



Dateline August 2207

Some interesting archaeological discoveries have been made off the coast of the Dunedin gigopolis and in the remains of the settlements in the wilderness of Otago and Southland. These settlements date from the time when agriculture, tourism and mining went on in these far flung places until the time in the late 21st century when the oil ran out and we were all forced to survive in this great city. A common thread running through the discoveries is the evidence of the existence of an ancient professional called the GP. It is unclear what these letters stood for. Some say that it meant 'Grumpy Person', some 'Grandfatherly Paternalist'. The evidence for this comes from the fact that most of these individuals were elderly males and indeed some of them seemed to survive into their sixties and seventies.

Of course these were the old days when people felt that individual health was important – today we know better – and those of us who qualify for survival after initial genetic surveillance depend for our medical advice on the compulsory propaganda programming and daily visits to the medical support capsules we all have in our homes. Before these programmes were established it is believed that there were professionals called 'Doctors' and 'Nurses' who looked after people's health. One of the current

academic theories is that these GPs were indeed some kind of doctor. From what we can deduce about life in the wilderness in those olden days, the peasants who lived in 'the bush' seemed to be very dependent on these GPs. They would go to their 'surgeries' whenever they felt ill and these old shamans would take responsibility for managing all their illnesses. It would appear that they were incredibly pragmatic – they would even treat women and children, and take responsibility for childbirth.

It is said that they were paid as little as \$1 an hour for their efforts but eventually none of the new doctors believed their old fashioned theories about what makes people ill and what makes them better. They seemed to believe in a process called 'healing' and thought that the kind of person you were was important. There was obviously a fair amount of support for these ideas two hundred years ago and many attempts were made to revive the profession by developing training programmes. However, it seems that, while the politicians paid a lot of lip service to these values, proper funding was never made available to make their life viable, and the young doctors could make a lot more money taking blood tests and looking into orifices with a sort of telescope and all sorts

This is a column written from the swamp. The term is taken from the book by Donald Schon¹ where he talks about the crisis of confidence in professional knowledge thus:

In the varied topography of professional practice, there is a high, hard ground overlooking a swamp. On the high ground, manageable problems lend themselves to solution through the application of research-based theory and technique. In the swampy lowland, messy, confusing problems defy technical solutions.

1. Schon DA. Educating the reflective practitioner. Jossey-Bass Publishers 1990.

Contributions

We invite amusing contributions to this column which should be relevant to the swamp and not more than 600 words.

of other quaint things which we now know are unnecessary.

For a while the old practitioners survived in the rural areas, gradually retreating into swamps, where our ancestors would seek them out and get them to brew potions for the reward of a few pence or a chicken. When the warning of the Great Warming came and we all retreated to the hills around Dunedin, most of them refused to run, declaring that they'd rather take their chances with the water. A fascinating fact is that these ancestors seem to feel so passionate about something so insignificant as an occupation. I suppose it was because they lived longer then...