

Operation without general anaesthetic.

By Diane Watkins

The surgeon confirmed, after viewing the scans, that I would need surgery on my troublesome shoulder!

‘I operate on Thursdays, so when would you like it done?’ he said.

The reality of the situation was hitting me, I needed to think.

‘I don’t want to take much time off work so at the start of the Easter holiday would be good, 29th March? Oh! By the way I don’t want to have a general anaesthetic, can you do it with local?’ The surgeon looked horrified.

‘I never do shoulders with local there are just too many nerve beds and there is the possibility that it will still be painful,’ he looked serious and unimpressed.

‘Well I’ve made up my mind I would like you to do it with local and I would like my Hypnotherapist to be present to help with relaxation and pain relief.’

‘Is there a reason why you don’t want a general?’

‘Yes. The last time I had general anaesthetic I was physically sick for three days and felt depressed for three months. I want to concentrate on healing my shoulder not to waste vital time whilst my immune system deals with the harmful effects of the cocktail of drugs pumped into me under general anaesthetic.’

The surgeon reluctantly agreed that it was my choice, and that the anaesthesiologist would simply administer a local pain block. I now needed to enlist the help of Gordon Gatiss, hypno/psychotherapist, confidante and very good friend.

‘Gordon, will you help me prepare for this op? You’re not squeamish are you because I would like you to be present for the operation?’

‘Not at all, it would be my pleasure.’

Over the next few weeks I visited Gordon and he took me through relaxation and visualisation exercises. He relaxed me and then talked me through each stage of the operation. After the initial session with Gordon, we discussed any changes that I wanted to make, so that the final visualisation was pinpoint accurate. During the sessions we identified the areas which caused me to feel anxious and he cleverly dispelled these fears until I could visualise the whole thing in a relaxed and calm manner.

The day of my final session before the operation, waves of anxiety had been hitting me throughout the day and I didn’t seem to be able to get rid of them. I was pleased I was due to see Gordon as I knew he would sort me out. I arrived at Gordon’s, he met me with his usual cheery ‘Hello, you!’ and a hug.

‘How are you then, excited about Thursday? I know I am’ he said.

I hesitated for a moment, got to be honest, no point trying to hide stuff from Gordon!

‘I’m a bit anxious today, if I’m honest’.

He started probing in his usual sensitive manner.

‘Try and identify what it is that is making you anxious’.

After some more searching questions I started to feel upset and my eyes filled up.
‘What have I touched on?’ queried Gordon. ‘Have you major concerns about the op?’

‘No. Not at all, I feel confident and positive.’

‘What is it then?’

‘It is people around me and their reservations about what I’m doing. My daughter would prefer me not to have it done at all; she has a phobia about hospitals and doesn’t want me to go near one. Nick (my husband) keeps saying are you sure you don’t want a general anaesthetic and that they can always knock me out if the pain gets too bad. I don’t even want to consider that!’ I dab my eyes.

‘You are letting others affect you. They are transferring their worries and anxieties onto you and you are picking up on them! Remember they are just thoughts and we know they are not real. You know what to do with them - don’t you? Use the process I taught you to move your negative thoughts ... remember The SCREWEDUP Letters?’

‘It’s just that I’ve got so much to do before Thursday its making me feel stressed, and I just want to concentrate on the operation without distraction.’

Gordon looked bemused. ‘Why do you need to be thinking about Thursday? We’ve got the visualisation sorted. Whatever happened to ‘Living in the Now’?’

Bingo! He hit the nail on the head. What was I doing? How and when did I allow my thoughts and emotions to run riot through my body, delivering their harmful peptides to all my cells? I immediately relaxed as I had the answer to all my questions and anxieties.

‘So, what would you like to do this session – visualisation again?’

‘No, I’m happy with the visualisation and I meditate on it each day.’

‘Let’s do some gentle relaxation. Get you in a really good frame of mind’ he smiled.

‘Sounds good to me.’ The session went well and I left feeling in control, happy and relaxed.

‘See you Thursday! I wonder if the surgeon will let me have a go.’ Gordon joked as I left.

Thursday 29th March –Day of Operation.

I woke up early from a deep sleep I slept well but damn! I have woken with a headache, just what I don’t need. Did I attract it through negative thoughts?

I am also aware that I am dehydrated as I was advised not to eat and drink. I decide to drink some water anyway, but not enough. Nick drove me nervously to the hospital, we were both quiet. We arrived and I felt decidedly unwell, but I banished all negative thoughts and checked in.

‘You can go now Nick, I’ll text you when I’m out of theatre.’

A porter took me to my room, just like in my visualisation. Various nurses come and go, I fill in numerous forms. Gordon texts to say ‘be calm’ and that he will be with me shortly. I feel better already! The Anaesthesiologist popped in to explain his role. I grilled him as to what he intended to do and emphasised that I merely wanted local pain block in the essential area. He agreed and was very pleasant and reassuring. The surgeon was my next visitor he ran through the procedures and I had to sign the consent form to confirm that I merely wanted local pain relief and that I wanted my Hypnotherapist to be present. He left saying I was second and he should be ready for me by 10 am.

There was aloud knocking at the door!

‘I hope you’re ready girl!’ It was Gordon; he had battled through the rush hour traffic like a Knight in shining armour! I was more than relieved to see him. We sat and chatted and I had to admit that I wasn’t feeling too good because of my headache. He suggested that I need to drink, which I knew was correct but I was nervous. The nurse came in to take my blood pressure and we asked if I could have a drink as I was not having a general. She says no!

It is wrong that patients go into operations dehydrated because it makes the drugs so much more concentrated in the system. I suppose the answer would be to put them on a drip. Anyway Gordon helps me to relax and I start to feel a bit better. The next knock is the porter; he wants me to get on a trolley down to theatre.

‘Its all right I’ll walk’

I walk down the corridor with Gordon by my side. We get to the entrance to the prep room.
‘Sorry sir you can’t go any further the porter says to Gordon.’

‘Its Ok he’s coming in with me, Gordon is my Hypnotherapist, I’m not having a general anaesthetic.’

‘Brave lady!’ The porter retorts.

We enter the prep room; the anaesthesiologist is waiting and greets us cheerily. I introduce him to Gordon and they chat. The nurse suggests that Gordon needs to get changed so he leaves. The anaesthesiologist goes through once again the procedure and Gordon returns looking like he’s auditioning for a part in ‘Scubs’! He fiddles with the face mask until he breaks it and they have to find him another! It’s all very informal and amusing. I ask if they will put on some gentle music that Gordon has brought to help relax me. The surgeon appears and I introduce him to Gordon.

‘How powerful is this music? I hope it won’t send us all to sleep.’ The surgeon jokes.

‘I’m going to give you a pain block in between these muscles called the Scalenes. You will feel your arm start to move in spasms then you should feel pins and needles creeping up through your fingers and thumb.’

This was it no turning back. Gordon requested that he be able to see my heart rate and blood pressure throughout. I was wheeled into the operating theatre. The surgeon asked if I would like to watch the operation on the screen. I said I would. He replied he would try to arrange it but it was more important that he was able to see clearly.

‘We need you on your side. You will be held securely by two braces and we will get you enough pillows to make sure you are comfy.’

‘Heart rate is 65 bpm Di,’ calls Gordon’

‘OK we have to cover you with these clothes and tape them in place.’

There was a lot of activity and noise, I felt the adrenalin shoot through my body!

‘Bring your heart rate down, Di’ called Gordon ‘Stay in control.’

I took some deep breaths and felt my whole body relax. Gordon then appeared just by my head, everyone was sorted out and in position, and the surgeon announced that he was ready to begin.

‘Stay relaxed Di. Relax down to level 10.’ I had done this numerous times and knew exactly what to do.

‘You will feel some pressure,’ announced the surgeon.

He wasn't wrong I knew that this was the first incision, probably the fibre optic going in. In addition to the pressure I felt a dull ache.

'Bring your heart rate down Di.' Gordon whispered assuringly ... it is 92 bpm.'

I felt my legs begin to shake as adrenalin shot through my body.

'Relax Di, take control and bring your heart rate down.' His voice drifted through my panic. I took deep breaths and breathed through the discomfort. I felt my legs relax and the relaxation went through my body. I was aware of the soothing music. Gordon instructed me to concentrate on the music. He was talking gently, reassuring me but I don't remember what he said.

'Do you want to watch Di?' Gordon asks. I decline I want to stay in control and am happy where I am.

'It's going to get a little noisy in here now.' The surgeon's words punctuated my pleasant trance. Adrenalin shot once more through my body, I began to shake again.

'Take control Di, take control ... your heart rate has gone over 100 bpm.' Gordon whispered.

I tried hard but the pulling, the pressure and the sawing noises kept pulling me out of my deep relaxation.

'Bring your heart rate down Di, take control.' Gordon uttered. 'Is there somewhere you would like to go Di ... a forest or a desert Island perhaps?'

This was familiar, I have listened frequently to Gordon's meditation CDs where he transports you to a safe haven. It's so powerful.

'Yes!' I murmur. 'Take me to a desert Island.'

Gordon starts to work his magic and soon I am floating in the sky bumping into fluffy white clouds. He deposits me on my paradise island and I drift down and remain there calm, happy, relaxed and in complete control. The events going on around me and procedures happening to me are insignificant. I have reached a new level of relaxation and am now detached from it all. Eventually I become aware of my surroundings again; I can hear Gordon having a good old chat to the surgeon.

'I think it's amazing, but I suppose you get used to it week in week out.' Gordon enquires.

'Not really!' Retorts the surgeon enthusiastically, 'Its never dull, a different movie every time.'

I am totally relaxed and chuckle to myself, Gordon is so into it I wonder if he's forgotten about me! But he's watching the monitors keenly and can see I am in complete control.

'OK. I'm just about done now' announced the surgeon.

There was a flurry of activity, as the sheets were peeled back.

'Now comes the most painful part of all,' said the surgeon, 'pulling the sticky tape off your skin,' he joked. 'Brilliant, you were wonderful. How do you feel?'

'I feel great.'

I was gently wheeled into recovery where the nurse Maria declared that I was the second patient she had looked after who had undergone an operation with hypnosis. By coincidence she had looked after Gordon after he underwent his hernia operation without any pain relief or anaesthetic ... he did it himself ... foolish boy.

Gordon appeared after changing out of his scrubs, and we chatted to the nurses who were all intrigued and amazed by the hypnosis.

‘I think you’re ready to go back to your room now,’ announced Maria.

‘I’ll say goodbye Di, will speak to you later,’ and Gordon left.

I returned to my room at PM, I felt on a high, but then my headache returned. I had completely forgotten about it. I knew I must drink. I spent the afternoon meditating and focusing on healing my shoulder. I drifted in and out of deep relaxation. Nurses seemed to be popping in frequently to take my blood pressure, heart rate and temperature.

‘Your blood pressure and heart rate are quite low.’ The nurse declared a little concerned. She checked my dressings to see if there was undue blood loss, but all was fine.

‘That’s probably because I’m meditating; it tends to slow the body down.’

She didn’t look convinced.

‘Don’t get out of bed on your own, call for help,’

By PM I felt absolutely great, Nick arrived and the orderly brought me my supper. I enjoyed a bowl of soup a roll and some fruit salad. I spent a pleasant night meditating and focusing on healing. I felt relaxed and extremely proud of what I had achieved knowing that my rate of recovery would be excellent. The next day, my daughter picked me up from the hospital and was amazed at how well I appeared.

I spent the rest of Friday and Saturday pottering about making sure I did my exercises And even more importantly my meditations. On Sunday morning I felt well enough to do a light session in the gym. My shoulder was aching of course and I had to take it easy but otherwise I felt fantastic. This was a mere 72 hours after my operation. It will of course take time for my shoulder to heal fully but the rate at which it is progressing is amazing.

The experience has been amazing and I would encourage more people to think about turning their backs on general anaesthetic. I allowed the surgeon to operate on my body I was fully aware of what was going on. There were times when I felt discomfort but my body responded to this and I was able to rise above this. I cannot stress enough how this process had affected my rate of healing. Without hesitation I would encourage everyone to read **The SCREWEDUP Letters: Your Past Does Not Equal Your Future ...** it helped change my life and it really works.

Diane Watkins (Cheadle in Cheshire)