

Marianne

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Photo by Marianne's husband

As I was getting the horses into the barn, I wiped out and heard a pop in my wrist. I thought I might have broken something. The emergency department was busy, but the nurse and emergency physician were excellent. They realigned the bones in my right wrist, put me in a plaster cast and sent me home.

The fracture clinic was a different story. It was a large room with multiple stretchers and little privacy. Everyone wore scrubs so I couldn't tell who was who. A man walked up to me without introducing himself, pressed on my hand and fingers and then walked away. I remember saying to my husband, "I hope that was the doctor." It turns out he was the orthopedic surgeon because he returned later to discuss treatment options. We decided against surgical management.

My cast was changed to a fibreglass one. I was sitting with an outstretched hand, thinking I was waiting for my discharge papers when the surgeon walked back in and — without warning — grabbed the back of my hand and pressed so hard that I fell to the side from the pain. My husband yelled, "What the hell?" as the doctor left. The cast technician later told my husband that sometimes they needed to do things without warning so that people didn't get anxious beforehand. I learned later when I requested my medical records that this pressing was called a "through the cast manipulation."

I know some doctors may not be the friendliest but are very good at their jobs. However, my subsequent experiences were not much better. My hand was swollen and I couldn't move my fingers. The cast technician told me this was because I was noncompliant with hand exercises — although

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Marianne on her farm.

no one had mentioned any exercises or physiotherapy to me. After my cast was removed, my surgeon told me I couldn't move my hand because I had complex regional pain syndrome and then discharged me without follow-up. My medical records indicated I was to be referred to a pain clinic.

This diagnosis confused me because I had no pain, just dramatic loss of function of my right hand. And if the diagnosis was true, what were the next steps? Three years later, I still have difficulty writing, typing and driving. Luckily, I could retire early from my job but that does not help with chores on my farm. I have been attending physiotherapy and my hand is slowly improving.

I don't think I got good care, but I don't have any recourse. I'm left to deal with the remnants of this injury, wondering if this could have gone differently. I'm sure this surgeon has seen thousands of patients. But I only have one right hand.

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