Why I Choose to Wear a Medical ID for MS

by DEBRA ROBERT

How a Medical ID for MS Can Be Helpful

It was a hot day in south eastern Florida, and I thought twice about being outside. I was recently diagnosed with multiple sclerosis (MS) and had been warned that my energy would drain and my symptoms would flare-up with extended heat exposure. However, it was gorgeous out, and my hammock was mostly in the shade at that time of day. Soon, the gentle rocking motion and light breeze lulled me into an unexpected, deep sleep.

I abruptly woke up to the sun blazing over me in its full intensity, with a severe headache and chills. Walking back toward the house became difficult as my chest tightened and waves of nausea took over. When I began vomiting uncontrollably, I started to panic.

Soon, I was flat on the bathroom floor, trying to sip whatever air I could into my tightened lungs. My heart was pounding unrecognizably, and my body was burning up as though being microwaved from the inside. With blurred vision and a searing pain in my head, I called 911. I was alone, covered in tears and drool as I dragged myself across the floor toward the front door.

What Happened Next Was Frustrating... I Felt Helpless

I don’t remember much after the EMTs arrived except that they asked a lot of questions. One of my issues due to MS is diminished speech. At times, I cannot find words in my brain and speech gets stuck in the back of my throat. The heat and stress of the moment exacerbated these symptoms.

It was impossible for me to inform the medics about my having MS or about my severe allergy to latex. I became more frightened, making the situation even worse. All my thoughts went to needing Randy, my husband, and caregiver. However, I had no way to tell the ER crew how to contact him. I felt frustrated and helpless not being able to speak for myself.

Falling asleep outside in the middle of the day, in the Florida heat no less, was an MS-rookie mistake. Randy and I had a long, honest talk about steps we might take to avoid this kind of situation in the future. Admittedly, I have a bit of a rebellious streak. I needed to think more before I act on things that I used to take for granted as a healthy person. There would be missteps along the way, not to mention MS will always make sure that I am put back in my place on no uncertain terms.

We assessed how to better adapt to our new normal. Part of the discussion was about being better prepared for emergencies.

I’d never considered wearing a medical ID for MS. MS is not an ‘immediate emergency’ disease as it is for people with diabetes or cardiac conditions; those I always related to wearing IDs. I had trepidations about wearing both a permanent reminder and symbol to everyone that I had an incurable disease. When asked about it, what would I say? Would I feel more self-conscious?

My Classic Silver Mingle medical ID bracelet.

'I Felt Empowered with a New Sense of Security'

I decided to give wearing one a try. We decided to get a medical alert bracelet from American Medical ID and have engraved what we most wanted first responders to know; my name, multiple sclerosis, latex allergy and Randy's cell number for ICE (In Case of Emergency). I chose a style that went best with my daily jewelry and waited for it to arrive.

Read more tips on what to engrave on a medical ID for multiple sclerosis

It is hard to explain why, but when I put my ID on for the first time, I knew instantly I had made the right decision. Aside from the fact that it was gorgeous, I felt empowered with a new sense of security.

I thought about that day on the floor and when the medics came in. Had I been wearing my ID bracelet then, the EMT's would have known instantly about my condition and Randy would have been contacted right away. What's more, my symptoms would not have worsened from the stress and fear of not being able to communicate.

As for feeling self-conscious, most friends had no idea my attractive, new bracelet was actually a medical ID. When I explain my choice to wear it, it often leads to discussions about their own conditions or those of their loved ones. Many times, I hear, 'I never thought of wearing one for that,' and in this, perhaps in a small way, I have helped another down the road.

I never expected I'd feel this great about wearing a medical ID for MS. Now that I do, I cannot imagine ever being without one. I am more in charge of my destiny with it than without it. I also feel better about the fact that it takes the guesswork away from first responders so that they may do their job safely and efficiently.

When I sat to write this article, I spoke to Randy about his thoughts on my medical ID. He explained as a caregiver, and it gives him peace of mind that my conditions would be known immediately and that he would be notified without my ever needing to ask. He keeps this in the back of his mind, whenever he is away from me.

My Medical ID 'Will Do the Talking for Me'

I want to think my bracelet will never come in handy. But life takes many twists and turns, and with my disease, there are bound to be falls, overheating, and other complications I have not yet even considered. My MS is progressing. I don't know what the future holds. But each day, I live my life as authentically and fully as I can. Right now, I am looking at a few beaded bracelets, also a purple sport band for my ID, to go with my rebellious purple hair.

I know there will be times where my ability to communicate becomes impossible. The best thing about wearing my medical ID is, I no longer have that as fear. It will do the talking for me.