

I'm Frank King, a Suicide Prevention Speaker and Comedian, and I live in Springfield, OR.

With apologies to Charles Dickens, it was the best of care, it was the worst of care. Best of care for my physical maladies, and the worst of care for my mental maladies.

On the physical side, I've had two aortic valve replacements, a double bypass, a heart attack, and two stents. On the mental side, I live with Major Depressive Disorder and Chronic Suicidal Ideation.

In 2012 I was working as a comedian on a cruise ship, you remember those, and I had a bout of angina. My suspicion was that the aortic valve replacement that I had gotten in 1995 was failing. It was a human tissue valve, it had miles on it when I got it, and after 17 years, it needed replacing.

When I got home, I called my primary care doc who worked me in immediately, took one listen to my heart, deemed what he heard "life threatening," and sent me directly to the hospital, do not pass go, do not collect \$200, for testing.

At the hospital I had an echocardiogram, declared it was "life threatening," and I was immediately scheduled for surgery. Shortly thereafter I had an aortic valve replacement, and they tossed in a double bypass for good measure, as it was two-fer Tuesday.

Spoiler alert, I survived the surgery.

Fast forward to late fall of 2016. As I said upfront, I live with two mental illnesses, major depressive disorder which is relatively common, and chronic suicidal ideation, also a "life threatening" condition, which is a bit rarer. For me, and others in my tribe, the option of suicide is always on the menu, as a solution for large and small.

Up until 2016 I had been self-medicating my depression and thoughts of suicide with over-the-counter supplements and holding my own, and then came the November election.

I began to slide into a deep depression and couldn't pull myself out of a literal death spiral. Coincidentally, I had an appointment with my primary care doc, and decided that it was time to ask him for some help with this "life threatening" condition. Often, those of us with mental health issues are forced to advocate for ourselves to get the care we need. I've never had to do that with my physical illnesses.

I told him that I'd like him to prescribe an antidepressant. He asked why? It was the first time he'd inquired about my mental health in the four years I had been coming to see him, even though he was supposed to ask me the two gateway questions, and seven follow-up questions on the mental health inventory PHQ-9 questionnaire, every time I saw him.

I told him of my depression and suicidality, and that if something didn't change, and soon, I was going to kill myself. He had his PA call in a prescription for an antidepressant, Wellbutrin.

Patted me on the head, and sent me on my way. No follow-up appointment, no referral to a therapist, not even the standard question asked of anyone who is having suicidal thoughts, "do you have a plan."

As a suicide prevention speaker and trainer, and mental health advocate, I found his bedside manner to be borderline malpractice.

I stopped at my local Walgreens. Because it was the first time I was to take Wellbutrin, I was told that I had to have a consultation with the pharmacist, Paul. Paul took one look at the bottle and what was in it, and immediately became concerned.

How was I doing? Was I struggling? Was I seeing a therapist? Would I please keep he and his team apprised of my mental state, and reach out if I found myself in crisis? All questions that my primary care doc should have asked.

Two weeks on Wellbutrin, and my wife noticed a marked improvement in my mental state. At three weeks, I did. I had a thought unbidden that I hadn't had since high school, "I like my life!" My second thought was why did I wait so dang long to begin taking antidepressants!"

Oh, my third thought was, "I don't care who is in the White House.