



Sebastian

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SHAKK

Aitken scare as ex-minister collapses after hip op

JONATHAN AITKEN, whose wife Elizabeth endured a massive brain haemorrhage last year, has suffered his own serious health scare.

Days after undergoing a routine hip replacement operation, the former Cabinet minister and jailbird was hit by pain so excruciating that he passed out.

'I started having shooting pains and they got worse and worse,' he tells me. 'I began to lose consciousness.'

Aitken had been discharged from the private King Edward VII Hospital in London's Marylebone — which is used by the Royal Family — five days after the operation.

He was recuperating at the mansion flat he shares with Elizabeth in South Kensington when the pain in his hips, thighs and legs struck him down.

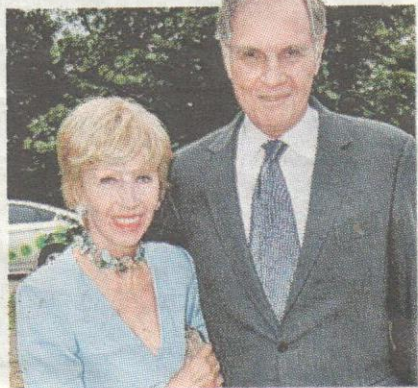
'The problem was that it was a Friday,' he says. 'I had fallen into the black hole of Friday afternoon medicine: everyone had gone home.'

The 71-year-old Conservative wanted to return to the King Edward VII, but no ambulance was available to take him.

It seemed to make sense to go to the place where I had the operation, but NHS ambulances will not take you to a private hospital.

'Eventually, a private ambulance was found in Nottingham, but it took two hours to reach me. We didn't get to the hospital until 10.30pm.

'At first, they thought the hip replacement had gone wrong, but I knew it hadn't. I was heavily dosed with morphine. And I was so bruised by the



Picture: ALAN DAVIDSON

Health issues: The Aitkens

haematoma that was causing me all the pain that I looked as if I'd been flogged by the 18th century Royal Navy.'

Aitken had been caring for Elizabeth, who underwent three brain operations in the space of a few days. The 78-year-old society beauty married Aitken in 2003.

Her three former husbands include Richard Harris, the Oscar-nominated star of *This Sporting Life* and the *Harry Potter* films, and the *My Fair Lady* actor Sir Rex Harrison.

Prisoners at Wormwood Scrubs, where Aitken sometimes preaches, prayed for her, and he believes this may have contributed to her miraculous recovery.

This time, they should kneel in hope of Aitken's swift recuperation.

'I'm on the mend,' he says. 'But I'm going to need a lot more physio before I'm back on my feet.'