



## What's been happening in the tearoom?

Last Sunday I was at the Medical Centre seeing a few patients and the cleaner was also in, tidying up the Saturday night mess.

When the patients had left, she poked her head around my door and asked, 'Who was working here before you?' A strange question; I had been on call all weekend. My eyebrows lifted and she realised I was bemused. 'Well,' she said, 'I found a hair straightener plugged in and scorching a hole in a chair in the tearoom and there is a mascara stick in the staff bathroom'. Sure enough the chair seat cover was smouldering away, but not quite in flames. A potentially compromising situation.

'It's a long story,' I said.

About 1:00am on Sunday morning, a 17-year-old girl was brought to the Medical Centre by ambulance. She was seriously inebriated and had a small laceration of her right eyebrow and a scratch on her cheek. A quick review did not reveal any other damage. The laceration was cleaned and glued, during which time a policeman arrived, had a few words with the girl and left, as did the ambulance officers. The girl walked out of the door and I was about to head home to bed when she returned. Her cell phone had been stolen, she did not know where she had been as she had never been to this town before and her home was about an hour and a half drive away by car. She did not know where

her friends were and did not want me to call her parents. The police had left this town as they were only covering from a nearby station and there was no local policeman on duty. There was no way I was going to take her home with me. What to do?

A helpful woman at Police Comms offered to contact the girl's parents and managed, after a few false starts, to get the correct phone number from the girl. The helpful Comms woman phoned back about half an hour later to say that her parents would drive (one and half hours) to get her. However, in the meantime would I keep an eye on her! What could I say? The girl offered to sit outside and wait. An inebriated 17-year-old girl with very little clothing on waiting in the rain in the early hours of the morning – not a good idea! So she was put in the tearoom where she had apparently, for reasons best known to herself, or perhaps not even known to herself, plugged in her hair straightener and promptly gone to sleep on the couch. In the meantime yours truly sat in his consulting room catching up on a bit of light reading, with increasing frustration, until the parents finally arrived at 4:30am. They said that they did not know the road and had to take it slowly as it was raining.

Interestingly, at one stage when the girl was still awake, she asked, 'who pays for all of this?' A good question. Apart from the ACC claim with no consideration for out of

This is a column written from the swamp. The term is taken from the book by Donald Schon<sup>1</sup> 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.

hours or prolonged child minding, nobody, unless the account for the surcharge is paid – unlikely.

On Sunday evening I received a text message. The police had given the girl's parents my cell phone number in case they needed to let me know if they were held up coming to collect her (they didn't).

*'I would like to thank u4tending2me last nite&4staying with me afta hours, my mum is sending u a thanku gift...I also left my remington hair straightener@your surgery&was hoping u could put it away4me so that my friends unty can pick it up@some stage?&thanku4everything'*

I replied that the hair straightener was here and was left plugged in nearly setting fire to the Medical Centre.

*'Oh my goodness,i am sober now&totally shamed out, my absolute sincere apologies4almost burning down your surgery, once again i couldnt apologize all the more4that'*

Another interesting experience from the rural practice swamp.