponding through Michelle's blog, so perhaps the knowledge of the operation is now more widely known than when it was first mooted to me in 2012 or I am now more aware. One unfortunate lady was on her third reverse shoulder replacement and another lady (who has subsequently become a good friend) was told by her consultant that she had left the operation too late and it could no longer be carried out. Unfortunately she does not live near me so she could get a second opinion. If there is a lesson to be learnt here – go early for treatment so that the outcome is more likely to be successful. And post-op, continue to work at your Physio exercises even if it is only for 5 minutes daily!