



I'd inherited her. It was my turn. She'd tried most other doctors around for varying lengths of time and my old friend, who had been caring for her for years, had finally had enough. He recommended me. A good friend? Huh. So I told him what I thought of him, and he grinned.

She arrived, complete with notes, including a restriction order applied to pethidine. The list of diagnoses was somewhat large. She was taking quinidine for an alleged dysrhythmia. She took anti-epileptics for alleged epilepsy. And so it went on. We set about the task of depriving her of most of these drugs, eventually deciding that she had pseudo-epilepsy, not epilepsy, and that there was nothing wrong with her heart. A year or two passed. Two or three times a week she came (she was subsidised by a benevolent government for her visits). Accident and Emergency complained about her; After-Hours complained about her; my partners complained about her; the nurses complained about her. A man of infinite patience, even I was finally exasperated. And one day she came in for the third time that week, accompanied now by an acolyte. (Mrs C. herself kept telling me she was a Pastor in a little Church. I guess it was one of those rather offbeat small sects). She started with her spiel. I decided to act. I'd fix her. Blasphemy would accomplish what being off-hand couldn't. "Jesus Christ Mrs C.,"

I said, "do you have to go on like this?" But she immediately turned her head up to the left-hand corner of the room, and there addressed God, who was available up there on the hot-line. "Forgive doctor", she said, "forgive him, help him in his good work." And turning to her acolyte she said, "Let us pray for doctor." And right there she and her slave kneeled down on the carpet and she launched into a prayer. A prayer that I would continue my help for people, that I would assist the poor and that my already good treatment abilities would become better. God was to be on my side. It was coals of fire stuff and you will be glad to know that I was very, very embarrassed. But surely she'd now leave the practice. No, oh no. She finished the prayer, got to her feet, and proceeded with the consultation as if nothing untoward had happened. I was caught in the swamp. Undoubtedly I was a rat. So I served my penance, and when I retired a year or so later, she left the practice with none of my partners showing any desire to care for her.

They didn't know the half of it. They didn't know what they missed. I had become quite fond of that deceitful lady. I tried my best for her. I flattered myself I 'understood' her (I don't believe I really did). She gave me a little gift. I went to her house on one or two occasions to see her and discovered that the house was decorated *à la* many plastic flowers

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.

mode. Her husband (*Was he hagg-ridden? Was he really a man?*), I quite liked after a while. We had all developed a *modus vivendi*. But she never overtly prayed for me again. I think even she realised that redemption for me was unattainable, although forgiveness by her was probably attained. I was a permanently rattus inhabitant of the swamp.