

My Hip Blog

I am 46 years old, a cardiac surgery nurse and live in Orlando, Florida. I also work privately as a rounding nurse for a group of 6 cardiac surgeons seeing about 30 patients per day. I've been fighting my HMO insurance company since February for coverage of total hip resurfacing and got the final notice in October stating that I've lost 2 appeals and that the decision is final. So I'm forced to have surgery in India...the only option I can afford. I can't wait to get my life back. My 10 year old son can't wait either. I'm looking forward to experiencing the rich culture of India and to meet Dr. Bose and his team.

Some may wondering why I would travel all the way to India for this complex surgery. Well finances have something to do with it, as does surgical expertise. It would cost me around \$40,000. out of pocket to have the surgery in the US and \$6,500. for surgery at a JCAHO accredited hospital in Chennai, India with one of the world leaders in this procedure.

10/13/06

Well, it feels a bit surreal but I'm off to the airport shortly for my trip to India. My 18 year old daughter, Jessica is accompanying me. My surgery is scheduled for 10/18 with Dr. Bose, in Chennai. It's hard to believe that I'm really and finally getting this surgery.



We flew from
Orlando to Newark
to Paris to Mumbai
(Bombay) to
Chennai, India.

10/14/06

We prepared for tipping by bringing plenty of "ones" in USD, especially the wheelchair porters who got you to the front of every customs and security lines. There were so many check points to deal with. We were checked 3 times in NJ. Once in the main terminal, then at the start of the Air India terminal then again at the Air India gate, then in Mumbai then again in Chennai. You've actually got armed military guards doing the checks in India, not hired security guards.

As for flight....we took Air India and stopped in Paris (didn't get off the plane) to refuel and to "clean" the craft. It really did help to break the flight up. I called the airlines to see if I can upgrade my "economy class" ticket business class at least for the way home but it was either too expensive or not available. It was rough with a bad hip even though I got up and walked frequently (mostly out of boredom) I was not looking forward to doing it on the way back after surgery. Trust me, the class system is alive and well in airline industry! You can't pick your seats until you check in so by the time we got to NJ to get on Air India from Continental, 300 other people before us got the primo bulk head seats, and other choice seats. My daughter and I were lucky to get seats next to each other. We were not prepared for such a grueling trip. I had no idea it would be so tedious, but then again I have never liked flying. No power ports for the laptop so my battery was good for 3 short hours. We were also not prepared for the amount of food served to us. Air India's fare was, of course, Indian, with the only choice being vegetarian or meat, we think mutton. We met a nice guy on the flight out of NJ and he stayed with us all the way to Chennai where he lived. He is an engineering student in Texas now and was returning home for a visit. Funny thing... his uncle is an orthopedic surgeon in Chennai and knows Dr. Bose. He stayed with us and helped us find our way through Mumbai to our next flight since we had to change planes.

The Chennai airport was something else as well. We were 3 hours late as we waited on the tarmac in Mumbai waiting for transferring passengers whose flight was late. We made it to baggage claim with the help of a porter who spoke very little English. He transported me in an old vintage wheelchair. All I had was a 5 US dollar bill so I tipped him with it. He must have thought he hit the jackpot as that is a lot of money in India. I had to literally dismiss him at baggage claim because I think he felt obligated to stay. I nearly fainted when I say that all of our bags actually made it all the way from NJ to Chennai! We were met by an Apollo driver holding a placard with my name on it. Driving to the hotel was nothing short of death defying with auto-rickshaws, taxi's, motorbikes, trucks and odd cars weaving in and out like crazy....beeping the horns and everyone driving with bright lights on. I tipped him well, providing he slow down. He complied. Imagine traveling all this way to get into a wreck or to run someone over!!



Chennai Airport (5 am Chennai Time)



Chennai

10/14-16/06

We stayed at the Raintree hotel for the 2 days before hospital check-in. It is posh and breakfast buffet is free. They have 3 restaurants, and 2 bars here. The Sunday Indian buffet is to die for I'm glad we happened to be here for that. We walked to the Apollo pharmacy down the block for Tylenol and it was very weird; just drugs, and also physician and dentist on duty. They only took rupees and only had 5 on me so they sold me 5 tablets for approx. 11 cents USD. Watch out for the "street people" begging and auto-rickshaw drivers who are looking to take you places at inflated prices. Our best bet was to ask the hotel for a driver/ tour guide that would be more reasonable and safer. We are the minority here. I found a printable USD to Rupee and Rupee to USD conversion chart on-line so I printed it and keep it with me so we could have some sort of clue.



Jessica and Me at the Raintree Hotel



View of Chennai from the Raintree



Jess's new blouse and our nice door man



Yes, I worked out the day before checking into the hospital.

Once we were in Chennai we immediately tried to adjust to the time difference. We did pretty good. Sleeping did not come easy nor was it in any way adequate during our 24 hour trip so picking a time to sleep here wasn't so bad. I ended up sleeping whenever I was tired, Jess slept all the time, it seemed. We were very comfortable at this hotel. We ate at one of the restaurants, Chinese. It was very, nice.



Jess on the computer, breakfast buffet, rooftop pool and rupees at the Raintree.



Downtown Chennai, friend Shanti in an auto-rickshaw.

We went shopping 2 days before my hospital check in day. It was a mistake but we were glad to have experienced it. It was a bad time to go shopping. It was the time of Dewali, or festival of lights. It's a national holiday with fireworks and gift giving and shopping. The city was PACKED with people. It was fortunate that I had a friend's sister, Shanti (a local), to lead us through the mess. The beggars were pitiful and my heart broke for them. I tried to ignore them but I ended up giving a woman with 2 kids some rupees (as she tried to pickpocket me). The vendors were relentless and Shanti keep shooing them away. We took a death-defying ride on an auto-rickshaw which I still haven't recovered from. We just bought some inexpensive costume jewelry and 2 outfits for Jessica. We topped off the evening with room service because we wanted to enjoy the solitude away from the crowds!! Its shower, pack and bed for me. I leave at 0900, Chennai time tomorrow morning.

10/17/06 Check-In Day at Apollo



Picked up at the Raintree by Apollo Driver. Check-in process begins...

Met Dr. Biswejit, Dr. Bose's assistant surgeon who examined me. He asked me which hip was the surgical one and then we wrote OK on my thigh with a surgical marking pen. I met Shiney, my first nurse and Jithu, international patient coordinator. Next was paperwork, consent and paid my "deposit", which was actually PREPAYING. I was given a name band, paperwork, consent. Vital signs, blood work, Cardiac Echo and EKG, both normal. Had a visit from the cardiologist who deemed me cleared for surgery (cardiac wise). Discussed post-op accommodations and reservations with Jithu and we made last minute changes.

Our hospital room...nice, with a couch that converts to a full bed, fridge, microwave, and of course Internet!! We are in the International Patient Wing of the Apollo cardiac hospital not the one that Dr. Bose's patients are usually in due to the construction to the new ortho wing. That hospital is right next door. I brought my own hospital scrubs!



Our Room and Our View!!

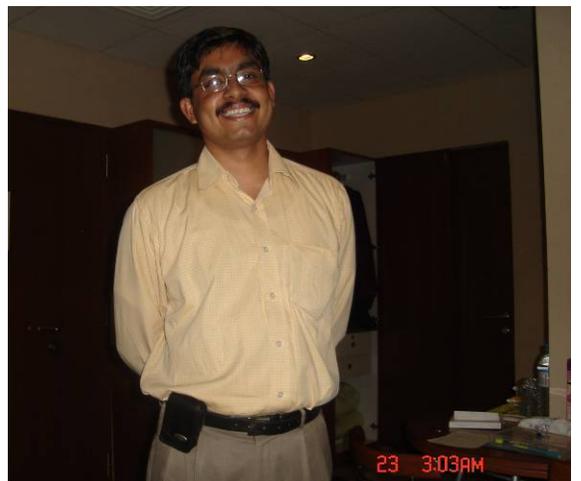
They immediately started feeding us. I swear I've eaten more since I've been here than I have in a month!!! Between the air food, the buffets at Raintree, and then at the hospital I don't think we've stopped eating. There were just so many new tastes, textures, and aromas that we had to have a little of everything to taste!! All that was left is CT scan (cardiac, by my request) and to meet Dr. Bose in person.

After I changed in to patient garb I was whisked away in an ambulance for my 64-Slice CT Angiogram. I didn't like the patient "sari" so I put on hospital scrubs that I brought. Jess stayed behind and I was all alone. Going by ambulance to another facility was weird. Everyone stared at me as some sort of oddity... a "wealthy" American coming to a poor country for medical care. Everyone stared. As I was waiting for my test the doctor came and said that my heart rate was too high and they started to give me a beta blocker and a valium. I refused the valium and took the beta blocker. They didn't even ask me...they just handed me 2 pills and said take these. I had to ask what they were giving me and why. Apparently your heart rate cannot be above 60 bpm so that the scan is accurate. The test itself took only a short time. I was glad to be back in my hospital room with Jess. While I was gone, Mahadeva Krishnan stopped by to see me and I missed him. He is scheduled with Dr. Bose next week. He is a Chennai resident and fellow surfacehippy.

Audrey will be checking into this hospital tomorrow. Her surgery is the day after mine. She and her husband Bob are coming from Nova Scotia and we met on surfacehippy.

10/17/06 PM UPDATE

OK, finally I met with Dr. Bose! He is as nice and as humble as everyone said he was! He totally put me at ease and I thoroughly enjoyed chatting with him. He showed me a real BHR up close and personal. It was heavy as I joked that I was trying to lose weight not gain!



Dr. Bose, a BHR, and Dr. Biswejet

10/18/06 SURGERY DAY

Pre-Op

I was instructed to shower with Betadine and be prepared for a Betadine site prep in the morning. I brought a chlorhexidine scrub that we use on our heart patients to scrub with. The anesthesiologist visited me and ordered 5 mg valium so I took it. Who am I to argue with him? So nite, nite, surgery at 0600. I was awoken at 0500 and took another shower with the surgical scrub. The sisters braided my hair and scrubbed my hip with Betadine solution and covered it with sterile purple towels. They put on a thigh-high TED hose on my opposite leg. Off I go!!! See ya'll on the other side....



The sisters did my pre-op prep and braided my hair. My IV lock, and my “sisters”.

Post-Op

I woke up in recovery having a substantial amount of pain. I was drifting in and out of sleep and recall that I was demanding pain medication and what that it wasn't enough. I next demanded to see my anesthesiologist. The next thing I remember was being back in my room where my daughter, Jessica was waiting for me. She said I was gone for about 8 hours and while I was in recovery someone went to my room to let her know that all went well with my surgery and then they brought her in to see me for a moment. I don't recall that. Audrey and Bob checked into the hospital while I was in surgery and they visited with Jessie.

I had general anesthesia and a Fenanyl drip infusing. I was nauseated for a few hours and vomited 2 times after surgery but it subsided quickly. They thought that the Fenanyl was causing the nausea so when my IV "blew" they discontinued it. Well that didn't last long....my pain came back with a vengeance. Of course now I'm dehydrated so they could not get a new IV in even after several attempts. Finally they got a nurse from CCU to come and got a line in after 1 try.

The Fenanyl was restarted and was a blessing that was! Now that my pain was under control I wanted to get out of bed but they said that tomorrow was the day they'd get me up. I felt that I would go crazy stuck in that bed. My bottom was getting sore because I could not turn either way. My laptop was wired into the network and could not reach the bed so I had Jessica write to the family and friends at home, oh, and of course, to surfacehippy as well.



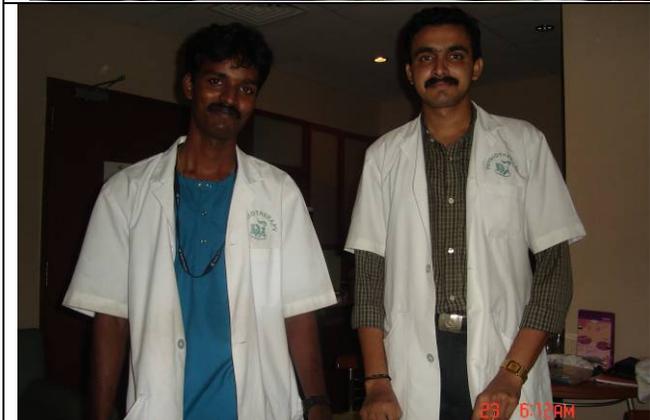
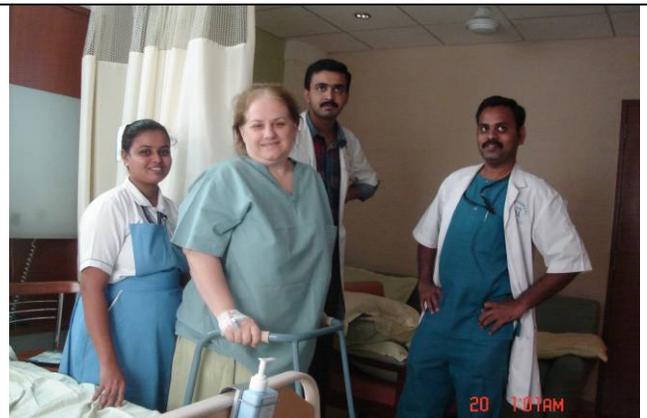
Me in my Fentanyl haze, my drains and drain pumps and my Fentanyl syringe pump.

10/19/06 POST OP DAY 1

Yeah...get out of bed day!! I am so excited! Dr. Bis and Dr. Bose came to see me and removed my JP drains. They also changed my surgical dressing for the first time. The wound looks great. They ordered the foley out and discontinued my Fentanyl drip. I was put on NSAIDs instead. My physical therapists came and got me out of bed. I walked around in my room with a walker and then sat in a chair. I hated getting back in bed. I did my therapy exercises while in bed.



Dr. Bose removed my drains and changed my dressing preparing me for activity.



Dr. Bose visiting me on POD 1, my therapists getting me out of bed for the first time. I looked like crap but I felt GREAT!!!!