

# Que Sera, Sera

“But life often plays cruel tricks on us.”

I woke up in a good frame of mind. The recurring nightmare of being suspended from practice for contravening some MOH rules and regulations did not occur last night. Among other things, it could be that the previous day I had checked and made sure that I had paid up all the relevant fees.

I sat up, said my little prayer and made my usual appeal to the Almighty, which were: a) not to be caught in a traffic jam, b) my clinic assistants to turn up for work, c) the air-con in the office to function properly and d) patient, Ee Li Tern does not turn up. I would be particularly grateful if my last wish were granted. One would think that these were reasonable requests and easily taken care of, but we mere mortals are in no position to understand the workings of the One in-charge. I then waited, as is my habit, for the signal from the lower abdomen.

It came and I positioned myself for action and also to read the recent copy of the SMJ for my CME, attempting two tasks at the same time. There was an article titled, “Stigma of Mental Illness”. After reading it, I learned that: “The diagnostic label of mental illness may render the person vulnerable to stigmatization”. It appears that Singaporeans who are different are likely to be treated like pariahs. In that case, perhaps a guideline on how to remain a sane Singaporean is called for. Singaporeans are particularly fond of guidelines. We are a practical lot and are natural followers. It can be done.

As I had not quite finished evacuating after reading the above article, I continued with a copy of MAD. I prefer humorous comic books anytime over medical journals. Laughter is good medicine. From personal experience, a good laugh seems to enhance bowel movements too. Instead of prescribing

senna, bisacodyl, lactulose, husk, liquid paraffin etc to constipated patients I sometimes recommend MAD magazines - one chapter before retiring and two chapters whilst sitting on the potty on rising. It has produced positive results. Best of all, it is not addictive. There is no troublesome side effect, in fact one may get to sleep better and begin the day on a more cheerful note.

A short while later, the last piece emerged. I was nicely done and could look forward to being uninterrupted the rest of the day - I thought. But life often plays cruel tricks on us. One moment I was feeling relaxed after getting rid of the waste and the next moment I was feeling tense. The reason was I saw blood. Bleeding PR is common enough and one deals with it in the office almost everyday. The difference being this time it was happening to the doctor and not to his patients. I knew that I have piles and had some minor bleeds previously but that was some time ago and also the bleedings were never that heavy. I sat down again to compose myself and to decide on a course of action.

The first thing I did was to take a look. I held a mirror in between while squatting. With one hand holding the mirror and the other holding a torch and bending forward as much as I could without toppling over, I managed to have a good view of the region. I saw piles alright and some blood but whether there was anything else inside I was not able to tell. The next thing I did was to clean up and then I went out for a walk. Walking, I find, clears up the mind somewhat.

The clinic of my radiologist friend happens to be within walking distance. Twenty minutes later I found myself in its vicinity and since they start work early, I decided to pay a visit and at the same time discuss my case and to seek advice.

If one were to expect a dissertation on the subject, one would be disappointed. I told him in so many words about my problem and he told me in so many words that he would do a barium study and assured me that it would be comparable to endoscopy. He gave me a packet of magnesium sulphate powder, four tablets of dulcolax, an instruction sheet for my diet and fixed an appointment for three days later. The rest of the time was spent gossiping, a fairly common and popular recreation among doctors.

This is a rather casual approach, one might say to a potentially serious matter. As the day wore on I began to think more and more about my problem and its implications, and the more I thought about it the more anxious I became. At first I resisted telling anyone including the spouse, but soon she began to notice that something was awry. She asked firstly why I was more moody than my usual moody self and secondly why I gave the maid instruction to serve only rice porridge with tofu for our meals. I succumbed under interrogation.

“Dear,” I said, “Something is wrong.”

“You are right,” she answered, “When was the last time I’m dear to you.”

“It’s all the time, right from the beginning and it’s on-going. *Sompah*.”

“Out with it,” she said.

“Something bad may happen to me and it can be quite *leceh*.”

“*Leceh* for you or for me?” she asked. I then told her.

“Will you take care of everything including me?” I asked.

“You silly goose,” she answered, “But only to the best of my ability. Go read your comics.”

She is always the practical one. I was wondering whether to cancel all my appointments, just in case. In the end I did not. I hoped I would be lucky.

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The day of reckoning arrived. Needless to say I had not slept very well. The abdomen was uncomfortable throughout the night and I had to make several trips to the loo because of the laxatives. I took a bath and to my surprise broke into a song while soaping myself. Although I like music, I listen but do not sing for fear of irritating others. I had burst out automatically this time, it must be the work of the subconscious mind and related to my present plight. Whatever it symbolised or signified, it did not really matter, so long as it made me feel better. "Que sera, sera, whatever will be, will be. The future's not ours to see, que sera,sera, what will be, will be.....," I sang.

I was still humming the song as I was getting ready to leave the house. The maid heard it and said, "Sir, this is my favourite song too and it is important to me."

"Really?" I said.

"Sir, before I came to Singapore, I was really frightened because everything will be so different from what I was used to and worse of all I wouldn't know what my employer is like. I didn't know what to expect at all. My mother taught me this song and told me to just hope for the best. Sometimes things are beyond one's control, whatever will be, will be," she replied.

"You are right," I said, "Que sera, sera, whatever will be, will be."

And so I made my way to the radiologist. I met the security guard inside the lift and he gave me a thumbs-up sign when he heard my "Que sera, sera .....". I took it as a favourable omen. When the barium was pumped in and the bowels inflated and I was feeling apprehensive and uncomfor-table, I sang, "Que sera, sera, what-ever will be, will be ....." but in the silent mode.

It seemed an eternity but actually it took only about 20 minutes to arrive at the verdict. I was lucky, the radiologist declared quite confidently that it was clear. It is difficult to describe the feeling, perhaps it is that of a condemned man who is suddenly given a reprieve. I cleaned up and went to his room to thank him and was all ready to indulge in some gossip only to find that he was in a hurry.

He had to leave for treatment for some shoulder complaint himself. I wondered what his story was.

I went home to tell my family and my maid heard me singing again. This time: "I see trees of green, red roses too, I see them bloom for me and for you and I think to myself, what a wonderful world....."

"Sir," she said, "You have learned a new song."

"If you like it, I'll teach you," I said. But this story does not end here.

I went to work and had for my first patient a young lady who had a simple gynaecological problem. Suddenly, I felt an itch in my nose, perhaps it was due to some scent she was wearing and I started sneezing and the nose began to drip. "Excuse me," I said and took out the handkerchief from my pocket to wipe my nose.

And then I saw her stare at me in a rather shocked manner, got up and left the room without saying a word. I was totally nonplussed by her action. "What's

the matter?" I wondered. It was only my nose that was misbehaving.

And then it all became clear. I had carried a pair of briefs in my trouser pocket for emergency use, in case I needed it after my procedure at the radiologist and I had taken it instead of the handkerchief to wipe my nose, right in front of the patient. How would she know that it was just an innocent mix up?

I could not blame her for being upset and frightened. She must be thinking that this doctor was weird and maybe deprived. The situation, come to think of it, was actually quite funny but when I found out that the young lady had left the clinic hurriedly with her mother and with tears in her eyes, I stopped chuckling. What if she was so offended and lodged a complaint, say one of outraging her modesty?

"Que sera, sera, whatever will be, will be.....," I sang in a voice, which after so much practice, was tolerable. ■

### The SMA Medical Informatics Committee

is pleased to announce a series of hobby group sessions related to IT and Medicine. Each session will consist of demonstrations and informal discussions.

#### IT Hobby Group Topics Lined Up for Year 2001:

- 29 July 2001 Singapore Palm Users Group (SPUG), Headed by Dr John Chiam
- August Medical Libraries
- September Video Streaming/ Online CME
- October Electronic Medical Records
- November Networking
- December Video/ Movie-making

#### Programme for 29 July 2001

Time : 3 - 6pm

Venue : SMA Conference Room

#### Lecture/Demonstration:

1. Introduction to Singapore Palm Users Group (SPUG)
2. Collaborative opportunities for SMA & SPUG
3. Setting up a Forum for doctors & "Palm library"
4. Demonstration of the latest SONY PDA (with seamless integration with SONY's VAIO laptop)
5. Q&A session on PDAs & other questions

#### Tea Break

#### Discussion & Hands-on Session

#### Guests from the Singapore Palm Users Group (SPUG):

- Mr Ronnie Ma, President
- Mr Toh Wei Sheong, Marketing
- Mr Jeffrey Yen & Mr Eugene Teo, Internet, Forum & Website matters

**RSVP for the 29 July Session at Email: [tech@sma.org.sg](mailto:tech@sma.org.sg) or Fax: 2247827. Thank you.**

Name: \_\_\_\_\_ MCR No.: \_\_\_\_\_  
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