

ANN ARNECKE

AN ACCOUNT OF MY HEALTH PROBLEMS FOLLOWING OCCUPATIONAL EXPOSURE TO MERCURY

I was born in 1942 at the healthy weight of 8lb6oz and was checked over thoroughly, as my mother was born with a scoliosis and was worried I might have the same. All was well. My blood group is Rhesus negative A.

I developed childhood illnesses – measles, chicken-pox and rubella, but was otherwise fit apart from frequent bouts of tonsillitis. I was given the polio vaccine in the 50s and a BCG when I was 16 years of age.

Between 1959/1967 and 1970/1973 I worked as a dental nurse/receptionist, for a total of 7 years.

During this time I came into daily contact with Mercury. My introduction to mixing the amalgam filling material was in the palm of my hand. I then mixed it using a pestle and mortar. I then graduated to mixing the alloy with the Mercury in a finger stall. The fourth method was by dispensing the alloy and Mercury into a capsule which was then placed in a machine which vibrated at high speed. With all four methods I was required to tip the prepared amalgam into a double layer of gauze and wring out the excess Mercury with my hands. It was stipulated that I had to take the utmost care when cleaning up any spilled Mercury, which was placed in a receptacle for disposal. I was never advised about the importance of protecting myself against the inhalation of Mercury vapour, or its absorption through the skin. In addition I developed dental X-rays daily using chemical solutions, with no form of protection.

My dental treatment, up to and including that period, consisted of many amalgam fillings, several root fillings, 2 gold inlays and a gold cantilever bridge.

In 1963 I had an appendicectomy (it was found to be unnecessary and the pain possibly due to ovulation), but was otherwise a fit and healthy adult. My menstruation was regular and normal, but I suffered severe pain when ovulating.

In 1965 I was involved in a car accident where my head was trapped between the front and back seats. I was given an anti-tetanus injection due to facial cuts.

In 1967, I underwent a routine medical for a job in the Civil Service, where I was asked if I knew that I had a heart murmur. I didn't. I also had blood tests which revealed that I had a raised bilirubin level. In my mid-20s it was also noticed that I had arcus juvenilis. My heart murmur never gave me any trouble and I lived a full and active life.

In 1975 whilst taking part in a hypnotic stage show, I had a large metal hatpin

plunged into my lower, inner forearm. It went into a vein, causing internal bleeding. I was given an anti-tetanus injection in hospital and my arm was elevated in a sling for three weeks.

I started nursing training in 1976.

I married in 1978 and moved to Norway. In 1979 I became pregnant, but suffered an early spontaneous abortion. I became pregnant again within a couple of months, had a trouble-free pregnancy and gave birth to a healthy daughter in 1979. I was given an anti D vaccination following delivery, as my husband and I have incompatible blood groups.

In 1983 my husband was posted to Benin, West Africa for a year. We had short notice of our departure from Norway, which meant that we all had to have 6 vaccinations on one day, plus take Niviquine orally against Malaria. (I took Niviquine the whole year in Benin and for several weeks on my return.) I was vaccinated against, Typhoid, Yellow Fever, Hepatitis A, Polio, Tetanus and Cholera. During that year I also had an extra vaccination against Hepatitis A, Polio and Tetanus and 2 extra vaccinations against Cholera. I became very ill a few weeks after arriving in Benin, (30C and 98% humidity) having lost 7kilos in 2 weeks due to continuous diarrhoea. I had to stay in bed due to the most tremendous pains in my head which affected my balance. My muscles ached and I had no energy, for even the mildest of tasks. Throughout our stay I was given numerous courses of antibiotics for various different complaints. Some were given, just in case I contracted what my daughter, or my husband were suffering from. I had 9 courses of antibiotics in 10 months (Tetracycline, Penicillin, Flagyl, Amoxicillin, Chloramphenicol and Bactrin – some of those were used more than once). Since then I have been unable to take Tetracycline as I develop an allergic rash. I was also exposed to pesticide during that year, as we had to spray the ground floor of the house with it every night to rid it of cockroaches and other insects.

On my return to Norway I was examined by a Professor of Tropical medicine in Oslo, as I continued to have terrible headaches and constant fatigue. I underwent endless physical examinations, tests and a brain scan, (they were looking for a brain tumour), none of which gave answers to my ill-health. No answers to them meant that the problem was all in my mind, or my approaching menopause, or my marriage!! All of these were suggested and questions posed. I was as abandoned on returning to Norway, as I had been during my stay in Benin.

I also lived in Norway during and following the Chernobyl disaster in 1986. It was amazing to me at the time that the Norwegian authorities raised the acceptable Becquerel levels (level of radioactivity), following the disaster, as the radioactive cloud drifted over the north of the country. Game was very often on the menu in our house, as were fresh fish and wild berries.

I eventually gave up trying to be heard and understood by the medical profession, and went looking for answers myself. I concluded that from the pattern of illness in Benin, studying my symptoms and researching, I was more than likely suffering from ME. As the result of responding to an article in a Norwegian newspaper by a lady

with similar symptoms, I joined her in starting the Norwegian ME Association in 1987. During this time a group of us paid for an all-round practitioner from England – GP/homeopath/acupuncturist – to come over and test us for food intolerance. These tests revealed that I was extremely sensitive to many foodstuffs. I already knew that I couldn't drink any alcohol, as I would be ill for days. I began eliminating these foods from my diet. It was much more of a challenge to eliminate fumes, smells, newspapers and fabrics from my life, as they were also causing a problem.

My heart gradually began to give problems, making it even more difficult to exercise due to the constant exhaustion. My heartbeat was very irregular, but I pushed myself constantly, at times convinced that I could fight it off. I would feel reasonably well one day, do a bit too much and end up exhausted and very unwell for days. I was referred to my local hospital in Norway in 1988 for an ECG and stress test as my GP couldn't find the cause of my problem. I was unable to complete the test and was on the verge of collapse. The conclusion was that I was unfit, and that I should go to the gym to improve my fitness levels! I tried to explain that just fulfilling everyday tasks left me feeling as if I had run a marathon. I was abandoned once again, and felt that I wasn't being taken seriously.

In 1992 I presented at my GP's surgery with an abnormal/irregular heartbeat. An ECG showed no problem. The doctor noted that I had lost my father in 1990 and my mother in 1992 and concluded that my fatigue was probably due to anaemia. I have never shown to be anaemic, before or since.

We moved to the UK in 1997, with my health challenges still in tow. I paced myself and tried to lead as normal a life as possible. I was operated on in 1999 to remove a malignant transitional cell carcinoma from my bladder. I had an annual follow-up Cystoscopy for 10 years, the last one of which was in 2009. I was given the all clear.

We moved to the South coast. Once again, a new place presented another health risk. Our new house had to be disinfested three times to rid it of animal fleas from the previous occupants!

In 2000 I went to a chiropractor with lower back pain, which was affecting my hip and causing me to limp. This had been causing me a problem on and off for several years and my limp had been noticed on many occasions. An X-ray revealed a scoliosis in the lumbar region.

In 2005 I was admitted to A&E with an erratic and elevated heart rate. Several years, countless ECGs and scans later, I have a diagnosis of atrial fibrillation and a restrictive cardiomyopathy of unknown aetiology. I was prescribed Digoxin and Nebivolol for rate and rhythm control and Warfarin as an anticoagulant. I stopped taking Nebivolol as it caused asthma, which was discovered in 2010 when I was admitted to hospital with bi-lateral pneumonia. I have also halved my dose of Digoxin as my heart-rate and rhythm have not improved in the 6 years I've been taking it. I will not take any medication, unless life-saving, due to my extreme sensitivity.

In 2010, 5 years down the line from my cardiac diagnosis and 27 years on from my year in Benin, my health was no better and my prognosis increasingly more grim. A

chance phone-call to a friend who had also “survived” a term in the same West African country, but with serious chronic health issues, turned into my Eureka moment. I talked about my employment history as I felt that there could be a link between my years of exposure to Mercury and my current health problems, almost as if my stay in Benin had been the trigger factor. She excitedly referred me to a Norwegian website where I read with interest about Tordis Stig Klausen, a former dental nurse, who has successfully fought the Norwegian government over its use of Mercury in dentistry. This article gave me a link to www.mercurymadness.org in the UK which has been a lifesaver during a very bleak period. I cannot stress enough the help, support, advice and expertise I have been lucky enough to receive from Becky Dutton and her fantastic voluntary organisation.

On Becky’s recommendation I completed a health questionnaire, which was sent to Professor Vera Stejskal, a world renowned Immunotoxicologist. As a result, Professor Stejskal recommended I had a Melisa test (her own blood test), which revealed I was suffering from multiple metal allergies. Some of these were off the scale in terms of severity and higher levels than Professor Stejskal had ever seen. I was advised to have all the offending metals removed from my mouth. This would mean the removal of two bridges made of Palladium, 2 inlays and posts made of Gold (which also contain Nickel) and an amalgam filling (which contains Mercury). Due to my precarious health situation, this work needed to be carried out slowly and carefully to minimise an adverse reaction. Therefore strict protocols had to be in place for my safety during the removal of these metals.

Becky also suggested that I made an appointment with Dr. Shideh Pouria, an Environmental Doctor, before embarking on the dental work. I completed another questionnaire. Dr. Pouria examined me thoroughly in July 2010 and sent blood tests for analysis. Once again the results were astounding. M.E was confirmed. There was evidence of exposure to a variety of toxic metals. The presence of numerous xenobiotics, such as mercury complex, Bithionol (antiseptic agent), organophosphates, PBBs (from flame retardants) and propyl paraben were also evident. There was also heightened sensitivity to organic mercury (most likely from high dietary fish intake), inorganic mercury (probably from amalgam exposure), as well as antimony, gold, dichlorobenzene, a number of organophosphates (most likely due to the extensive exposure to pesticides) and PBBs. Dr. Pouria immediately started me on a regime of nutrients and supplements, based on her findings. These began to have a remarkable effect in a relatively short space of time. I had to abandon the subcutaneous B12 injections as I reacted to the nickel coating on the stainless steel syringe needles, and now take this orally.

I had complained to my dentist of problems along the gum margin abutting one of my bridges – my gum was an unhealthy colour and puffy despite my excellent oral hygiene - and I also had a recurring sore patch on my palate on the same side. He felt that it could be lichen planus, but saw no problem with the gingivae. He referred me to a Maxillo-facial specialist who treated me as if I was a time waster. Again, on Becky’s advice I sought advice from Dr John Ahearne – a holistic dentist. He carried out a thorough examination noted that I did indeed have lichenoid deposits along the gum margin and set out a plan of removal and replacement of all the offending

dental materials. My safety and well-being were prioritised throughout, each step explained, making an arduous procedure much easier by his kindness and professionalism. All metal removal was completed, with very little reaction. My fillings were replaced with a composite material and Dr. Ahearne finally constructed replacement Zirconium/Ceramic bridges for me in May 2011. The improvement in my gingival health is remarkable, with no redness, soreness or puffiness. I knew there was something wrong!

My health has improved immeasurably since July 2010, when multiple blood tests revealed that many of my symptoms may have been explicable through what have been dubbed, "environmental diseases". The results of follow-up tests in Feb 2011 and Dec 2011 are astonishing, and show unbelievable improvements following metal removal and a regime of nutrient supplements

Although my energy levels can't be compared and the test results are amazing, I have still a long way to go. This was brought home to me in Sept 2011 when I had a very bad reaction to food/inhalant sensitivity tests, the effects of which I am still battling. Slowly has to be the key word in any testing or treatment for those of us suffering the effects of long term toxic exposure. Before I embarked on this diagnostic journey and treatment plan, I was in a constant state of exhaustion, with my heart rhythm all over the place and several episodes of near-syncopy every day. I hardly have any such episodes these days, and my cardiac situation is no worse than it was 2 years ago. I lived in daily fear of my deteriorating health, even with my positive attitude and the help of acupuncture and weekly healing sessions. I had thrown everything at it, in an attempt to get better. Staying positive and the healing have helped enormously in my quest to find strategies to help me deal with my worsening situation. It's an understatement to say that I am getting my life back, slowly but surely. It is strange to think that I don't remember how it is to feel well, and I'm a bit nervous to shout too loudly. I am already a different person, but my treatment is on-going and understandably slow, due to my long-term problems. I hope my quality of life will improve further as my body rids itself of the toxins it has stored. I am already well on the way to being my old self again, thanks to the team of experts I have around me.

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