

Whispers on the Web

A Monthly Online Newsletter for WebWhispers

February 2022



From The Editor's Desk

Hello Friends! The past two or three years have been characterized by things being taken away from us, much of which had become expected or routine. Now I think we finally have a lot to joyfully look forward to, not the least of which is the return of things the pandemic took away. I feel really good about the comeback I think we will all make this year.

Many of our support groups and lary clubs have dwindled as people grew tired of having to meet online. Some never participated in that to begin with and we lost them at the beginning of the saga. I think that will prove to be temporary and I pray that I am correct on that. Others have come to prefer an online meeting over having to get dressed and ready to fight traffic and go somewhere. I think most of us have an innate desire to be with other people.

Those of us who were together in-person at the IAL Annual Meeting and Voice Institute have not seen one another in the flesh since 2019 in Phoenix. I would have bet a million dollars that I would never say that. Though I've seen many of you on my phone, iPad, laptop, or desktop, regardless of how much I think of you, being with you in-person is better. If you don't feel the same way about me, I'll just have to get over that. When with friends, I happen to prefer "could we have some more coffee" or "could we get another round" to "oh crap, I think my Wi-fi is acting up again".

I'll have more in our March issue on the Voice Institute to be held In Charlotte, NC this June, our presence there and our scholarship opportunities for those who can use some help getting there. I can't imagine anything that would keep me from attending. I hope to have some concrete information then on other events for our community as we get our stuff back together.

In this issue, we have more from Aaron Wayne's book and an excellent "Voice Points" on thyroid function with laryngectomees, both of which I'm sure you will benefit from reading.

If you have a suggestion for WotW, please share it with us. We are always open to new writers. Tell us your story or share your thoughts. We would love to include it here in Whispers on the Web. Let us hear from you at editor@webwhispers.org.

Above all else, keep your chin up!

Tom Whitworth
WebWhispers President

Whispers on the Web February 2022

Contents

From The Editor's Desk

Tom Whitworth

VoicePoints

Thyroid Function in Patients with
Larynx Cancer

Stephanie Giparas,
PA-C, MCMSc

The Silent Partner Chapter 10

The Best Medicine and the Birth
of "The Silent Partner"

Aaron Wayne

From The Archives

February: The Month
of Purification

Noirin Sheahan

WebWhispers is an Internet based support group. Please check our home page for information about the WebWhispers group, our email lists, membership, or officers. For newsletter questions, comments or contributions, please write to editor@webwhispers.org

Donna McGary Managing Editor
Kim Almand VoicePoints Editor

Disclaimer: The information offered via WebWhispers is not intended as a substitute for professional medical help or advice but is to be used only as an aid in understanding current medical knowledge. A physician should always be consulted for any health problem or medical condition. The statements, comments, and/or opinions expressed in the articles in Whispers on the Web are those of the authors only and are not to be construed as those of the WebWhispers management, its general membership, or this newsletter's editorial staff.



Voice Points is written by professionals for the lary community and is coordinated by Kim Almand M.S, CCC-SLP and Erin Guidera, M.S., CCC-SLP. Please contact them with contributions or questions at Kalmand@uthsc.edu or Erin.Guidera@moffitt.org

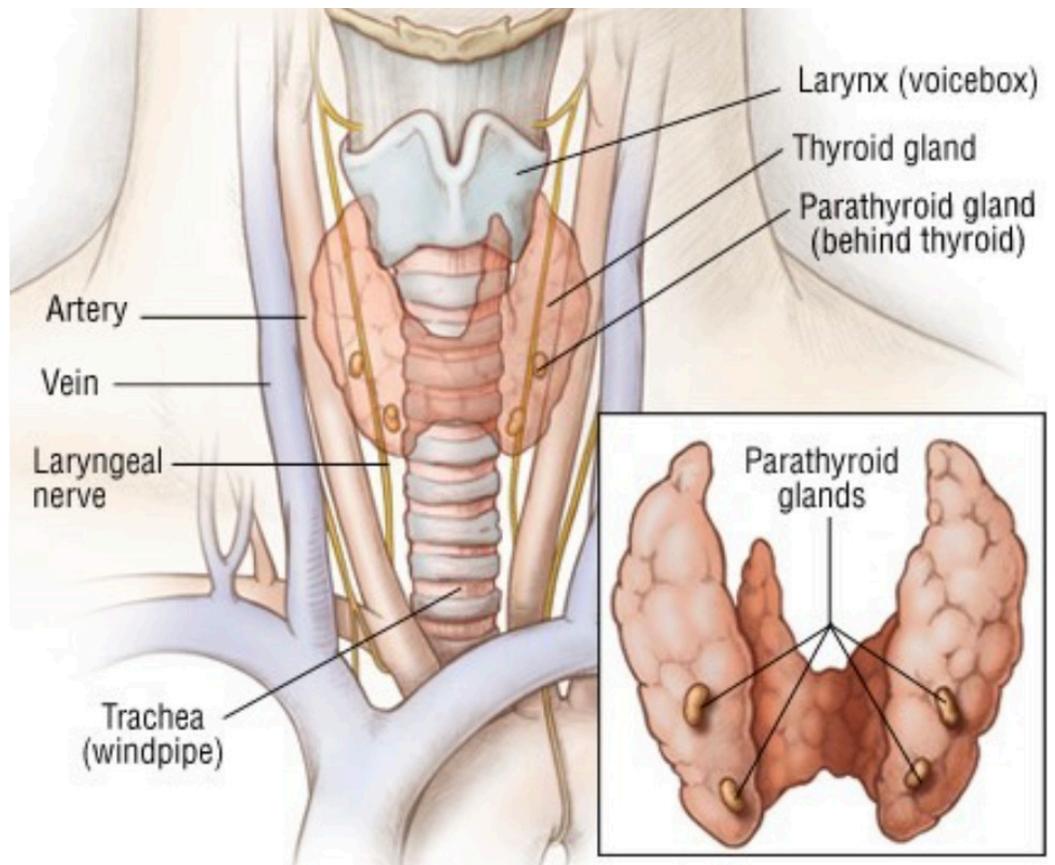
Thyroid Function in Patients with Larynx Cancer

The thyroid gland is an endocrine (hormone-secreting) gland located in the lower front of the neck, below the larynx (voice box). Its appearance is frequently described as butterfly-shaped. Its primary function is to produce thyroid hormone. The thyroid hormones are then carried throughout the body through the bloodstream. Thyroid hormones affect our metabolism, energy, and temperature regulation. They also support the function of multiple organ systems including the brain and heart (*American Thyroid Association, n.d.*).

Thyroid function can be impacted in patients with larynx cancer if the thyroid gland is removed at the time of surgery, or if the patient undergoes radiation treatment.

The thyroid gland is sometimes removed as part of a laryngectomy procedure for patients with larynx cancer. Laryngeal cancer that invades the thyroid gland is

relatively uncommon, but it is recommended that surgeons consider removing the thyroid gland for advanced larynx cancers that have cartilage invasion. The thyroid gland may also be removed during surgery for less advanced larynx cancers if the thyroid is enlarged and nodular, or if the patient currently has decreased thyroid function (hypothyroidism) and is



Frank H. Netter. (2006.) *Atlas of Human Anatomy*. 4th Edition. See: *Thyroid Glands, Parathyroid Glands and Larynx*, Plates 74 – 78

already on thyroid hormone supplementation.

In other patients, the thyroid may be able to be spared during a laryngectomy. However, if a patient requires radiation treatment, this can put the thyroid gland at risk for damage. While the goal of radiation is to treat tumor cells while avoiding damage to healthy tissue, some destruction to normal tissues is inevitable during treatment. Luckily, current treatment modalities are quite advanced and allow a precise calculation of radiation doses to normal tissues to avoid adverse effects of radiation. Despite this, radiation-induced hypothyroidism is still a common late effect of the impact of radiation on the thyroid gland. This can develop months to years after undergoing radiation therapy (Ronjom, 2016). When thyroid hormone levels are too low, patients will need supplemental thyroid hormone (thyroxine).

Treatment with T4 replacement (thyroxine) will bring the body's thyroid hormone levels back to normal. Synthetic thyroid hormone pills contain T4, exactly as the thyroid gland would produce T4 itself. A weight based-formula is used to calculate the dose. This dose may be adjusted later based on subsequent blood work results (American Thyroid Association, n.d.).

Thyroid hormone must be taken on an empty stomach with no other food or medications. It is recommended to take thyroid hormone regularly, reliably and appropriately, early in the morning, on an empty stomach, with no food, beverage, or other medications at the same, or within a 30 - 60 minute window thereafter.

Thyroid medication is very safe. The only dangers of taking thyroid hormone medication are taking too much or too little. Not enough thyroid medication will cause the hypothyroidism to continue. Too much thyroid medication will result excess thyroid hormone and hyperthyroid symptoms. Common symptoms of excess thyroid hormone are sleep disruption, fatigue, increased appetite, anxiousness, shakiness, and heat intolerance, palpitations or increased heart rate. Patients who are on thyroid hormone

and experience these symptoms should have their thyroid levels checked. Too much thyroid hormone is indicated in blood work by low thyroid stimulating hormone (TSH) levels (American Thyroid Association, n.d.).

It is imperative that patients without a thyroid gland are compliant with taking their medication. Without thyroid hormone, patients can risk developing life-threatening hypothyroidism. Long-term profound hypothyroidism can result in myxedema. Symptoms and signs of myxedema include severe cold intolerance and somnolence, which eventually can progress to profound lethargy and even unconsciousness or myxedema coma. If there is concern for myxedema, it is necessary to seek out immediate emergent medical care and treatment (Mayo Clinic, n.d.).

Stephanie Giparas, PA-C, MCMSc

Stephanie Giparas, PA-C, MCMSc, is a Nationally Certified Physician Assistant and practicing Head and Neck and Endocrine Oncology provider at Moffitt Cancer Center in Tampa, Florida specializing in the evaluation and treatment of patients with head and neck and endocrine cancers.

Works Cited

"Hypothyroidism (Underactive Thyroid)." Mayo Clinic, Mayo Foundation for Medical Education and Research, 19 Nov. 2020, <https://www.mayoclinic.org/diseases-conditions/hypothyroidism/symptoms-causes/syc-20350284>.

"Hypothyroidism." American Thyroid Association, <https://www.thyroid.org/hypothyroidism/>.

M;, Feen Rønjom. "Radiation-Induced Hypothyroidism after Treatment of Head and Neck Cancer." Danish Medical Journal, U.S. National Library of Medicine, <https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/26931197/>.

"Thyroid Function Tests." American Thyroid Association, <https://www.thyroid.org/thyroid-function-tests/>.

THE SILENT PARTNER

My First Year as a Laryngectomee

Chapter 10: The Best Medicine and the Birth of "The Silent Partner"

That old cliché about laughter being the best medicine might be considered trite, but it became my watchword during this travail and during other trying times in my life. Our minds need to heal every bit as much as our bodies need to heal. Not only does laughter burn calories, it tends to sweep the dust and cobwebs out of our attics.

Shelley and I celebrated fifty-three years of marriage last June. We both attribute the longevity of our love to humor – we still make each other laugh. I also think that humor is a very important component of a healthy attitude and that having a healthy attitude is of paramount importance when one is trying to heal. A good laugh goes a long way and has the additional benefit of absolutely no deleterious side effects. While my friends and family understand my attitude completely, some strangers may find my sense of humor somewhat macabre. An example of this is the submission that I made to a punning contest (pun-off) in Richard Lederer's column, 'Looking at Language', in a national magazine:

"Dear Dr. Lederer:

The difficulty I had breathing turned out to be throat cancer, which required an emergency tracheotomy followed later by a total laryngectomy, but you won't hear me complain. My laryngectomy may have also affected my memory, as when I try to call my cat, then say to myself: 'Man, you're dumb!' My laryngectomy is recent and I haven't mastered my electrolarynx yet, so I can't tell you how this will affect me in the future.

Signed, Aaron J. Wayne"

I don't think that he realized that I AM a laryngectomee because his response was to immediately reject my submission out of hand, replying that they "weren't puns".

I later had t-shirts made that said "TOTAL LARYNGECTOMY - but you won't hear me complain" and when I wear one of them to the hospital or doctor's office I get some good laughs. One doctor that I had never met saw me in the elevator and asked me where I had gotten the shirt and said that he thought it was a great idea.

Some other things that got a chuckle out of me or someone else:

Last July my wife brought in my birthday cake with two lit candles on it. I got a big laugh (and a gasp or two) when I stood up, yanked my plug off, bent over and blew out the candles!

I find the brand of trach tubes, HME's, and adhesive plates I use amusing, because Provox is Latin and means 'for voice' and are sold to people who no longer have one.

People's reactions are funny: More than once I've had someone react to my being mute as if I were deaf instead, by talking louder or using signs and miming while speaking to me. A nurse once stopped by just to visit and we carried on a brief conversation in writing on my clipboard, but he was just being cute. I loved it!

Another idea that I thought amusing was decorating my HME plug. After I had made a few, I wrote a 'Business Proposal' as a joke, but it is on its way to becoming a reality.. Now what I need is a partner in marketing to help me develop the idea and assist in finding sources in which to advertise.

Of course I realize that this will make me The Silent Partner.





Noirin's column was originally published in 2017. Given the times we're living in, it seemed timely to share it once again.

February - The Month of Purification by Noirin Sheahan

When the Romans added February to their calendar, they decreed it as a time of purification (februum). How great we feel after a good scrub in the shower! Or when we clear out all the junk stuffed into our cupboards and under the bed. And then there's inner purity - being cleansed of all the pettiness and irritation we pick up in life; coming back to innocence. Inner purity is, in my mind, linked to friendliness. Friendliness is like a bright light inside – it makes me feel clean and whole. But if I trample on friendship by snapping at someone in a moment of anger, I feel as though I've not only hurt them, but also let myself down, sullied myself. It's hard to turn on the bright light again, for fear of what dirt it will show.

How to clean up my inner world? The cold February weather purifies the earth, killing off the bugs. It's often tempting to think that by enduring a period of cold or hunger, I could somehow make up for my snappiness. Maybe that comes from being brought up as a Catholic, doing penance for my sins. Perhaps I could consider laryngectomy as penance for all my many sins? There's no doubt that we larys have endured a lot of hardship. The surgery itself was tough for many of us. And losing our

natural voices – that counts as a lot of suffering in my book. Especially for those of us who don't master our second voice so well or can only voice an unpleasant rasping monotone. And we female larys are doing double penance, having lost our soft feminine tone. If hardship could purify, shouldn't all larys be saintly?

Sadly, it doesn't work out like that. I still get impatient and frustrated and feel just as bad now when I snap at someone as I did previously.

So it's back to the question – how do I clean up my inner mess? Perhaps we all have our own solution. My spiritual scrubbing brush is mindfulness meditation. Think of how we purify water by channelling it through a filtration system. Gravity pulls it down through layers of stones then pebbles then sand forcing the fluid through ever smaller channels, filtering the waste into finer and finer constituents until microorganisms in the soil convert what was pollution to a rich nutrient that can fertilise our fields.

Just as the water running from our tap is pure, I start out my day and most activities with good intentions. But gradually I get stressed by life's many upsets. Just as water gets dirty as it washes the dishes, my goodwill is undermined by each bout of irritation, each flight of fancy with its hangover of disappointment. There are times when I'm ready to snap at whoever crosses my path.

Like waste water, I purify myself by channelling my energies so that they can settle. This is what happens when I take a break from busyness to

meditate. It starts out very simply: you know the old saying “take a few deep breaths” to get you through a crisis? That’s also how I start a meditation session - feeling my chest and stomach swelling and deflating every time I breathe in and out. Once I feel a bit more settled, I open my attention to notice how the rest of my body is feeling, what emotions are registering and what is the flavour of the thoughts crossing my mind. This is when impurities start to filter out.

Here’s an example: not too long ago I found myself cross and close to tears because both my neighbours had lost the spare sets of keys I had asked them to hold in case I locked myself out. After I’d got the new sets cut, I decided to take time to meditate before calling to my neighbours with these. After my first few breaths, I felt the anger and frustration boiling inside me with thoughts like “useless people ...you can’t trust any of them”. But negativity can’t fester while we’re feeling the breath ebb and flow. The physical sensations kept breaking into the thoughts, breaking them into less coherent snippets. With my thoughts all over the place, my attention got drawn to the emotional energy driving these – the turmoil boiling in my chest, clenching my jaws, the bitter sensations in my mouth, the sense of anger, helplessness and frustration.

Just as waste water gets drawn through finer channels as it seeps through the filtration bed,



my attention also got finer as time went on, breaking experience into ever smaller pieces. One moment I was indignant and my jaw tensed up, next my jaw relaxed but my throat felt raw and sore and I felt sorry for myself, next I noticed my breath pumping in my chest and self-pity changed to determination. What a confusing mixture I always find, once I peep inside my purification tank!

Experiencing the sorry mixture within always brings back my common sense. It reminds me that, while I can’t fix my neighbours, I can minimise the turmoil within myself. Just as soil microorganisms digest the dirt in waste water, I found myself digesting the unwelcome truth that self-righteous anger was doing no good, and in fact was causing me pain. Although I’d learned that lesson many times before, just remembering the words “don’t bother getting angry; it doesn’t help” isn’t enough to calm me for long. I have to take the time and trouble to learn the lesson again, from within. Feeling the pain caused by anger persuaded me to drop my self-righteous stance. My body’s need for ease overrode my ego’s need to be indignant.

And so my bout of rage transformed to a wry smile at this foolish waste of energy. With that I remembered all the sets of keys I myself had lost over the years. It wasn’t such a crime after all! The inner light of friendliness switched itself on again. I could see my dirty patches of frustration and irritation, but they were being viewed with an understanding smile and didn’t cause me any concern. It was as though water was running clean in my taps again, ready to pour out and do its share of work in the world. When I called into my neighbours with the new sets of keys I felt a genuine gratitude for their promise to look after these carefully in future.

I and my neighbourhood were cleaner and lighter for that bit of purification. My hope is that I’ll use this last month of winter well. As the cold weather purifies the soil, I hope I’ll join in the seasonal effort, purifying my negative emotions till the light of friendliness shines again.

Look for us in March!

