



He was obviously a snowboarder. It wasn't so much the baggy trow and heavy jacket, but rather the blue fibre-glass wrist armour that gave him away.

'Scaphoid eh?' I commented
'Yeh mate.'

Ah, the lack of vocal economy established he was not an indigenous Southern Man and the unflattened vowels identified his linguistic origins as trans-Tasman. Quite why our ANZAC neighbours must embellish every male-to-male vocal interaction with a word that spells sickness in Maori, I do not know. Neither did he.

He was young enough to be my son, a thought that immediately drew me to wondering what my eldest was up to right then. Probably hitching a lift from the Top of the Bruce with some strange fellow in a gas guzzling, pedestrian-destroying SUV. Perhaps in the medical centre with a damaged wrist from his efforts on a snow scooter? I pondered the parallels.

The pleasant vibration from Mr Nokia tucked deeply within my ski suit intervened. I aimed the car towards the side of the mountain road precipice whilst simultaneously reaching for the shoe phone and scaring the hell out of my Australian passenger. Working for the Lord was I.

The dulcet tones of a *Woman's Weekly* reporter emanated from the earpiece. She was seeking advice on the matter of progesterone cream. A few minutes was spent frying my neurons with microwaves talking of the bad research and the difficulty for

GPs trying to give patients informed consent on a therapy of which little is known, amply time for my passenger to consider the meaning of life gazing down the 4000 feet of mountain slope to the valley floor.

Once back on the slippery road to the bottom, we talked of his experience of the medical system with this scaphoid fracture. He had seen six doctors so far, for the injury was now a year old. Sustained back home, snowboarding of course, he had the inevitable non-union. He had seen four specialists, two emergency room doctors and described in detail the six different opinions he had received from each. That he had paid \$A90 for a phone discussion with a top private hand specialist only to be told he would have to wait 18 months for an operation in public merely made me reflect on the benefits of ACC. I didn't go into that, for my possum-loving hitchhiker right then espoused his *pièce de résistance*, 'if only I had a GP'.

Such wisdom, such insight. We had been discussing the 'too much opinion and not much fact' he had experienced and my natural progesterone cream shoe-phone discussion had led him to reflect that all this opinion probably indicated there wasn't much research on scaphoid fracture and non-union. He needed help with options. My stomach began to churn. I felt a fraud. I didn't know of any RCTs of scaphoid fracture management but was not brave enough to admit this to the young Anzac. I di-

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.

verted the conversation towards the likelihood of his getting further surgery and the ideal of getting some gambling odds for the surgery. His last offer had been 60:40 and he lost that one, for his first operation had failed. He was pretty reluctant to have any further procedures with lotto-like odds and had resolved to ski in NZ before they chopped his hand off. I reassured him that surgery could perform marvels, sometimes.

I dropped him at the petrol station in town. His parting comment was that he needed a GP, a good one, 'like you'.

Ah, another one for general practice. Trouble is, that's what they all say.