

I've been thinking...



**Thankful for An MRI?
Thanksgiving 2011**

I've been thinking about magnetic resonance imaging, sleeping bags, allergies, and great hospitals.

Well, I went in for an MRI, and the diagnosis was not good: Claustrophobia. But I'm getting ahead myself.

While studying x-rays of my shoulder, my doc ordered an MRI. I told him we were nearing eight on the pain scale and pressed for the earliest appointment.

Seven o'clock the next morning, after being scanned for metal, a rad tech strapped me to the transport board and pushed a button. Moving into the magnetic abyss, I felt like dead man walking. Except, I couldn't walk. But I could talk. It took about two seconds to find my authoritative voice: "*I NEED OUT NOW.*" She got the hint, and I was pardoned.

I asked her not to tell anyone, throwing in HIPPA. She kindly assured me it happens all the time. Okay, I didn't pass. But, she says I didn't fail. We're calling it an incomplete.

She said something about rescheduling so we can get those shoulder pictures. I said, "What shoulder?" She mentioned the sedation option. I relented.

So, I determined to take my mulligan. The plan was to put me under while stepping up to the tee the following week.

While it felt like I left the building wearing a scarlet C, I experienced more shudders than shame. I couldn't shake the hemmed-in feeling. On the drive home, I entertained stopping by the dealership and buying a bigger Audi.

Truthfully, I was blindsided. I was looking forward to a horizontal half hour. Looking back, though, clues *were* available. As a kid at camp, I couldn't zip up a sleeping bag. Not if I was in it. Still can't.

While watching news of the Peruvian miners who had to Houdini their bodies into a narrow capsule to be lifted to light and life, I recall thinking I'd probably stay in the hole. Just thinking about it begs for Clonazepam.

I surmised that either Rumsfeld and Cheney aren't claustrophobic or they'd never had a closed MRI, else they would not have settled for water boarding.

Before I got home, I flashed back on how up to her last April 14, my mother reminded me that on that day in 1948 I refused to deliver. My head came out, but my shoulders (yes, my shoulders) wouldn't. They were too broad to negotiate the passage. Not to minimize mom's trauma, but apparently I didn't appreciate the delivery myself. I've got forceps marks on my head to prove it.

Finally, I remembered Jesus' words, "Unless a man is born again, he cannot enter the kingdom of heaven," and the puzzled listener who rhetorically asked, "Can a man enter a second time into his mother's womb and be born again?" Good thing Jesus was talking metaphorically because I don't know if there'd be any hope for me if one had to be born again physically.

Perhaps that's what I was feeling at the entrance to the MRI. Been there. Done that. Not interested.

Did I say I asked to have "MRI" added to the "allergies" field in my EHR?

I got my second chance last week. They put me under before strapping me down. No problem. However, as the Capital One commercial suggests, it pays to ask, What's in your wallet? The magnetic strips on all five credit cards in my jeans got fried.

Today, we looked at the digital images. My left rotator cuff, though photogenic, is torn. Surgery? Hmm. Decisions.

On this Thanksgiving eve, I'm grateful for sedation and MRIs—In that order.

I'm thankful for Virginia Mason Hospital and Medical Center (VM), my health-care provider, whose groundbreaking efforts have applied Toyota's lean principles to increase quality and reduce the cost of healthcare. From top to bottom, VM lives up to its mantra: Team Medicine.¹ All this, when most people in our world will never be touched by a qualified physician or treated in a hospital that could pass a Joint Commission audit.

I'm also thinking about the wide swath of nurses, pharmacists, physicians, informaticists, technology developers, healthcare writers, and journalists (among others) who drop by my column now and again while helping hospitals move from good to great. As one of your many beneficiaries, this Thursday I'll be giving thanks for you.

Happy holidays,

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¹ Last month VM rolled out bar-code-enabled medication administration (BCMA). While entering the game after a couple thousand other U.S. hospitals, I predict VM will soon be with the front of the pack helping all of us learn how to do it even better because they are applying Toyota lean principles along their bar-code path. Read an inspiring [conversation](#) about the VM team philosophy and processes by Gary Kaplan, CEO, in which I had the honor of participating.