

Writer's Profile

Ehsanul Alam Sabbir is an engineer by profession, but likes to explore life; cycling, running marathons, travelling and reading books being his passions. Currently working as a Software Quality Assurance Engineer for BRAC Bank, he has completed an MSc in Information Technology from Dhaka University, and before that a BSc in Electrical Engineering from BRAC University.



Title: A Day in a Hospital Operating Theatre

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Level: Advanced

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Good health is a blessing that we usually take for granted. It is something we don't really think about each day, until we, or our loved ones, **encounter** a problem with some part of our body, especially if it's a problem that just won't go away. Then, it becomes of the greatest importance to us, and soon, it is the **primary** concern of each moment of every day, until, at last, we find a solution that will relieve our discomfort.

Going into a hospital *operating theatre** (OT) for the first time in my life made me realize that we should always be grateful for our body's healthy state. This story is a sharing of my experience, and a tale of my wife's excruciating pain, as I witnessed it, in the OT of a hospital in Bangladesh.

*Acute paronychia** is the term used when dust particles **accumulate** in the corner of the nails, causing infection and forming thick *pus**. The pressure and the infection build up, and cause excruciating pain. This was the problem my wife was facing. While we had tried to fix the problem ourselves, using various kinds of medicine, including *antibiotics**, nothing seemed to cure the infection, and it became clear that an operation was **inevitable**.

After trying to treat the problem for a month, and visiting several doctors, we **finally** decided to go to the hospital and, if necessary, '*go under the knife**'. *Nadim*, a friend of mine, gave me the **contact** details of a skilled doctor from a leading hospital, and off we went.



It was a typical Friday for both of us, but it turned into a very special day for my wife, because she would finally arrive at a solution to her ongoing pain. For me, it became the learning experience of a lifetime.

At the appointment time arranged, we reached the hospital at around 4:15 p.m. We waited in the emergency waiting room. *Ejaj vhai*, the doctor, a smart guy in his thirties, came and took us to his examination room to **investigate** the problem for the first time.

Upon looking at my wife's toenail, he gave us two **options** to consider. One was to continue the **ongoing** medicines, which so far hadn't worked, in the hope that the problem would **eventually resolve** itself, and endure the pain for a while longer. The other was a **procedure** called '*nail avulsion**' which was a more drastic solution, but which would provide relief straight away. This procedure **involves removing** the nail completely, in the operation theater, under **normal** operating conditions. This was a suggestion we had not been prepared for.

As the doctor described the procedure to us, I could almost feel the cold shivers that were running up and down my wife's spine. The doctor could see that his description was causing us more than a bit of **stress**, so he said, "Well *Vavi*, let's have coffee downstairs and **relax** a little. Then, we will discuss the procedure a little more. In any case, I can **assure** you that it will not hurt any more than the bite of an ant."

"And where is this ant from?" I replied in a humorous tone, "*The Amazon*?*". We all laughed, a little nervously, I thought, but after a while, my wife, desiring to be free of the pain, agreed to **undergo** the procedure.



The doctor recognised the fear on my wife's face, so he asked me if I would like to go into the small operating theatre that was fitted out with all the necessary **equipment**, to stay beside her, and observe the operation with my own eyes. Without thinking for a second, I said, "Yes".

Upon entering the OT, I saw two gigantic lights shining brightly. The doctor **adjusted** the height of the bed and my wife got onto it. A pair of scissors soaked in *disinfectant** was placed in readiness on the doctor's tray, and a note was handed to me, with the name of the *anaesthetic** which I had to provide as a part of the last moment preparations. I knew then that there was no turning back. Two more pairs of hands joined those of the doctor, 'brothers' they are called, to help carry out the nail avulsion procedure.

I quickly went to get the anaesthetic, and as I re-entered the OT for the final time, I saw that a *syringe** had already been prepared with which to **administer** it. The anaesthetic was injected without any further delay. It was carefully squeezed into my wife's toe in several places around the infected **area**. All this happened so fast I could barely breathe. My hands trembled, and I saw my wife shaking, because this was the part of the procedure in which she *could* feel pain.

I held her hand firmly, urging her not to look at her feet. She was brave, but the pain was **intense**, and tears were rolling down her cheeks, unchecked. It was so hard for me to see her suffering like this, but gradually, her toe became numb, and finally the pain was gone. At last, there was no feeling at all, so that at that exact moment, one could have chopped off the whole toe without the patient feeling any pain whatsoever.

As per the plan, the scissors were taken in hand by the doctor, and with the simple shrug of an **expert**, the nail was uprooted. The Doctor held up his prize, showing me the infected nail with a smile. The culprit, which had been causing so much pain, was hanging from the blade of the scissors, and after our **brief inspection**, was finally thrown into the rubbish basket along with a big glob of clotted blood. Now, I was looking at my wife's bare toe, without any toenail at all. My eyes could not believe what they were seeing. After cleaning the toe with *antiseptic** and *hydrogen peroxide**, and wrapping it in a sterile *bandage**, the procedure was finally over. The entire operation had taken only a breathtaking 15 minutes, though it had felt much longer. My wife was shaken, but at last her agony was over. As for myself, my trembling stopped, and I started to breathe normally again.

At last, we returned home, with a feeling of overwhelming gratitude towards the doctor, thanking Almighty Allah, without whom nothing is possible. **Despite** our unpleasant experience, that Friday turned from a day of tears, trembling and pain, into a day of great relief, and we learned an important lesson. Living a healthy life, and **appreciating** our good health, even the health of something as small as a toe, is something we should all treasure, and something for which we ought always to be grateful. That is the lesson we learned that day.

Learning activities

Vocabulary

1. **Words from the Academic Word List.** These words occur frequently in academic reading texts in all subject areas, and are extremely important to know if you are studying English for academic purposes.

accumulate

brief

expert

adjusted

contact

final/finally

administer

despite

inevitable

appreciating

encounter

inspection

area

equipment

intense

assure

eventually

investigate

involves	primary	resolve
normal	procedure	stress
ongoing	relax	undergo
options	removing	

Off-list Words: These words are not high frequency words in English. Only spend time learning these words if you already know all the Academic Words listed words above.

agony	glob	shrug
almighty	gratitude	smart
ant	guy	soaked
breathhtaking	height	spine
cheeks	humorous	squeezed
chopped	infected / infection	sterile
clotted		tale
culprit	injected	teardrops
drastic	nervously	toenail
emergency	numb	tone
endure	overwhelming	unchecked
excruciating	readiness	uprooted
gigantic	shiver(s)	whatsoever

Glossary: These words are also less common in English. Unless you are studying health related subjects, it is less important to spend time learning them

- **acute paronychia** (noun phrase) = The name of a painful infection in the area around a toenail or fingernail.
- **(The) Amazon** (noun) = The name given to the large tropical rain-forested area in South America. Rich in biodiversity, it is home to many rare and endangered birds, animals, insects and plant species, but is often considered to be a challenging environment for humans who are not familiar with it. Also called ‘the lungs’ of the Earth, because of its role in maintaining the stability of the global environment.

- **anaesthetic** (noun) = medicine that is given during an operation to remove the sense of pain.
- **antibiotics** (noun) = medicine given to kill infection caused by bacteria
- **antiseptic** (noun) = a solution that is applied to medical instruments to ensure they are fully clean or the human body in an area open to the air that has been injured or infected.
- **bandage** (noun) = a strip of clean cloth applied to a wound or injury
- **disinfectant** (noun) = similar to antiseptic (above)
- **hydrogen peroxide** (noun) = a chemical compound with the formula H₂O₂, used as a bleach and an antiseptic (see 'antiseptic' above.)
- **(nail) avulsion** (noun) = A medical procedure in which a nail is completely removed.
- **operating theatre** (noun phrase) = the name of a room in a hospital in which surgeries (operations) and important medical procedures, requiring sterile conditions, take place.
- **pus** (noun) = a thick white or green liquid formed from the accumulation of dead white blood cells and bacteria.
- **syringe** (noun) = a piece of medical equipment with a needle and chamber for liquid, used for giving an injection of medicine that is in a liquid form.

Comprehension Questions

1. **Remembering:** What steps had the writer and his wife taken to try to find a solution to her problem, before visiting the hospital? How effective had those steps been? What lesson did the writer learn from his experience? (Explain your answers in your own words, in English.)
2. **Understanding:** What is the meaning of these expressions? Can you explain them in your own words?
 - *'to take something (or someone) for granted'*
 - *'to go under the knife'*

Describe some situations in which you might use each expression.

Critical Thinking Questions (Discuss these questions in ENGLISH using as many words as you can from the vocabulary lists above.)

1. **Applying:** What kinds of health problems would you try to fix yourself, before seeking professional help? When do you think it is necessary to visit a doctor? When do you think you do NOT need to see a doctor? Give reasons for your answers.

- 2. Analyzing:** In the story, the writer uses the word '*excruciating*' to describe his wife's strong pain. On a scale of one to five, (one being least uncomfortable, five being most uncomfortable) classify the following words that are used to describe physical discomfort (ache, itch, tingle, throb, acute, chronic, crippling, unbearable, sharp, severe, sore, tender).
- 3. Evaluating:** In the story, the writer explains that he had to provide the anaesthetic for his wife's procedure. In your opinion, when a patient seeks medical treatment, who should cover the cost of their medicine and their medical care? Should the government pay for the medical costs for all citizens out of taxes, or should citizens have to pay for their own care themselves? Can you think of any other alternatives for covering the cost of health care?
- 4. Creating:** Using the information in the story, write a script for a mini-play in English.
- One group should create a dialogue of the conversation between the writer and his wife, as they try to decide how to resolve her health problem (in the time before they visited the hospital). describe how the wife was feeling. What did they decide to do, at first?
 - Another group should create the dialogue between the doctor, and the writer and his wife just before, and while they were having coffee. What do you think they said to each other? How did each person express their feelings and/or explain information to the others?
 - Another group should create the dialogue that took place in the operating room, just before the operation took place, between the doctor, the patient and the writer. What did each person say? How was each person feeling? What instructions were given by whom to whom?
 - Another group should create the scene in which the writer and his wife thank the doctor, then leave the hospital to go home. What did each person say? How was each person feeling at that point?

Practise your mini-plays until you can say your parts without looking at the script. Now, perform your mini-plays to each other in the same order as the events in the story. If you can video yourselves, do so. Later, watch your videos and give yourselves some helpful feedback on your dramatic performance (e.g. use of emotion, body language, audience involvement and interest, and props, music, costumes if you used these). Also give helpful feedback to each other on your skill in using English (e.g. pronunciation, grammar, vocabulary, intonation). Keep it light-hearted and kind, and most of all, have fun!

