



Newsletter – March 2010

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Limitations of our Bodies.

During my Secondary School and National Service days I was an active sportsman and took part in many long distant running (X-country) races. Later, I also took part in several distance-runs organised by the Singapore Sport Council. Although I did not run competitively after my school and national service days, I had no problem running 10km to 20kms, anytime, as I jogged about 16 km daily round the Pandan Reservoir, just for the exercise.

In 1991, after several years of running I began to notice the occasional nagging pain in my right knee. However, I continue to jog regularly, hoping to stay fit and healthy.

I also had a good racing bicycle which I rode daily, from home to my place of work and back, for about 15 years, to 2000. I was actually very happy and comfortable cycling to work and did so at a reasonable pace. However, I was ignorant that the forces applied while riding up slopes were causing damage to my knee joints.

I did not think much about the damage I continue to inflict on my knees until the year 2000.

1st Surgery

In early 2000 I noticed a swelling on my right knee and was unable to jog and had difficulty cycling. I visited the polyclinic to get a referral to the Singapore General Hospital. In February I had a right **knee scope** Surgery done. It was a minor surgery with three “key holes”. It was supposed to flush the worn-out substances from the knee to reduce the swelling and improve the blood circulation there. After a week of medical leave I was able to return to work. I was however, still unable to jog or cycle to work as the pain persisted despite the surgery and the prescribed physiotherapy exercises.

2nd Surgery

In 2006 Sept I had another **High Tibial Osteotomy** surgery done, to avoid a knee replacement surgery on the right knee. (In this procedure a pie-shaped piece of bone below my knee was cut out and deliberately fractured so that the bone will re-set into position in a vertical line with my hip joint and ankle.) I was hospitalised for 11 days and discharged with a cast from my toes to my upper right knee. I was on crutches for 4 months and was able to go back to work only after seven months. In retrospect, I am surprised that I mentally survived these seven months. It was very painful for the first four months. I had a lot difficulties bathing and even using the toilet. In addition, I

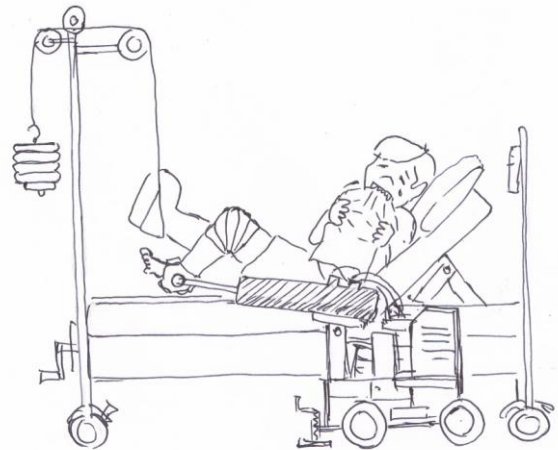
had a hard time weaning off the crutches as I grew too dependent on them. The surgery also affected a nerve on my right foot resulting with a persistent pain while walking and this took three years to subside. However, with much perseverance and regular physiotherapy exercises I recovered well enough and was happy to be able to go back to work.

3rd Surgery

After the 2nd surgery the swelling subsided but the pain persisted. In 2007 October, I was advised by my surgeon to go for **Growth Factor** surgery. Hoping to escape from the pain I agree to a third surgery which was non-invasive. This surgery is known as the “growth factor” as it involved direct injections into the cartilage of both knees using my own white blood cells (harvested by centrifuging my own blood and only collecting the white blood cells) to enhance the growth of the cartilage. This surgery did initially provide some relief, - for about seven months. Then the pain and swellings return, and again grew to become persistent and unbearable.

4th Surgery

In 2009 October I had to be hospitalised for right **Knee Replacement** as the three earlier procedures did not solve the problems. This surgery took about three and a half hours and I was drowsy, weak, and in pain for the first few days. On the next day I was made to exercise with a hydraulic cylinder jack attached behind the knee to flex the right leg to 90 degrees movement for 30 minutes a day for four days. This is to prevent the leg muscles from degeneration from disuse. I was also



given three dose of morphine to reduce the pain which resulted in loss of appetite for a month. Next, I had to strengthen the knee muscle with the assistance of the physiotherapy for three months. I was discharged from hospital on the 4th day, was able to walk after a month without the clutch and this round was on hospitalisation leave for about 3 months.

I understand the main causes for the pain and swelling is as follows.

- a. from birth both my legs were bowed (bend) inward slightly and
- b. being bow-legged, intensive jogging and cycling imposed excessive stresses, and damaged the cartilage to both knees.
- c. For not using a good pair of jogging shoes - I usually ran barefooted.

I learned one lesson from all these years of suffering and agony, of going through four surgeries, the trepidations of long recoveries from surgery, the huge financial costs, and the months of medical leave could all have been avoided. All I need was some awareness and education of the physical limitations of my body.

During my childhood, in school, and even during my national service there weren't any awareness or attempts at information or education of such injuries. The institutions were only concern about results and performance – they only measure - time.

Through this excruciatingly painful experience, I learnt that young people with bowed legs should not take up endurance sports involving their lower limbs. Those who ran long distances with bow legs will later suffer as their body weight on their misaligned hip-femur structure put heavy stresses on their knees joints. This will irretrievably damage their knees and leads to pain and walking difficulties. Few people are aware of this.

What does all these mean to me?

To be hospitalised several times for a healthy sports-loving person like me, is something that cannot be imaged. Why me? I have been mindful about my health all my life. After reflection I now accept that each person's life has to take its own special journey. I have to accept my present reality. Damage has been done to my knees. I have to move on from here to a new phase in my life.

I have to thank God, appreciate that I am still able to walk, and accept the great strange wonders that God had planned for me. I have learnt that the vine that doesn't produce good fruit got a message from the caretaker of the vineyard. The Vineyard-caretaker who knows how to prune and when to fertilise, etc, asked the owner (master) for a year – for him to nurture the vine so that it will produce good grapes. He pleaded with the master for the need to be patient to give him time to prune and to produce a good harvest of vines.

Yes, likewise the suffering, the endurance, the hope of recovery gave a new dimension to my life. As in the parable the caretaker had to educate the owner to be patient. I thank God for giving me the patience and hope, and for watching over me, through this difficult journey - to walk again.

I also believe that our body is the temple of God and should not be abused by excessive exercises, or else we may inflict injury to our physical body, which was never designed for such purposes. So, we need to give regard to, and understanding for, our own physical body to continue His work.

.....shared by: Francis Mane

Reflections:

Examine our worst eating/drinking habits.

Do we eat, drink and exercise in moderation and have adequate rest in order to keep ourselves healthy?

Do we have adequate rest and recreation or do we work too hard and keep long hours?

Why do we need and want "health" for?

