



Teachers, Please Prioritize Your Health

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Fibroids were one of the many reasons that I had a hysterectomy December 2020 (yes, during a pandemic). I had removed them multiple times, and one got as big as a golf ball. I also had my endometriosis removed multiple times. I was on continuous birth control for years as well as metformin for polycystic ovarian syndrome (PCOS). Then, I had an ablation where the doctor essentially fried the lining inside my uterus. Despite that, four years later, I had a hysterectomy. When Amber Ruffin shared, her struggle with fibroids which led to an eventual hysterectomy in [Essence magazine](#), her story resonated with me.

In the article, she said, "I'm not exaggerating when I say a third of the people I talked to had had it. Many had surgery to get them removed. But I knew almost nothing about fibroids when I got them, which is odd because it's so common." After sharing that I had fibroids, I learned that many people I knew, especially Black women, had fibroids. No one talked about it, and it's a shame. Fibroids and the other conditions have not only caused infertility issues, but also impacted the quality of my life.

Because many people I knew didn't talk about this, I sought out medical professionals to help me understand my body. Back in college, I was told that I might need a hysterectomy one day, but the doctor told me that my doctor back home probably wouldn't do it on someone my age who hadn't gotten married or had kids. I think it's wrong that women aren't trusted to make a decision like having a hysterectomy. Do guys who are young, single, and not fathers get told they can't have a vasectomy?

Why am I sharing this information? I lived in pain for years because I never felt like I could take time off to take care of myself. When I finally had my hysterectomy, I learned that one of my fallopian tubes was twisted and wrapped around my uterus in addition to having a uterus full of fibroids again. My doctor took a picture so I could see it wrapped around, and it is one of the most disturbing images I have seen. My symptoms were the worst during the five years I was in Wayne Township. I left the district for four years and went back for a year. That 6th year is when I should have had the hysterectomy. Instead, I had it during the second year of the next job I took. My life would have been so much better if had the surgery years prior instead of during a pandemic.

Even when I did prioritize my health and had the surgery, it was made clear to me how inconvenient it was for me to have surgery before winter break and not return until sometime after winter break. I was strongly encouraged to do it over the summer, but I said no. I was told I was an inconsiderate administrator for choosing to prioritize my health. I'm glad I ignored the pushback because my actions impacted a teacher, I supervised who had needed surgery for years, and not having surgery had greatly impacted the teacher's life. I went through hell for approving the time off. Let me tell y'all how deep this was. My principal tried to go around me and take action to discourage the person. After the surgery, the teacher thanked me.

If a teacher died tomorrow, there will be a body covering that class. Teachers must prioritize their health and pushback on administrators who make it difficult or discourage teachers to do so. I am not only talking about physical health; mental health must be prioritized, too.

Three weeks after my hysterectomy, my dad died suddenly from a heart attack. If I thought the lack of support I received when I had a hysterectomy was bad, I learned it could get worse after my dad died. My principal told me to get over my dad's death or quit. I knew I wasn't going to return, but I was going to resign after I collected every single coin of that contract. Once my principal realized that was the reason I hadn't resigned, she talked to HR and arranged to have my contract paid out without me having to work the remaining days after the school year ended since school administrator contracts are typically 12 months long instead of like teachers who have 10 month contracts. Honestly, that did not bother me at all. I was sick and tired of doing my job and her job. When she said she wanted the old Shawnta back, what she meant is that she wanted the Shawnta back that cared more about being seen as a great employee by any means necessary even if that meant doing work that was not work, I should have never been doing.

Learn from me. Do not learn the hard way as a I did. Teaching is not worth a person's wellbeing. If a school administrator cannot figure out how to create a culture where teachers feel safe to care for themselves, then teachers will leave and find a school administrator who can treat them better.