

Good News From A Former Syringomyelia Patient

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My story started horrible, but became a success. I will not sugar coat anything, because although you may be hearing only negative things, it is important for you to know the truth.

At the age of sixteen, I had a summer job babysitting the children of my mother's friend. Now 23 years old, I still remember that hot July day. I had miserable allergies. I remember sneezing and feeling a horribly sharp pain in the left side of my neck. I brushed it off as a strange occurrence (like temporary pains and ringing in your ears).

I became concerned when it happened every time I sneezed or coughed, but I still did nothing about it. I finally decided to go to the doctor when I sneezed and the pain shot from my shoulder to the back of my eye and was so painful it brought my knees to the ground, and tears to my eyes.

My pediatrician thought I was faking, and I could tell by his body language. However, he referred me to a neurologist to be on the safe side. The neurologist caught a glimpse of the syrinx in a CT Scan, which I'm told is not common. He referred me to a neurosurgeon after my MRI confirmed I had Syringomyelia, a word my pediatrician had never heard.

My neurosurgeon comforted me by explaining that although if gone untreated it can cause many problems, Syringomyelia can be treated very successfully. But, my family and I were still scared.

I will not lie. My first surgery was painful, as was the second. But, it is now eight years later, and my problems have gone away. After my first surgery, I had experienced pain in my legs, making it difficult to walk. But, I can walk as easily as any normal person can. When allergy season comes along, I no longer have excruciating pain.

I still have minor nerve damage. The skin on the left side of my neck and face is sensitive, but it is something I do not even notice unless I talk about it. I cannot feel sensations such as sharp pain, coldness, or heat on the left side of my neck, face and a small portion of my lower back. But, that is something I did not even know until my neurosurgeon pointed it out to me. You would be surprised how something like that can never be noticed. I mean, how often does anything happen where you would experience a cold, hot or sharp sensation on your neck?

I lead a normal life. No one would ever know I had a serious neurological disorder unless I told them (which makes an interesting conversation since almost no one has heard of Syringomyelia). I work a full-time job and am now married. The only inconvenience I have as a result of Syringomyelia is an occasional MRI. But, that is a preference. My neurosurgeon does not feel it to be necessary, I just do it every three years or so just to make my family feel comfortable.

Do not worry. Syringomyelia can be scary and intimidating, but it is something that people can overcome. I am very grateful on how my disorder came out, and I think my experiences taught me about life. Although I experienced much pain initially, I would not change anything that has happened in the past eight years.

I wish you the best,

Patrick Burdette,
FORMER Syringomyelia Patient