



Hobbit's Aphorisms

The Hobbit was one of *SMA News*' well-loved pseudonymous contributors and, in commemoration of the newsletter's 60th anniversary, we have chosen to spotlight some of her classic works. The August 2026 issue featured "The Hobbit Meets Darth Vader", a satirical take on medicine and the field of aesthetics, which can be viewed at: <https://bit.ly/5808-Hobbit>.

This issue, we bring you yet another reprint from the Hobbit: tongue-in-cheek aphorisms about medicine, first published in the September 2007 issue of *SMA News*. The Hobbit and more of her recent musings can be found at: <https://hobbitsma.blog>.

What is an aphorism? An aphorism is defined as "a pithy observation which contains a general truth". – *Oxford Dictionary of English, Second Edition, 2005*

Long, long ago, when Dr House spoke with an English accent, George Clooney was still in ER and Gray's Anatomy was better known than Grey's Anatomy, and in a galaxy far, far away, an aphorism was the way medicine was taught.

Hippocrates was famous for his aphorisms. Examples of his aphorisms are:

"Desperate cases need the most desperate remedies."

"It is a bad sign in acute illness when the extremities become cold."

"When the disease is at its height, then the lightest diets must be employed."

"Unprovoked fatigue means disease."

Of course, today aphorisms are out of date. We have evidence based medicine, clinical guidelines and drug representatives to teach us the latest factual developments in medicine.

But wait, are aphorisms truly out of date nowadays? Maybe not. Here are

some present-day aphorisms you may wish to consider.

Primary care

- More doctors in polyclinics will not decrease waiting time.
- Generics are good enough for managed care patients who demand getting branded medicines.
- Ironically, self-paying patients usually do not mind getting generics.

Luck

- Despite your best efforts, you will miss on your first attempt at venepuncture when the patient is a fellow healthcare worker, an immediate family member of doctors, a VIP and so on.
- Despite your best efforts, you will often miss on your second attempt at venepuncture when the patient is a fellow healthcare worker, an immediate family member of doctors, a VIP and so on.
- Patients with difficult venous access will have inflamed drip sites one day after a new venula has been inserted.

- The spinal/epidural will fail in the most FON and "ngeow" patient.
- The Electronic Medical Record and Drug Prescription IT system will hang only at peak hours.
- Your handphone will usually only ring when you are scrubbed or gowned up.
- The patient will collapse at night while you are on call and not in the daytime.
- You will not be able to find the FB throat during peak A&E hours.

Patients

- The patient undergoing a treadmill test will normally abort the test himself, unless he is undergoing a fitness for Viagra test, in which it is normal for him to persevere beyond what is advisable, and the test will accordingly be aborted by the technician or doctor standing by.
- A patient usually attempts to AOR, or commit suicide at 7 am, 2 pm and 9 pm.
- The patients who request to sign an AMD are usually those rich enough to pay for long-term life support.

Internal medicine

- The last true internal medicine specialist was produced in 1980. He currently hangs around in Tan Tock Seng Hospital sending out funny emails.
- You will grow old while following geriatricians on ward rounds.

Surgery and anaesthesia

- Anaesthetists never rush the surgeons to finish the case when they are in private practice.
- Anaesthetists have the most complete collection of golf and motoring magazines in the medical profession.
- Subsidised piles patients do not receive staples.
- All female general surgeons will have a special interest in breast surgery when they are in the private sector, regardless of previous actual training.

- Personal blue letters from orthopaedic surgeons are to be taken seriously, they usually include some notion of asking the physician to resuscitate, revive or resurrect.
- Surgeons who play the most soothing music in OTs are the ones who throw the worst temper tantrums.
- Each laser unit will be superseded by a more 'advanced' unit in three months. Similarly, the latest Lasik equipment will be obsolete in six months.
- There are fewer electives in the Lunar 7th Month.

Practice issues

- The patient who wants to use Medisave for outpatient treatment of chronic diseases will be charged long consultation charges – because it takes at least 20 minutes to file a withdrawal anyway.

- Ridiculous rents and prices are paid by doctors for clinic space.
- You will not be able to finish the drugs you bought at a hefty bonus before expiry date.

Junior doctors

- Male housemen are more likely to receive free food from female nurses (of any age) than female housemen.
- Housemen and medical officers driving Porsche or cars of similar standing should not receive traineeship in lucrative specialties.
- Male housemen will never buy fast food for supper while on-call. Please note that this does not apply to female housemen.
- Eating pao leads to bad calls.
- Public hospitals will look into revising doctors' salaries after young doctors quit and not before. ♦

For readers who cannot get enough of the Hobbit's witty works, we have curated a small selection of articles below for your reading pleasure, comprising topics that are still relevant to this day. Even more Hobbit articles and other interesting content from past issues of *SMA News* can be found on our website at: <https://www.sma.org.sg/news/allissues>.

The Hobbit's Nonsensical Glossary of Healthcare Sector Terms (Oct 2005):

https://www.sma.org.sg/sma_news/3710/hobbit.pdf

The Real Cost of NOT Having a Means Test (Apr 2006):

https://www.sma.org.sg/sma_news/3804/Hobbit.pdf

Why You Should Not Quit and Go Private: 20 Reasons to Remind You of the Right Thing to Do (We Hope...) (Aug 2007):

<https://news.sma.org.sg/3908/Hobbit.pdf>

The Hobbit's Guide to Food (Jan 2010):

<https://news.sma.org.sg/4201/Hobbit.pdf>

The Hobbit's Guide to Dying (Aug 2010):

<https://news.sma.org.sg/4208/Hobbit.pdf>