REALHEALTH™

Half Full

January 28, 2014 By Nicole Lemelle

Love them or hate them, pharmaceutical drug companies are here to stay. The odds are that if a cure is ever found, it will be discovered by a drug company.

For that reason, I decided to take an offer to attend the first MS Patient Blogger Advisory Board meeting hosted by Novartis Pharmaceuticals Corporation. I was surprised they asked me to attend because I no longer take their MS drug Gilenya, but I was very honored they did. They paid for me to go to Morristown, New Jersey and be a part of the advisory board. Don't worry, I'm not going to try and sell you on the benefits of using Novartis products. As a matter of fact, to my surprise Novartis really didn't talk too much about their company's products. The focal point of the event was the accuracy of their marketing in meeting the evolving needs of MS patients.

Along with a group of eight other MS bloggers, I was asked for input on communication needs within the MS online community and feedback on some of Novartis' social media channels. It was interesting to find out how drug companies work as far as marketing and the government guidelines they have to follow.

As far as the trip itself, it turned out pretty good considering that traveling can be a challenge for me. My husband, Tommy, and I went from 55 degree New Orleans to 7 degree Morristown, New Jersey. Yikes! We flew United Airlines, so that meant I had to use an aisle chair to board the airplane. It wasn't so bad this time. I think that's because I know what to expect now. Once we got to New Jersey, I was nervous because there was snow everywhere, which was a problem because I was using my scooter and it isn't waterproof. So I was happy to find out that all the events would be happening inside our hotel and we would not have to venture out into the snow that much. The hotel was also connected to a mall so that made me really happy.

The best thing about the event was that I got a chance to give my input to a company that is searching to find a cure for MS. The only way to change what we think is wrong with pharmaceutical companies is to engage with them and if they initiate the conversation that means they may actually listen to the suggestions. I believe pharmaceutical companies engaging with patients is a positive step. Yes, it's about profits but by exchanging dialogue with them, maybe we can make it more than that. So when it comes to pharmaceutical drug companies I will look at the glass as half full and not just consider them as the big bad wolf.

I also got a chance to put faces to the names of bloggers I have been reading for years. It was an honor to be amongst peers that not only understand but are also going through the same things as myself.

Check out my fellow attendees and their blogs:

- Dave Bexfield - Dave’s Active MSers Blog
- Jamia Crockett - My MS Heels...My MS Heals
- Jeri Burtchell - Partners In Research
- Joan Wheeler - A Short In The Cord
- Jodi Bean - Jodi Bean’s Blog
- Jon Chandonnet - Jon Chandonnet
- Lisa Emrich - Brass and Ivory and Carnival of MS Bloggers
- Matt Allen - Matt’s Multiple Sclerosis

Nicole with Lisa Emrich (Brass and Ivory, Carnival of MS Bloggers)

Nicole and Dave Bexfield (Dave’s Active MSers Blog)