

Up Front/Commentary: Routine dental procedure has me wishing for quick death

By Kathy Hedberg of the Tribune

There are certain words that can be spoken to make all the difference between whether a person goes just for the basic health care procedures or opts for the Hollywood blow-out version of self-improvement.

Those words are: "Your insurance won't cover it."

You have to give people credit who go ahead with the boob jobs, the facelifts and the collagen implants when they have to pay for it out of their own pockets. It means looking good and being popular really is important, which is what I have always believed. Sure, having a nice personality and a stimulating intellect might win you friends and admirers, but if you really want to make it in life, kid, you need to look hot.

For me it involved a relatively minor dental procedure. I say "minor" ironically, because what's minor for many people is major anguish for me.

I've always considered myself a fairly phobia-free person, fearing little else than nuclear annihilation and mice in my closet.

But add going to the dentist to that list. I've put off dental visits sometimes for years, and it's not necessarily because I've had a bad experience.

I really haven't experienced a whole lot of pain from dentists, other than from Robbie Jimenez, who broke my heart in high school, but that was before he was a dentist so I guess it doesn't really qualify.

What gets me tied in knots now, though, is the whirring sound of those little chain saw blades they use to scrape your teeth and those dagger-sharp lances they take to poke around your gums.

I keep thinking: One false move, one unanticipated hiccup and they've punctured my sinuses/eyeball/spinal column. Pray to God the hygienist has a good home life and didn't drink too much caffeine this morning. Call me crazy, but I just don't feel safe with people handling sharp instruments that close to my brain.

This is what they call a full-fledged dental-phobia and, really, it doesn't even embarrass me to admit it. I'd rather fess up to being a chicken when it comes to dentists than end up my life maimed and bitter.

Unfortunately, a tooth broke and despite my best efforts to convince myself that if I just left it alone for awhile it would probably grow back, I had to finally give in and make a dental surgery appointment.

I told the dentist about my fears. He was cool about it, actually. He said I didn't need to have the surgery right away - that I could wait until it was abscessed and infected and then they could go in and do the procedure in the emergency room.

I considered that for awhile. But I decided as long as I had put my hand to the plow I might as well go ahead and get it over with.

I asked if perhaps he could knock me out with powerful drugs - the kind I've heard college kids use at parties to make them feel happy and warm toward the whole human race.

Oh yeah, the dentist said. He could totally hook me up with that. But it would cost another \$300-\$400 and, bottom line, my insurance wouldn't cover it.

I won't lie, I'm a little bummed about that. States are legalizing marijuana now, you'd think insurance companies would understand there are times in your life when you need the good stuff. They could pay for it and then pass the cost along to all the other insurance customers, like they do with everything else.

But life is harsh and so I have decided to go forward with only local anesthesia. I just hope my dentist and his assistants get a good night's sleep the night before my operation and stay off the sauce.

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