



# WHEN THE DOCTOR WENT TO HOSPITAL

**F**rom the moment you walk in the door it's as if something changes. You are now part of a surreal world of gowns, tubes, paper knickers and loss of control. Just 24 hours after working in the GP surgery myself, I am tied to a bed with several tubes coming out; pain, things being done to me, an out-of-reach buzzer for when I needed help.

Suddenly the topics of conversation are how full your catheter bag is, whether you've passed wind, how many vomits, what you have had done and why. No room for embarrassment here. With me are four very different women in the bay – all with their own stories, families, backgrounds, personalities, humour, houses and life outside the hospital. Yet it's as if none of that counts any more. Now I was the day-one hysterectomy with a fever.

The staff were very busy and worked very hard. They often seemed stretched and stressed, but masked it well. So many beeping machines, vomiting patients, pain-relief requests, blood pressure checks.

The funniest experience was the day one bed bath administered by a very efficient, very competent team who 'went from top to bottom' left me feeling I had been through a car wash...but grateful. Second funniest was the patient opposite coming over to me as I lay in bed, dropping her pyjamas and asking me if her scar looked all right...and she didn't know I was a doctor.

So in the middle of all this activity, what I really noticed was that some people really cared and others didn't. All did the job ok. But some didn't look me in the eye, smile, squeeze my hand, or give

time. I noticed the one nurse who asked the elderly lady next to me how her husband was getting on at home – it only took two minutes but made all the difference.

That hand squeeze, the compassionate look, acknowledgement of the person inside, two minutes to listen...it can make the patient feel good, peaceful, hopeful, valued, warm inside. The doctor who came and looked me in the eye and squeezed my hand as she told me all about what they found inside made me cry. Good crying. That was real, complete care of me the person, as well as my body.

I wonder how much difference that art of medicine, that soft immeasurable care, makes to the recovery of the person. I wonder if that hug or hand-squeeze would result in less pain relief being needed, less pressing of buzzers, patients getting home quicker.

The lady who showed me her scar told me how she had been too frightened to come into hospital for five years since her mum died there. She had a lot of pain post-op and was demanding to staff. I don't think any of the staff knew why her pain was so bad. Maybe it was more emotional than physical pain, but how many staff would think to ask or choose to take apparently more time to just sit and probe a little? Isn't it great if a person can go home not just with a physical op done but with an emotional wound healed as well.

Maybe if we focused on that bit more, the staff wouldn't be so busy and the NHS wouldn't be so stretched.

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