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A Tampered Soul

Early in the afternoon on a weekday I was seated in the very front row of the ceremony at a military cemetery when the service had just ended. My mother and my brother were seated on either side of me with the rest of my family members filling up the remaining seats in the area. Some of my relatives began to stand up to stretch, release the breath that had been held for maybe the entire ceremony, and looking for a mourning soul to hold and hug close. The sun screamed happiness over my shadow of sorrow while the perfectly lined trees swayed to the rhythm of cries. I could feel my eyes swell up with tears, wondering why I hadn’t run out of them considering the long and heartbreaking week I had just experienced. My cheeks warmed up extremely fast, my legs and feet became stationed to the ground and my body remained glued to the uncomfortable black chair. Everything, anything or anyone surrounding me instantly became a ghost, or they were frozen, or they weren’t even there at all. It was my tears, my body and the expensive wooden container in front of me. I silently questioned myself and everything that had just happened because it felt just as real as a dream could feel. I wanted so badly to unwrap the American flag that sat in my lap and blanket it around my empty self, just so that I could crawl underneath the casket and hide. My insides ran away with my emotions without any intent on returning. I had no idea whether I should get up and leave immediately or stay seated until someone addressed my sadness, but instead I continued the unexpected process of realizing that my father’s lifeless body was being laid to rest deep down into the ground where my hands could no longer reach for his for reassurance. My vision was blacked out, my lungs suddenly forgot how to function, but when I finally came to consciousness I was headed to the car forced to leave my hero and best friend behind for good.

 My mother and I arrived at the hospital about twenty minutes after she told me the news and we rushed to the floor that my father was on. We then entered the room that was located at the end of the hall and I found my father lying in a bed with just a blanket over him stretching from his torso down to his feet. There were a million and one tubes coming from every direction, in and out of his nose and mouth. I immediately felt as if I was on the outside of my body looking at my own reaction to the scene. My world was thrown up and tossed around and now it was lying on layers of used cushion right in front of me.

 As I slowly took in everything that was happening, I felt afraid, nervous and scared all at once. I sat by his side while my mother and the nurse tried to explain the story to me once more. My father had suffered from a double brain aneurysm and a stroke. He had his own apartment not too far from where my mother and I lived and before these health issues occurred, he was attempting to get back into his apartment, in which he had just been evicted from. (My parents were not legally divorced but formally separated) I tried to comprehend their explanation as my face flooded with tears and I held onto my father’s hand tightly. The nurse clarified that my father couldn’t feel anything physically and that he could hear all of us talking but he couldn’t respond back. He was basically in a coma, but when I tried rubbing his arm for a little just for minor comfort for the both of us, right after he made little movements and even pulled away from a small IV that was inserted in the top of his hand. The nurse told me that he knew I was there with him because he hadn’t shown any obvious signs like that before. This one particular occurrence is one that I will never forget because it may have been the very last signal I would have ever gotten from my father.

 My father lay in the hospital bed for one week exactly. At one point he received surgery to get his front bone plate in his head removed to reduce the pressure of the blood build up. On the very last day of being at the hospital, my family and I were there until around 11:10 at night. My mother, my aunt and uncles all had to discourse what they wanted to do with the situation at hand. The nurse told me, “I know you want your father back in your life more than anything but you have to understand that if he were to fully recover from this, then he would have to be taught everything over again completely. Makayla, it would be as if he was a toddler. He wouldn’t recognize you, or any of your family members.” As a ten year daughter, obviously I would have taken this option to get him back, but frankly it was not up to me.

 I walked around the corner of the room that my family gathered in to have the discussion about my father and I observed everything that was going on around me. I was leaning against a windowsill and nurses continuously came out of the stair well that was across from where I was standing. I wondered a hundred times over and over again why this was happening to me and how everyone else could just walk around as normal while my father was in the room near me just wasting away. The next thing I knew I was saying my goodbyes and heading for the elevator engulfed in my aunts arms sobbing, without any sense of thought, emotion or direction.

 As for my ten year old brain, I could barely spell the word aneurysm let alone know what it is and what can cause it. An aneurysm is “an abnormal flaring or swelling of a portion of an artery due to the weakness in the wall of a blood vessel” (American). Many factors could have contributed to my father’s aneurysm such as high blood pressure, high cholesterol, and cigarette smoke. The fact that two had occurred within my father’s head means that a part of an artery ballooned up on one side of his head on one day, and then the same thing happened to the other side during the following day. When the stroke was added to the equation, my father severely lost control of his body and fell down a set of stairs. My family and I had no knowledge of what a brain aneurysm was at the time or what caused one, therefore there was no way that we could have initially prevented it.

When I was about twelve years old my doctor suggested I receive an MRA, a magnetic resonance angiogram which is similar to an MRI, in order to guarantee that I did not have an aneurysm because they can be hereditary at times. Still today I wonder if I have the potential to get one due to the fact that I have constant chronic headaches. But when I brought this up to my doctor, a different one, she explained that if I had a brain aneurysm it would have already been located in my brain because most people are born with them. If that is the case then my father could have quite possibly been born with the aneurysm that he died from at fifty-nine.

My father grieved from a double brain aneurysm due to various factors. His lack of a healthy lifestyle would easily be considered a major contributor to his death. Cigarette smoking also played a main role in increasing his overall risk for an aneurysm. In a former study it was proved that about 70 percent to 80 percent of people who experience aneurysms were or is a current smoker (American). This does not automatically mean that if someone smokes close to a pack of cigarettes each day, then that person will definitely experience some sort of aneurysm. There are several other donors, such as high blood pressure, high cholesterol, and an unhealthy lifestyle. Another test researched the relationship between the size of an aneurysm and whether or not the patient was a smoker. The larger an aneurysm is, the greater risk of it rupturing and immediately killing a patient, with that being said, “92 percent of aneurysm holders that were larger than 24 mm. and 78 percent measuring between 13 mm. and 24 mm. were found to all be smokers” (Baker). This study clearly shows how cigarette smoking can increase a person’s risk in having an aneurysm as well as encouraging size in the defect.

It sometimes worries me that I could lose other family members to this threatening cause and that they could even have an aneurysm right now but not have any idea about it. Perhaps if people were more aware of aneurysms then the death toll could be reduced dramatically. Observing daily life patterns would be the first way to determine whether someone is a victim or not. If there is something that can be done to prevent someone from having an aneurysm, it should definitely be acted upon. I’m sure that if my mother wasn’t a smoker as well as my father, she could have taken a stand and encouraged him to quit before it was too late. My father also chose to travel the path of alcoholism along with being a smoker; not the most ideal combination for a positive lifestyle. There are certainly a handful of things that could have been done differently to avoid what my father went through and at this point it is only something that I can learn from, as well as educate others on this deadly happening and sharing ways to turn away from smoking from the start.

Health physicals and school programs should educate people on brain aneurysm’s as much as possible in order to strengthen the awareness nationally, and to prevent a rupture before one can happen. Brain aneurysms can go unseen for long periods of time, and because there is not a lot of available information on them, people are unsure of causes and possible symptoms. Aneurysm awareness is not a common topic that is taught in health classrooms, but it is an important issue that should be addressed to everyone.

“The annual rate of rupture is approximately 8 – 10 per 100,000 people or about 30,000 people in the United States suffer a brain aneurysm rupture. There is a brain aneurysm rupturing every 18 minutes. Ruptured brain aneurysms are fatal in about 40% of cases. Of those who survive, about 66% suffer some permanent neurological deficit.” (Brain)

This statistic clearly expresses how common the rate of rupture is for brain aneurysms and how frequently one can actually burst. There is no distinct process to go through in order to prevent an aneurysm rupture but there is a drug called Nimodopine which can prevent a vasospasm post rupture. A vasospasm is a sudden constriction of an artery which can lead to depleting in the diameter and the amount of blood it can deliver. The drug will block calcium channels in cells of the brain and vessels. Regardless of what can prevent an aneurysm after the fact, four out of seven people who do reach recovery will most definitely have a disability (Brain). If there is any trace of brain aneurysms in a person’s family history than it is crucial to play it safe as early as possible and talk to a doctor to get an immediate screening. There is no warning to when a brain aneurysm could rupture, just as similar as a heart attack, but with the assistance of imagining screening techniques, an individual who is at high risk for holding an aneurysm can easily be identified and taken care of.

The long, detrimental week that I spent with my family watching my father silently ache is something that no one should have to go through at any age. The fact that my father passed away from a double aneurysm and a stroke should explain the extreme impact that his lifestyle had on his health. Becoming more informed and conscious of factors that could lead to a risk for a brain aneurysm is vital for everyone, especially those with a family history of aneurysms. The symptoms regarding a brain aneurysm can be easy to overlook but if they reach extreme levels, then going through a screening process could ultimately save someone’s life.

Work Cited

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