

Mommy

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I recently had my pacemaker upgraded at the Mazankowski Heart Institute. The care was excellent, and I am in total awe of the skill it takes to wend a wire through a vein all the way from my shoulder to the inside of my left ventricle heart wall. My 2 wire pacemaker/ICD was replaced by a 3 wire pacemaker/ICD. This cardiac resynchronization therapy is designed to optimize the pumping power of a failing heart. It is a day procedure and I had a lot of time to observe the comings and goings of my fellow patients.

First of all, most of the patients seemed to be older men, which may be an indication that we should have done a better job managing our diets, exercise plans, and blood pressures in years gone by. Secondly, practically all the men coming on to the day unit (including me) were accompanied by a woman. These women helped the patients change into the skimpy little hospital gowns and ensured that the medical facts divulged to the attending staff were accurate (e.g. How far can you walk without stopping? Husband answer: 16 blocks, uphill all the way. Wife answer: 1 block although he rarely leaves his television chair. How tall are you? Husband answer: 6 feet, 4 inches. Wife answer: 5 feet, 8 inches. How do you feel? Husband answer: just fine. Wife answer: He is as physically active as a toadstool but the toadstool has better colour)

Post procedure, these same women help their husbands get dressed, listen carefully to instructions on follow up care plans, and walk their dazed and only slightly wounded men out to the hospital car park and home.

Now don't get me wrong. This unit at the Mazankowski Heart Institute can be a scary place for people who worry about having their hearts blasted by electricity (cardio versions); arteries reamed out (angioplasties) or wires poked inside your heart (pacemaker and ICD implantation). I, on the other hand, have been a frequent customer, which has given me a total faith in the amazing skills of the electrophysiology team. The only procedure that I have yet to experience is a battery change to my pacemaker/ICD.(I have visions of physicians down on their hands and knees chasing AA batteries rolling across the procedure room floor but this may just be a reflection of my own infamous battery changing skills.)

My point is that when the chips are down and their backs are to the wall, most men really need their mommies. If you don't have a mommy then a wife or even a daughter will do. You see this all the time. Politicians caught embezzling public funds, using crack cocaine or having sex with

their pet monkey make public statements of regret with their wives standing next to them on the news conference platform. One of our longest serving Prime Ministers, William Lyon Mackenzie King, talked daily to his dead mother via crystal ball before making any big decisions. Finally, it is reported that the final word spoken by most jet pilots as their damaged planes hurtle toward the ground is, "Mommy!".

Why are men so dependent upon women? It may be that women are just plain stronger, and can endure painful situations better because of female life experiences such as childbirth, ballet classes, and wax treatments for hairy legs. It could also be due to the fact that girls and women tend to be much more socially active than boys and men, and often have better communication skills - particularly when it comes to explaining a difficult or highly sensitive situations (e.g. How many blocks can you walk?).

My best guess is that women, particularly mothers, are really good at offering cuddles and reassurance to little boys before sending them back out into the world. My own mother always made things better when I got into trouble - cuts and bruises, fights at school or bad report cards. When I was sick, she gave me ginger ale and slathered my throat with Vaporub, then tied a sock around it with a little dab under my nose for good luck. Come to think of it, I still seek moral support from my 94 year old mom even though it is mostly by telephone as she lives 900 kilometres away. So it is a very natural and rational response for a man to want his mommy when faced with a scary or difficult life decision. If his mom isn't available then a man needs the next best "mommy stand in" such as a wife or daughter. I did think about flying my mom to Edmonton to be with me during the procedure, but realized that it might make all the other patients jealous, and I wasn't certain if my cubicle would be big enough for her walker. Still, my wife, Audrey, did a pretty good job, and is waiting hand and foot on me while I recover. However, she keeps muttering about how I will eventually have to carry my own weight, that she is my partner and not my servant, and that my whiny, pathetic wounded patient voice is getting on her nerves.

Thank goodness that I married such a good woman. I wonder if she will hold my hand and feed me grapes when I tackle my 2015 income tax filing?