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## Birgul Ozcirpici\*

Department of Public Health, School of Medicine,  
Gaziantep University, Turkey

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\*Corresponding author: Birgul Ozcirpici, Professor,  
Dr, MD, Department of Public Health, School of Medi-  
cine, Gaziantep University, Turkey,  
E-mail: [ozcirpici@gantep.edu.tr](mailto:ozcirpici@gantep.edu.tr)

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## Opinion

# My own patient experience: Learning to walk again like a baby

## Abstract

I had a left monoparalysis during a holiday abroad in July 2005. This narrative shares my experience of getting ill in a foreign country, how it is difficult to describe your troubles and, how little is known about the long recovery period of paralysis by physicians. My experience showed me that being a patient was so far from being a doctor. Social support is very important during recovery from paralysis, because you can not do anything by yourself and you are very desperate. You feel the muscles that have not gained tonus yet, like a belt and strap. Only the physiotherapist, warned me about the long recovery progress. I did not realize how high the sidewalks are. A 1 cm height feels like a mountain to climb, and a 1 kg weight like a truck to carry. From this experience, I offer two main suggestions including 1) Language is very important for foreign patients for communication at hospitals. An online translation center for hospitals, that translators of each language work, may be beneficial when it is needed at any country. 2) Be clear in communicating with patients about their diagnosis, in this case telling the patient having paralysis how long the recovery period will be in detail.

## Overview of my Experience

It was my first holiday abroad, in July 2005. I did not know what would happen on my first day in Venice, Italy. I still sometimes get unhappy and anxious when I hear something about Venice, but I am ready now to share my patient experience after twelve years. I work in a University as Professor, I am a medical doctor and a public health specialist. I am an obese person. I was not able to stay standing up for a long time. I sometimes felt a pain like angina, pectoris and kidney pain. My EKG and urine was checked, no pathology was found. I thought that all my complaints were because of my obesity.

On the first day of the holiday, we walked for a long time to see Venice and I got so tired. That night, I woke up with a feeling like a discharge of electricity on my back. Something was going wrong. I went to the Venice state hospital with the tour guide. At the emergency room, my blood pressure and glucose were checked and no problem detected. We decided to return back to the hotel, but my left foot started to creep slowly when returning. I went to bed again and just after a half an hour I woke up with the feeling of electricity on my back again. Unfortunately, I could not walk this time. I fell to the ground. Emergency was called, emergency mobile service workers and municipality helpers carried me back to the state hospital. I was hospitalized at orthopedy service. I had left monoparalysis. They took me to tomography and my result was "osteofitis". They could make an appointment for magnetic resonance imaging in 10 days. I decided to return back my country instead.

When I arrived home, I applied to Gaziantep University hospital and they immediately sent me for an MRI. According to the results, my T6-7, T7-8, T8-9 intervertebral disc spaces were narrowed. Central left paracentral disc herniation was seen at T8-9 level. Disc herniation narrowed the anterior subarachnoid distance and created spinal cord compression. I had two operations. In the operations, a T 8-9 discectomy was applied and my T 8-9-10 were fixated posterior with pedicle screws. I stayed at the hospital for one month. My muscle strength was at 3/5 when I was discharged. At discharge, the Neurosurgeon who operated on me said that "it takes approximately 6 months to heal".

I thought that everything would be okay after 6 months. I would walk, do all the things I could do before. Unfortunately, that was not correct. Twelve years passed, there are still some muscle groups on my back that are not working. You feel the muscles like a belt and strap that are not working and that have not gained tonus yet. I stayed at home for 8 months. I used walker device. I did not realize before how high the sidewalks are. A 1 cm height feels like a mountain to climb, and a 1 kg weight, like a truck to carry. My physiotherapist visited me once a week at home. She was the only one who warned me about the progress: "This period will take 2 or 3 years."

She taught me gymnastics movements that I could apply in bed, I did them twice a day for a long time. After 8 months, I started to work again. I was driving a car, going to work with my helper. Unfortunately, I could not carry even a little cup of

drink. At the beginning, I could stay only for an hour at work, than 2 hours, than 3 hours. For a long time, somebody helped me carry my bags and I held their arms. A research assistant helped me during medical school lessons. Over the 12 years I have continued to do more and more each day. Now I can stay at work for eight hours a day. I think if I did not work in an office, I would not be able to do the same work. Now I am walking or swimming every day at least 30 minutes and I lost approximately 20 kg.

## Reflections and Recommendations

1. My experience showed me that regular exercise is very essential, for preventing and healing of musculoskeletal disorders.

2. A global language is very important for foreign patients for communication at hospitals. An online translation center for hospitals, that translators of each language work, may be use beneficial when it is needed at any country.

3. Tell the patient having paralysis how long the recovery period will be in detail. I think all the physicians should be warned about the long recovery period of paralysis.

4. Nursing services was very good in developed countries compared to my country. Number of nurses are very limited and shift changes are very long in my country, especially at public hospitals. However, I can not make the same comment for the diagnosis period in a developed country. Scheduled appointment for diagnostic scanning was too long for a patient having neurological deficit at emergency and we lost time. Whereas, almost every district has advanced diagnostic scanning techniques in my country. To my opinion, as being a public health specialist, both developed and developing countries need to spend their health budgets very carefully. Diagnostic scanning tools should not be so limited neither as I experienced in a developed county, nor as much as in my county. There should be a way to optimize it considering needs.

Thanks to the God for walking again, thanks for their tenderness and helps to my husband, and to my little daughter and son who had to grow up quickly because of this period. Thanks to research assistants, Dr. Ferhat Coşkun and Dr. Omer Balci, for their helps showing me the importance of social support. Thanks to Physiotherapist, Zeynep Elbeyli, for her helps and advices and for telling me the long progress.