



Swamp puzzle

The healer had soaked up a lot of changes in the swamp over 35 years, and hadn't, until this day, got the (kauri) gum. It was afternoon. A young teenage boy came by in a shiny green lycra pant suit, the sort a sport cyclist might wear, with a note from his teacher. After his examination and an offer to drive him home, he left with a prescription for stomach cramps and some photocopied information on great recipes for when he's better. Several hours later the boy was back saying he had lost the prescription to one of the cruel gusts of wind blowing over the swamp at that time. To cut a long story short, he got another script for a measure of exasperation.

Later as the sun set and the denizens of the swamp prop up the door jams, checking, and chatterboxing amongst themselves, celebrating that they are all still on the surface of the swamp, a woman comes back in through the door waving a dismally gaping, nondescript handbag that the

receptionist immediately recognises as hers, knowing that there was nothing valuable within.

The swamp plops. She glances to the now vacant park in which her bag had been, near her seat by the door, and is betrayed by her pallor. The swamp gurgles. The assembled company's puzzlement at the interruption begins to mix with triumph at receiving such an unlikely end of day pick-me-up for them all. She quakes with laughter, pulls out and holds up a small, crumpled, white page, on which is written a prescription for stomach cramps and which has been sharing the space in her bag with her religious magazines. The assembled company becomes somewhat hysterical. The laughter and jerky movements only encourage suction from the swamp. Soon, and for a short time only, increased bubbles plop to the surface of the swamp.

*Yours posthumously
A Healer*

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.

The LEARN Model for Cross-Cultural Healthcare

Listen to your patient from his or her cultural perspective

Explain your reasons for asking for personal information

Acknowledge your patient's concerns

Recommend a course of action

Negotiate a plan that take into consideration your patient's cultural norms and personal lifestyle

Berlin EA, Fowkes Jr WC. A Teaching Framework for Cross-Cultural Healthcare: Application in Family Practice. Western Journal of Medicine 1983;139(6): 934-38.