

Surgery offers more to be thankful for

Mark Pavilons

I had hoped to leave this world as I ca



me into it - with all my parts.

Alas, it was not to be.

I unwillingly parted with my right thyroid Oct. 9. Still waiting for test results to see if it's benign or malignant, and if necessary, the rest will get yanked in the name of preventive medicine.

The bonus is, if the entire gland has to go, modern medications can keep the body in check, but I'll have to be on pills for the rest of my life.

While I don't have any stats on the prevalence of thyroidectomies in Canada, from what I saw during preliminary tests, pre-op consults and day surgery, it seems it's more commonplace than I would have imagined.

And during the week since my surgery, I heard from several who knew a close friend or family member who had it done.

From what I did read, total thyroidectomies are recommended to treat many thyroid conditions.

Beyond malignancies, thyroidectomy is also a viable option for patients with symptomatic thyroid masses or goiters.

Total thyroidectomy is safe and is associated with a low incidence of disabilities.

The thyroid gland has been described throughout history but was first so named by the Romans. Thyroid masses were mentioned in literature throughout the 12th and 13 centuries. In 1170, Robert Frugardi described the removal of a goiter. Thyroid surgery was undertaken well before thyroid gland physiology was understood.

What surprises me is that this procedure, like tonsillectomies and the non-chalant removal of adenoids, gall bladders, appendixes, etc., is a strange occurrence. Modern medicine, it seems, favours organ removal and considers it a first line of attack and not a last resort. Why is that? Is it easier, less costly than long-term treatments, helps boost successful, surgical stats, and offers surgeons a tidy remuneration?

Don't get me wrong, I'm glad we've advanced to this stage where we can cure many diseases with a relatively simple procedure. Sure beats bloodletting, leeches or drilling holes in a person's head. I have heard, though, that leeches are making a bit of a comeback!

I'm also lucky that my surgeon ? a specialist I visited on a totally unrelated matter ? spotted the swollen thyroid and acted promptly.

He was, through my ordeal, rather pragmatic and straightforward ? removal is the simplest approach and even if it's the ?big c? it can be dealt with directly.

I never really considered the worst case scenario, I've been much too busy. My family relies on me and I owe it to them to carry on, no ifs, ands or buts. Plan B isn't on the table.

Maybe such hurdles and challenges are tests in the ongoing classroom of life.

I already knew what's important. I have no regrets. My journey has taken me here, whether it's to great new heights or an operating room at Mackenzie Health. My wife was there waiting for me, just as I knew she would be.

I had the easy part ? I slept through the whole thing. My fate was in the skilled hands of my surgeon Dr. Solomon, his cauterizing scalpel, the support team and recovery room nursing staff. And if The Almighty had a hand in things, great.

If all the income tax money I've spent and employer health tax contributions helped keep me around, then I have a renewed faith in our system.

At one point, most of us will get to experience our health care system first-hand. The entire segment of baby boomers is heading into the second half of their lives.

My journey ? everyone's journey ? continues. It's far from over. No, I can't see into the future, so I will have to meet the future head-on and deal with it. Maybe that's why physicians are so practical ? they see a problem, devise a solution and tackle it.

During all of this, I remained steadfast and unshaken. Of course, suffering and being taken in my prime doesn't appeal to me, but I'm no longer terrified by the prospects.

Maybe it's the love I feel around me, and the best wishes from friends and acquaintances. Maybe it's belief in the medical system.

Maybe it's belief in something higher.

This Thanksgiving was particularly enjoyable for me and mine.

Around the dinner table, we gave thanks for events and circumstances that have kept us together and allowed us to enjoy our homemade feast. We enjoyed a couple of day trips in the area to take in what little remains of the mild days on the calendar.

Just as we must move forward on our life's journey, there is always something to be thankful for.