

The NHS does a wonderful job day in, day out but occasionally, for those entering the system, it can appear to move very slowly and when anxiety and fear of serious illness is weighing on your mind, sometimes it pays to take...



THE PRIVATE OPTION



When a fit and healthy middle-aged woman started getting severe stomach and acid reflux, she immediately went to her GP. Two months of antacids followed with no easing of symptoms and the situation was seriously impacting on her home life and her job.

Given that bowel cancer is the second biggest killer in the UK with one person diagnosed every eighteen minutes, naturally she was frightened that the pain could be the result of something more sinister. We discussed her contrasting experience with the NHS and with Nucleus, Wales's private centre of excellence for gastroenterology.



Please tell us how this all began?

I started getting acid reflux several months ago and put it down to stress from work and my diet and lifestyle. I went to my local GP who prescribed antacids which I took for two months with little or no effect. My GP upped my dose and gave me another month's supply. Again these proved ineffective. Then the excruciating stomach pains began which got progressively worse.

How did you feel at this point?

I was really quite frightened! There's a history of cancer in my family so that was always at the back of my mind.

What happened then?

The pain got so bad that I was rushed into hospital by ambulance. A number of tests were carried out but I was sent home with laxatives after being told I had constipation. The pain didn't ease and I started to get really concerned. After reading about Nucleus Healthcare, I gave them a call and made an appointment to see Dr. Srivastava. He immediately put me at ease, examined my stomach and asked about the pain. He suggested I have a colonoscopy and endoscopy to find out what was going on.

I enquired about the price and, not being exactly awash with cash, came away wondering whether to proceed. Dr Srivastava said they could carry out the procedure the following Monday.

And then?

Events sort of snowballed. Another hospital visit followed as I was in debilitating pain. I was admitted, and another series of tests carried out. Bloods, urine, stomach x-ray and observation. I was admitted to a short stay surgical ward which had five other women of differing ages and various medical conditions.

I was told that I would need an endoscopy and colonoscopy but would have to be sent home and put on a waiting list which was currently standing at three to six months. I couldn't imagine waiting that long as I was in great pain and was concerned about my family and my job. The pain increased whilst on the ward and I was then moved to another ward with three elderly and very poorly women and was informed that if I wanted the first procedure, I'd have to wait it out on the ward. There I stayed, in great discomfort, for five days.



During that time parts of the ward had to be closed due to a severe Norovirus infection and I was worried that I would catch it. On the fifth day, as one of the ladies on my ward came down with the virus, I was told that theatre could fit me in for my endoscopy. I stressed to the consultant that I was fearful as I have a strong gagging reflex and he assured me that I would be anaesthetised and wouldn't feel a thing. When I got to theatre however, I was told that this wasn't the case.

What then followed was a horrendous procedure given my state of anxiety and I was deeply upset. I was then sent to another part of the ward where the infection had occurred but had now cleared. I was told that the endoscopy results were normal and I was discharged with more antacids, painkillers and a stronger laxative. I received a note to say that I had been put on the waiting list for the colonoscopy. When I enquired this had a waiting list of one to three months, even if the consultant were to mark it urgent.

And you were still none the wiser regarding your condition?

No. I decided that I needed answers sooner rather than later and felt that my only chance of getting them would be to go back to Nucleus. Once again, I saw Dr. Srivastava on the Tuesday and was booked in for both procedures the following Monday. I told him of my recent experience and he immediately put me at ease, saying that I would be given enough sedation to be conversant but that I wouldn't feel any pain during the procedures. He was very reassuring and I felt I could trust him.

I arrived at Nucleus on the Monday and was greeted by a friendly receptionist. I was shown to my immaculately clean private room with en-suite bathroom. My nurse went through the relevant documentation with me and I watched television for a while which took my mind off things. I was then called down to theatre. True to Dr. Srivastava's word, I didn't feel a thing and woke up to a lovely tray of tea, sandwiches and biscuits which was very well received.

What was the outcome?

Dr. Srivastava came to see me and told me that the procedures went well and that I was to come back a week later when he would have the results of the biopsies. However, in the meantime, he did stress that he had seen nothing that caused him immediate serious concern.

What happened then?

I must confess I was apprehensive. I just needed to understand what was happening to me. My appointment came and I was greeted by Dr. Srivastava for my consultation. He immediately let me know that nothing sinister had been found. He did, however, find a small hiatus hernia, gastro-oesophageal reflux, gastritis and an irritable and over-active bowel. He explained he had tested me for H. Pylori and other bacterial infections which had proved negative.

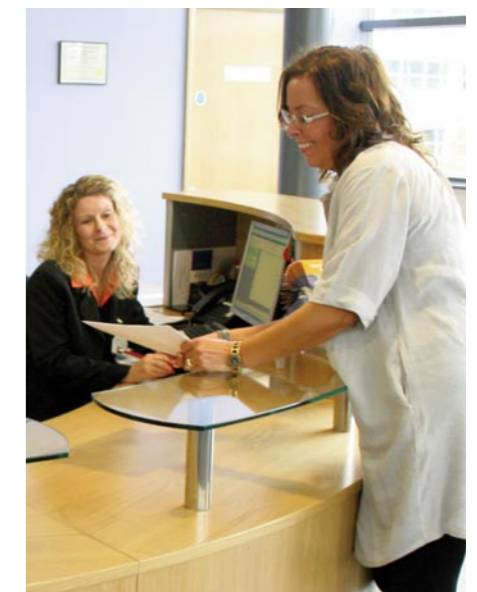
Dr. Srivastava then gave me a note for my doctor to prescribe me appropriate medication which would then, hopefully, ease the inflammation in the oesophagus and calm my bowel. I was to come back to see him in a month to see if the medication was working for me.

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How do you feel now?

Whilst I appreciate that not everyone can afford private healthcare, I must say that when faced with the prospect of being in considerable pain for several more months, not being able to work and look after my family, and run the risk of suffering from something far more serious which could have been treated if caught early, then private healthcare is worth its weight in gold. As for the NHS... I'm still waiting.

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