

My Experience

On Friday August 16th, 2013 I received a phone call from Dr. Teeb Al-Samarrai informing me that I have infectious TB and that I needed to stay in isolation. This shook my world. She said the sputum results came positive. I started the medication same night.

I am a 65 year old semiretired man who came to San José from out of state to work on a contract project. I developed cough symptoms around 1st week of July, a month after coming to San Jose. The cough would not respond to normal treatments and a CT scan revealed a large cavity on my upper part of left lung and possibilities for TB. A sputum sample confirmed it. On that night I got my medication and came to my apartment (rented temporarily), I stared thinking about my life and my world which went upside down. I could not believe or accept the fact that I was infected with TB. My initial reaction was that I must have caught it in San Jose. Afterwards I came to know that TB is slow growing and it must have started long before. I still cannot understand where and how I got infected. My biggest challenge was how to inform my wife and 2 adult daughters.

The next day drowning in my own grief, I composed my self thought about my life and how to handle the situation. Finally about 4.00 pm I called my wife and gave the bad news while she was on a walk with close friend of her who is physician. She was in disbelief. Her friend consoled her, gave facts about TB and told her that it is curable. I also called my daughters and they were shocked. I told them not to worry that I started my medication and it will be cured soon. I cannot imagine what was going through the minds of my wife and daughters. I don't think any of my family had the slightest inclination that one of us would contract TB.

On Monday the case manager Bonnie from Santa Clara county health department visited. She explained the whole process of Isolation, medication, side effects and general information about the disease itself. She gave lot of reading material regarding the disease, which was very valuable. She answered a lot of my ignorant questions and put me in a comfort level. She also arranged doctor's appointment with the county clinic and the DOT process. I learned a lot about the disease and felt a lot more comfortable about the situation.

The first week was miserable. Here I am staying by myself from out of town away from my family diagnosed with TB in isolation and cannot go out any place. On Thursday I visited the clinic for my doctor's appointment. The whole process was unique. Wearing a mask going through the protocol of patient registration, verification of medication, preliminary vitals, checking for rashes, eye checking etc. The clinic staff was very efficient, considerate and compassionate. The visit with Dr. Polasky was very helpful. She explained the process, the disease, reviewed the CT scan with me, and addressed all my concerns, cautioned about reactions, side effects. She asked about any breathing issues, unusual symptoms which I had none other than cough. I told her even the day before I was diagnosed I was jogging, doing my gym workouts without any problems and how is it possible!! She suggested holding off jogging. I understand it is acceptable to go walk for walk or hike in remote areas with mask.

Bonnie my case manager visited everyday to do the DOT (the only person I can talk to in person everyday). She was addressing the concerns I have and providing additional information about the disease which put me at ease. These visits were of great support and encouragement. I also started my daily walks/hikes of minimum 4 to 5 miles and some days up to 7 or 8 miles. These walks and the DOT visits is what kept me going, kept my sanity, tranquility and a philosophical aspect of life in general. It also made me realize how a normal healthy person can get TB and how life can change so drastically. After 2 weeks the DOT process was turned over to case worker Fran.

After the 3rd week I was told to submit 3 sputum samples followed by doctor's visit. During the visit I found out that results are still positive and I need to continue my isolation. Again the doctor's visit was very helpful. The examination was very thorough, explained the negative sputum process and treatment process in general. She also confirmed that the lab results showed that the disease is susceptible to the medication. I started submitting sputum sample every Monday and the results came on Tuesday as positive. This went on for 4 weeks. During this time it was discouraging and frustrating, even wondered if I was drug resistant. My family was getting more concerned about the results than myself. I was getting an attitude "Damn the results. Whatever happens—happens. I don't care when I get out of the isolation".

Fran the case worker who does the DOT every day was very cheerful, supportive, encouraging that I will get better. She made me think positive. As time went by I started to continue my routine and managed my emotions as an isolated person on isolation. My out of town family was very supportive calling me everyday and especially my wife checking up on me 4 to 5 times a day. During my 3rd doctor's visit I was seen by Dr. Narasimha, who was also very helpful and assured me the sputum sample will turn negative and that is was just a matter of time. It was taking longer due to my large cavity in the lung. As weeks went by the sputum results started improving (from 4+ to 1). Finally on October 18th (after 2 full months) the 3 sputum results came negative and I was released from isolation. That day was joyful for me, my wife and daughters. Even the case manager Bonnie, case worker Fran was cheering for me.

Even though it was only 2 months it felt like a life time. What got me through were my daily solitary walks, the daily cheerful visits from case worker/ case manager, the faraway support from my wife and daughters, my positive assertiveness and my previous good health. Fortunately I had no negative reaction or symptoms to the medication. I started my jogging and workouts. During my 4th doctor's visit after release from isolation I was told I will need to continue my DOT with 2 medications for another 6 months, and that I needed to have checkups once a month. I was given the option of continuing here or in my home town. Due to the isolation my contract work had to be discontinued and at this point I wanted to head to my home town. Due to the excellent care and treatment I received in the Santa Clara TB clinic I wanted to continue my treatment here. It was agreed that the DOT can be done through iPhone via face time. I left San Jose mid November. I am continuing my DOT thru face time and look forward to my next doctor's visit at Santa Clara TB clinic. The entire TB clinic staff was very nice and my experiences with the clinic visits were better than my regular doctor's office visits. I sincerely would like to thank all of them for their care and support in getting me and my family through this difficult time.

