

# INTERRUPTIONS

## – how should we respond?

It is a typical busy hospital day on call and the bleep is going off incessantly. Urgent reviews, angry or upset relatives, drug chart changes, abnormal blood results or cultures – the list of jobs to juggle on top of our normal day to day activities can seem endless. It is no different for GPs:

Late morning came a call to do a home visit on a lady with a PR bleed, and as I was preparing to go, I was phoned from the treatment room to come and see a patient with an odd-looking ECG. In between, the district nurses were knocking on the door conveying their concerns about various patients they'd seen that morning. And this was while I was trying to continue a morning surgery.

Trying to find the house on the visit (no house number, just a house name) provided frustration, as did the difficulty accessing the key code (not in the patient's notes), let alone waiting for the lady to finish using the toilet before she shuffled back with her Zimmer frame to the bedroom in order for me to examine her. One was thinking 'that was ten minutes wasted that I could've been using to get caught up with triage calls'.

### The burden of the bleep

For eager medical students an exciting novelty, the bleep is now so often a burden. It can make us feel frustrated, tired and annoyed, and this can negatively affect our interactions with our colleagues and patients. Encountering repeated interruptions, with limited physical and mental resources, how may we act?

I think the story of the Good Samaritan<sup>1</sup> can help us here. Despite potential danger, social division, and cost to himself, he spontaneously gave the resources he had, to him who was suffering and in need. The spontaneity of love for all those we see and speak to, and the courage to fulfil it, must grow in us. When facing a summons for help out of the blue, we must overcome the strain of our own desire for rest, in addition to any bias against the one asking.

How can we ourselves overcome these obstacles and love as we should? We cannot. God's love, realised in Christ and given in the Spirit, is our needed resource for the joy, peace and wisdom to tackle all that is thrown at us. As St Paul exhorted, we need to be 'gentle, kind, humble, meek and patient'.<sup>2</sup> We should pray for these things and be confident that God will supply all our needs with the wonderful blessings from Christ Jesus.

Spontaneity of love is one thing, but these virtues should also be the bedrock of managing our daily job lists. On his way to Jairus' dying daughter, Christ was interrupted by a woman in search of a cure for chronic bleeding.<sup>3</sup> Both were healed. Likewise we must

achieve both spontaneous and planned work for the glory of God.

The antidote to frustration and annoyance is genuine love, for each patient, nurse, allied professional and colleague. Again, in prayer we find refuge, as praying for each one will help us remember their needs and how we can address them. It will help us not to be proud. In the parable of the sheep and the goats,<sup>4</sup> both groups seemed not to recognise Christ in the vulnerable and needy. Surely the test of any individual, group or nation is how they treat the most vulnerable; the poorest, least ranked, and least able to speak out. How do we fare?

### Practical tips

So are there any practical suggestions that could help us cope with the bleep and its demands in a loving, servant hearted way?

- Learn from God's word – asking him for help, strength and wisdom. This must be a priority though it is easy for this to be squeezed out of an already busy day
- Pray – even a very short prayer before answering each bleep can help focus us, especially if we are struggling
- Prioritise and delegate, in loving gentle ways
- Try to foresee any potential problems
- Work as a team, and be able humbly to ask for help if needed
- Rest – there is another we are called to love, another for whom God died and loves eternally, and that is us ourselves. We must treat ourselves to good times of regeneration, to rest in mind, body and spirit
- Take breaks, however short, and keep well fuelled
- Find forgiveness and forgive yourself. We must confess our own shortcomings to God and 'turn all our anxieties over to him'<sup>5</sup>

At the end we must regard each person (including ourselves) as too loved by God for us to give any less than our all, and in our mind's ear hear each bleep and summons as the voice of Christ saying this child has need of you; go to them in my name.

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### references

1. Luke 10:25-37
2. Colossians 3:12
3. Luke 8:40-56
4. Matthew 25:31-46
5. 1 Peter 5:7