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September 21
018, VOL 32
O 38 R22.00
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'MY HARDEST SURGERY'

A SURGEON speaks out about what goes on in theatre.

TV shows like *The Good Doctor*, *Monday Mornings*, *Scrubs* and *House* give us a glamourised idea of the medical profession, but what really goes on in the operating room? And what goes through a surgeon's mind while they're wielding the scalpel? people magazine spoke to Dr Jason Crane, an orthopaedic surgeon from Cape Town Mediclinic, about what goes on behind the scenes and what he considers to be one of his most complex surgeries to date.

"The patient was in his early 50s and was complaining of severe pain in both his ankles, which had resulted in him being in a wheelchair for the last two years," Dr Crane tells us, adding that the patient had been in a car accident in his 30s, which had done severe damage to both of his ankles.

"At one stage they thought they might have to amputate his left lower leg due to sepsis, but in the end they managed to save both legs."

Unfortunately, Dr Crane says that both the patient's ankle joints had sustained severe injuries to the cartilage and had worn down over time, 'until raw bone was rubbing against raw bone'. "When I saw him he had severe traumatic osteoarthritis of both his ankles."

Dr Crane describes the patient's situation as being past all conservative measures by that point, which left him only two options: "To either fuse both his ankles or to undergo a bilateral [both] ankle replacement."

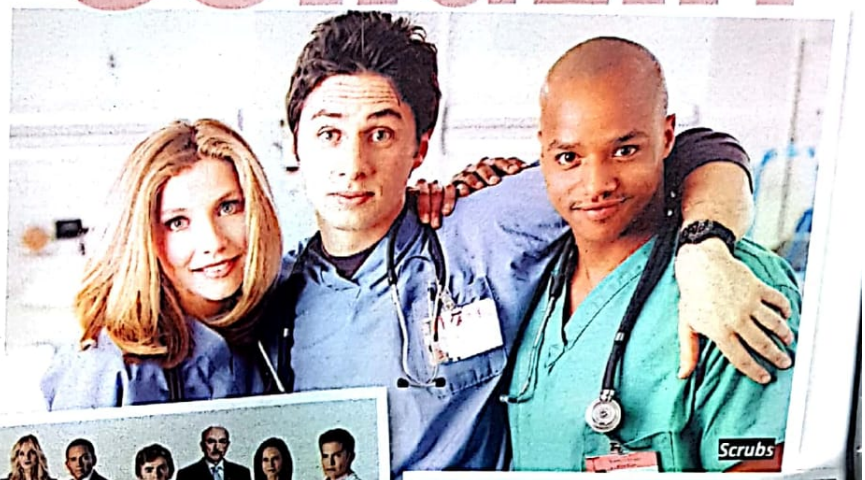
To add to the complexity of the patient's case, Dr Crane says the patient could not afford to take time off and do each ankle separately – it had to be done in one complex procedure. "The risks included wound problems, sepsis, breaking of the bones and failure of the ankle replacement to properly bond to the bones," explains the doctor, who added that it could even end in amputation if the surgery were to go wrong.

"After much deliberation and weighing up the pros and cons, we decided to go ahead with a simultaneous bilateral ankle replacement and accept the risks," says Dr Crane.

How is the patient doing today?

"I still keep in contact with him, and even after the few years that have passed he is still working and walking without much pain or discomfort."

SOURCE: ALEX J. COYNE



Behind The Curtain: Surgeons, Scalpels & Soundtracks

SURGEONS are under a lot of pressure to perform under the lights of the operating room – we quizzed Dr Crane about some more details surrounding his job.

Dr Crane says that once he settles down and makes the first skin incision, he relaxes and focuses on each individual step that needs to be performed.

"I know that if I look too far ahead and see how much work there is to do in such short time, and how complex each element of the surgery is, it can become overwhelming," he explains.

"When I finally put in a last stitch and apply the plaster cast I then allow myself to contemplate the magnitude of surgery and how his life will hopefully change for the positive."

Dr Crane's secrets to a successful surgery involve many factors.

"Starting with the selection of the patient, making sure that they are at their physical best, that you've made the correct diagnoses and that you've chosen the correct treatment option," he says, adding it's also vital to make sure the patient is properly informed and aware of all the risks – and what aftercare will require of them.

"Then, the most important step is to have planned out each step meticulously in your mind before you even start cutting, also taking into consideration any complications that might occur and how to deal them if they do."

Dr Crane says that he seldom gets irritated in the operating room.

"When I do, it's usually when my general practitioner assistant, who has been with me for many years asks, 'Why are we doing it like this?' when we've done it exactly the same way for the last eight years."

And something we had to know: do doctors really have a playlist going while they are operating? "Music is important to me in theatre," says Dr Crane. "It relaxes me and focuses me. Just as before an operation when I plan out each step, I also often plan out a music playlist. I find soft, uplifting house music in the background keeps my team fresh, focused and happy."