

A Selection of Comments from Polio Survivors Drawn from the Australian Polio Register

The following selection of quotations are from polio survivors who have included their details on the Australian Polio Register. They reflect not only the resilience of polio survivors but also their tendency to minimise the impact of both polio and its late effects on their lives, and “just get on with it”.

Although it may not be revealed in the brief quotations below, the Register records that a number of polio survivors contracted polio while nursing polio patients in hospitals, or as doctors attending polio patients. A number also contracted polio twice.

I am in good health except for my arthritic pain in my spine, neck, shoulders, legs. I do become tired easily but put this down to being overweight. Exercising is a bit of a problem when my joints ache. I also have a balance problem which causes me to have falls from time to time. Apart from this I am fine.

I would like to share the difficulties of this syndrome with others - what medical assistance is there? Is there a large range of symptoms? I have battled for years with medicos telling me there is nothing wrong with me even though I have such a variety of ailments!

I can't remember some details of contracting polio because the circumstances were so traumatic. My mother was pregnant with my sister who later contracted polio too. My polio history was, to some extent, intertwined with hers, and the separate details are difficult. I was not vaccinated in 1953 (Ireland had a major polio epidemic in 1954) but the health system tended to keep this quiet. My sister's was separate, being about 11 years after mine and she was vaccinated. All polio records were destroyed in Ireland in the 1960s and it is only in research like that of Patrick Cockburn in his autobiography "The Broken Boy" that details of the epidemic and how it was dealt by the Irish Health system come to light.

Would like to know the name of a good doctor/orthopaedic surgeon specialising in polio.

Polio affected my hips. Shortly after discharge from hospital I was selected for National Service Training (1952). No exemptions were made for my recent hospital experience when selected for National Service. Consideration was given when the Army doctors discovered my weaknesses. I completed my service in 1954. I have experienced hip and legs discomfort ever since my release from hospital. During the past few years the pain has increased, making exercise and walking difficult and painful. I have not received satisfactory response from the medical profession that I maintain this problem could stem from my polio experience.

I only became aware of my polio in my mid twenties [around 1975]. I was informed by GPs that it was a reaction to the polio vaccine I had taken 3 or 4 years previously. This year [2011] I started having late effect problems with my polio and when I saw Dr S he believed that I actually contracted polio as an infant (in Europe).

I am unsure about the age/year I contracted polio but it was around 1952-53. Recently I put in an FOI request to the B Hospital seeking details of dates of admission/discharge, treatment etc, but the outcome was that "all hospital records from the 1950's have been destroyed". I am still pursuing the matter with the hospital and hope that there is some remaining information which is accessible.

I have just experienced an extremely severe reaction to anaesthetic and morphine while having an operation. All Doctors should be made aware of this problem. I spoke to all involved about this but it fell on deaf ears.

I am trying to locate the best place/clinic to get an assessment regarding post polio.

Kept from school until May 1938, neighbours were told I was mentally retarded, complaints of pain etc were treated as attention seeking and punished, such attitudes were not unique, a doctor's fee was a day's wages. I got away, was picked up by police and returned to school. But no treatment.

My case was not reported and I was not hospitalised (hospitals were full). The family doctor visited me at home several times a day and manipulated my arms and legs (physiotherapy really).

When I was admitted into hospital I didn't have polio. One child had polio and gave it to the whole ward and three nurses as well.

I had no idea that there was support groups out there. I have led a very active and fulfilled life until recently when it's all gone downhill.

When I had polio I was nursed at home as were many kids in our area as the hospital was full to the rafters and my two doctors took daily turns initially to visit. My parents believed in Sister Kenny's treatment and although my right leg was mainly affected I was able to live a normal healthy active life thanks to this treatment. LEOP first struck after a bout of encephalitis in 1998 diagnosed as "Chronic Fatigue".

As a young physiotherapist I had worked with new polio patients since graduation, from 1951 to 1954 in Melbourne and Sydney. When I caught polio in 1957, my two daughters did not, having been vaccinated.

No Doctors seem to know anything about post polio. For many years I was completely free, but in the last 10 years my leg muscles have got progressively weaker. Have trouble walking much at all now.

In the preceding 6-8 years I have experienced marked weakness of my legs - the left has noticeable atrophy. Prior to this I was capable of and enjoyed moderate exercise/activities. Mobility/balance is now a major concern for me. I have adapted my home and life-style to accommodate these issues. Like countless others, now my future well-being/independence is rarely far from my mind. Recently a colleague asked me: "What was it like growing up disabled?". Taken aback, my response was: "My mother and my family never considered this to be the case - so neither did I ...". Mother's saying was: "When you smile that's what people remember first ...". My upbringing taught me that I wasn't a disability and that the abilities given to me needed to be used - and I continue to put these skills to effective use.

Thank you for this website, I no longer feel alone or different. Thank You All.