

As I'm getting ready to leave Chicago this is my advice...

I wrote in my journal on the first day in the hospital that I wanted to meet wonderful people, and that is what I did while in Chicago. Don't worry about which day you'll be released; wake up each morning and enjoy the view from your room, the people you meet along the way and know that in the end you'll be free of MS.

I was by myself for over two weeks, but didn't feel alone because there was always someone coming in or out of the room. I called my family or friends when I had a free minute. The staff is wonderful and the only thing that is required is to follow their instructions and rest assured they will let you know when it is time to stand up, sit down and when to swallow each pill. Your job is to sit tight and enjoy the journey and know that this will be over before you know it. The care I received during my stay at the hospital was phenomenal, you are treated very well. You might say it is a "whirlwind" because it goes by so fast

Take time to visit with the hospital staff and learn about how they live in this incredible city. I learned about the real fears of living on the south side, the dreams they have for their children. What it's like to live near Wrigley Field, the opportunities that they are providing for the children. What brought them to Chicago; how far is their commute, where do they park to go to work and if it's dark when they go to work and are they afraid for their safety. I asked a lot of questions and just enjoyed each person and their story. I am leaving Chicago with some amazing new friends.

The hardest day for me was the day after the stem cell transplant Day +1 and now looking back I can't even remember why.

My biggest aha... the hospital volunteers will pick-up Starbucks, and run errands if needed. I didn't realize that the volunteers would run to Starbucks until my second to last day.

Everyday I got up early, straightened my bed and tidied up my room. After I did this I ordered my breakfast and then showered. By the time I showered and was dressed, my breakfast was delivered (one hour for meal delivery). Dr. Burt's team is usually in by 9 am and I wanted to be ready when they arrived.

Walk and get out of the room, it may seem like a hassle to put on the mask, gloves and gown, but once you go you'll feel so much better. I brought my Fitbit and walked 3 or 4 times a day, I walked 10,000 steps on two days and then the other days my goal was 5,000. It gets to be momentous going in a circle, but it felt so good to have accomplished a goal. I walked, as early as 6 am and as late as 9 pm, it doesn't matter what time you venture out.

Take a pair of underwear (and extras) for everyday unless someone will be doing your wash. I was by myself and was glad I didn't need to worry about how to get my wash done.

During the day I dressed in short sleeve t-shirts (port is in arm), comfy pants and flip-flops

Take a plastic bag for your dirty clothes.

I bought a 5 foot USB cable for my iPhone... glad I did, as I was able to plug it in under the bed and it was always within reach.

Don't let constipation go on too long; tell the nurses.

I asked the nurse about getting my stem cells blessed and she made arrangements for a minister to be present when I received my new stem cells.

Things I wish I had brought... my own pillow, some snacks, and a large water bottle for everyday. A pair of binoculars would have been fun to look out on the lake or streets.

Things I could have left home... my computer and unfortunately I never had time to color in the adult coloring books.

I ordered 6 things on the menu, because I might only like one. Try the Kiefer frozen yogurt very refreshing and good.

Ask the nurse for cranberry juice, it is refreshing and great for swallowing the bigger pills.

Ask the nurses for popsicles, sometimes when you don't feel like eating they hit the spot.

The steroids caused me to have lots of water retention and it was frustrating, but it did finally dissipate.

I never closed the blinds in my room, the light was inviting and the city views were amazing.

I started copying and pasting my text updates - it gets to be overwhelming when you have lots of people texting and asking the same questions.

I had enough masks to get home on the airplane, sanitizing wipes for the plane and I bought a very small can of Lysol to spray the light switches and television remote at the hotel after leaving the hospital (easier than wipes).

At the airport I asked for early boarding, so that I was able to wipe everything down prior to the passengers being seated.

The days can get long, so bring a couple if good books to read.