A personal lived experience. The Quiet Struggle to Breathe again: A Personal Narrative of Persistent Nasal Symptoms Following E-Bike Collision, Septal Fracture and Nasal Surgery

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Abstract

Background: Nasal trauma may result in persistent structural and functional symptoms that can substantially affect breathing, sleep, and quality of life.

However, the lived experience of prolonged nasal obstruction and uncertainty following trauma and subsequent surgery is less frequently described or observed.

Objective: This personal narrative explores the long-term experience of persistent nasal symptoms following an unexpected e-bike collision, septal fracture, delayed surgical management, and subsequent nasal surgery.

Case narrative: In December 2021, the author sustained multiple injuries after being struck from behind by an e-bike while walking on a public footpath; including nasal trauma and septal fracture. Despite having no previous history of significant nasal problems, persistent and alternating nasal obstruction, turbinate swelling, rhinorrhoea, postnasal mucus, crusting, bleeding, sneezing, and sleep disturbance subsequently developed. Following a prolonged wait, septal surgery and inferior turbinate procedures were undertaken, followed by further intervention, without meaningful improvement in symptoms. The absence of clear explanations prompted the author to independently explore nasal anatomy, turbinate physiology, autonomic regulation, and neurogenic mechanisms. Multiple treatments, including intranasal corticosteroids, antihistamines, ipratropium, capsaicin, and non-pharmacological approaches, provided little or no benefit.

Conclusion: This narrative illustrates the substantial physical and emotional burden of persistent breathing difficulty following nasal trauma and surgery. Altered autonomic regulation, neurogenic mechanisms, structural changes, and mucosal dysfunction may contribute; however, the precise mechanism in this individual case remains uncertain. The narrative highlights the importance of communication, explanation, and recognising the lived burden of persistent nasal symptoms.

Keywords:
Nasal trauma; Septal fracture; Persistent nasal obstruction; Inferior turbinate; Septoplasty; Nonallergic rhinitis; Vasomotor rhinitis; Autonomic nervous system; Neurogenic inflammation; Nasal mucosa; Lived experience; Personal narrative; Quality of life.