



## **Reflections of a River Rat:** Handle men with kid gloves for the annual prostate exam

My worries began in the afternoon once the courtesy call from the doctor's office came. The secretary reminded me this would not be a telemedicine visit. I had to come to the office for my annual physical exam.

By the time I met Mary for dinner, I had been tweaking. My doctor, Gary Glazer, had retired in June, and I was reassigned to another doctor in the practice, Sylvia Park. I had met her over Zoom to discuss Covid exposure in light of age-onset diabetes and heart concerns, and I appreciated her aggressive, no-nonsense approach.

"I gotta tell you, I am not looking forward to this doctor's appointment tomorrow," said the husband of 38 years. "It's a full physical. She may want to

check my prostate, and I've never dropped my pants in front of a woman before except you."

I continued.

"Hey, I'm not only talking about the vertical smile. What if she wants me to turn my head and cough?"



**"Frankly, I don't enjoy prostate exams any more than you do!"**

Mary was unfazed. "If she's seen one, she's seen them all."

Perhaps I was making more out of this than I should have. It's not like I haven't mooned a few people in my day. There were too many lunar events with the Buff State rugby team. Last year, two guys were relentlessly making fun of my lousy shooting at the 6 a.m. basketball game when I retaliated with a loosening of my gym trunks. It's a sophomoric guy thing.

I recall the conversation I had five years ago with my male

doctor. I knew the prostate exam was coming when I blurted sarcastically, "Oh boy, my favorite part of the exam."

With the trust built up from a 30-year relationship, he deadpanned: "Well, it's no picnic for me."

My uneasiness was rooted in the fact that I still retain a modicum of shame. My mother, Eileen, the registered nurse who spent 47 years in labor and delivery at A. Barton Hepburn Hospital, marched into my hospital room as a 13-year-old to inspect my stitches from a hernia operation. She lifted the sheets before I could even make a fig leaf with my hands.

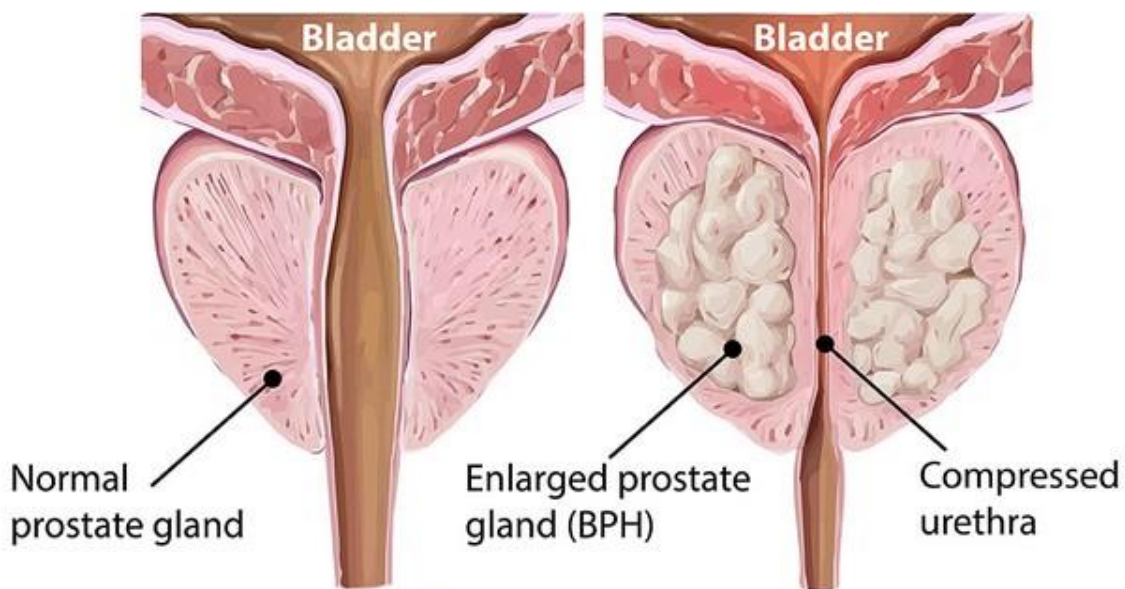
“Mom, you can’t look down there!” I protested.

“Look mister, who do you think bathed you for the first 5 years of your life? I can do whatever I want.”

Case closed. But I retained my sense of privacy.

As a father of two girls, I respect privacy. When I drive my adult daughter, Katie, to her annual physical, I remain in the examination room only long enough to help with medical history questions. Kathleen stutters sometimes in formal situations, or she gives inaccurate answers. I’ll never forget the time she misinterpreted the question when her doctor asked if she was sexually active. She smiled, waved her hand at the doctor, and said, “Why of course!”

I didn’t know whether to bellylaugh or worry. I slinked off to the waiting room.



An enlarged prostate gland (BPH) restricts the flow of urine through the urethra.

All this led to my annual physical and useful talk with Dr. Park about A1C, alcohol consumptions and daily glucose testing. The longer we talked, the surer I had become that I would avoid the exam. Then she announced she had one last duty.

I was told to bend over the exam table and drop my pants. She was as pragmatic and dispassionate as that childhood nurse and mother whose directions I followed.

My discomfort lasted all of two seconds. “OK, you’re good to go. There’s nothing there.”

“Hey doc,” said the columnist, “I gotta ask – do men fuss a lot when you say you’re giving the exam? You must have horror stories.”

“Actually, most men are relieved,” she said, “because female doctors have smaller fingers.”

My buddy Dan had the best line. He recalled how two lifelong friends met up at the doctor’s office. One was the doctor and one the patient.

Said the patient: “Did you ever imagine during our friendship that you’d be sticking your finger in me?”

Retorted the doc: “Nope. Did you ever imagine you’d be paying me to do that?”

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