A Difficult Travel Experience

October 25, 2011 By Shawn Decker

A few weeks ago I came down with the local cold, claimed victory on it too soon on this blog only to have it return with a vengeance... well, last week I had to travel to Providence for a sexual health HIV/AIDS program with Gwenn at UMass Dartmouth. The cough kept me up the night before, but I felt well enough to travel nonetheless.

I figured it was two short flights to the hotel, then I could sleep for 4 hours before the talk. No problem, right?

At the airport in Charlottesville, as I was walking to the airplane, my ankle started to hurt like hell. I've had this recurring cartilage problem, and each new step hurt worse than the previous one. Something in my ankle had slid out of place, and the pain was excruciating. I told Gwenn I'd be fine, but I couldn't get to that seat on the airplane soon enough. As we took our seats, I smiled with relief.

"Can you smile again?" Gwenn asked. The concern in her voice made me realize it wasn't the joy on my face that she wanted to relive with a second showing on the dimple. I smiled again, and she said. "You're mouth is bleeding..." Two days before, I'd gone to the dentist for a routine cleaning, halfway through which I was asked, "Do you ever have problems with mouth bleeding?" "Uh, not normally... but I do have hemophilia." "Oh," the clinician said, apparently having overlooked the form I filled out which stated clearly that I have a bleeding disorder. As I sat in the airplane looking like I'd just gone on a date with Chris Brown, Gwenn wondered if we should tuck tail and live to speak another day.

I assured her I'd be fine as I dabbed a tissue at my gums.

At the airport in Philadelphia, I limped my way to the next gate, but by the time we got to Providence it was so bad that Gwenn and I commandeered a wheelchair. I swallowed my pride a bit, and probably a little bit of blood as well, and coasted through the airport to the rental car facility. After about a minute, I was walloping Gwenn's leg with my travel pillow, bellowing: "Faster!... Faster!" She thought it was funny the first five times I did it.

After a long nap, I felt much better. The mouth was fine, the ankle was decent enough to walk to the car... once I got to the school, Gwenn dropped me off at the Student Union, and I remained seated during the whole program. The tone of the discussion with the students of UMass was a bit more serious than usual, which tends to happen when I'm not feeling 100% healthwise. I think it's because it takes a lot more energy than people realize to be funny... to be on...

The most important thing is to engage people in a conversation about a topic that is difficult, which is sex. Yes, there were laughs, but I also teared up when talking about how preventable HIV is. It breaks

my heart that people are still needlessly being diagnosed with this because we don't properly educate them about sexual health.

After the program, we had a great dinner with Beth-Anne, the contact at the school who we met years ago when we first visited UMass Dartmouth. As we ate, laughed, and shared stories of working with and speaking to college students, I felt so proud that I didn't get off that plane in Charlottesville and crawl back in bed. I knew I'd be fine, I knew that my wounds were all superficial and could be overcome. I knew with 36 hours I'd be back home.

And when I did get back in bed I slept more soundly than I had in a week.

Positively Yours,
Shawn

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