“Something for the weekend”

Ben Darebefore

No, no, no, no, no, no, no, NO.

Been there, done that, haven’t got the t-shirt because I don’t need any reminders of what it was like before I did what I tell my ‘heartsink’ patients to do, and got a life. So no, I’m not going to extend my hours.

I’m old enough to remember (and young enough such that I can remember, for that matter) what it was like to do my own on-call, and to offer Saturday morning emergency clinics in the naive belief that this would give me a better chance of having some time for myself on the weekend. Of course, this never really happened. Even my idea of putting “Resus Annie” in the waiting room to teach patients what a real emergency was sadly backfired. The sods would pop their head round the door on Saturday morning, see that there was at least one other patient in the waiting room, and toddle on home, stopping only to put the kettle on before phoning for a home visit. Those with mobile phones would call for the same on their way home, the background sounds of “Do you want fries with that?” giving the game away somewhat and causing me to conjure up ideas of what I’d like to do to them that would have made the crimes on causing me to conjure up ideas of what I’d like to do to... f
during usual hours because they work can’t come during usual hours because they work... early in the morning, later in the evening and on weekends, but not by a doctor, or nurse for that matter, will they? So it’s OK for the MPs with their large expense accounts, non-executive directorships and questionable morals to have weekends to do with as they please, but not me.

And what about extended hours during the day? We know the longer a person works the greater the risk of mistakes. Let’s face it, I find putting on the golf course difficult at the best of times. How on earth am I going to accurately fit an IUD after teatime?

Has no one thought this through, because it’s not only us GPs who should be considered. As we’re told time and time again, general practice is more than just the doctor. Yes, and I know my nurses, staff and the others can’t wait to start earlier, go home later, and spend Saturday morning hearing about someone’s hangover when they’d rather be at home dealing with their own.

I’m not going to apologise for one of the key features – if not the key feature – that got GPs to sign up to the new GP contract, namely an end to 24-hour responsibility. In my view it has kept GPs working in the NHS, and unilaterally imposing extended opening hours will have the opposite effect. In our practice, yes, we’ll be giving our patients the choice and convenience of being seen earlier in the morning, later in the evening and on weekends, but not by a doctor, or nurse for that matter, because we won’t be there. Patients will be more than welcome to sit in our waiting room using the NHS Direct Interactive service on the TV that I’m having installed.

So there you are. Lots more choice for patients, and convenient for all. Except for emergency services, that is, because ironically this will complete the audit cycle as NHS Direct Interactive will inevitably advise these patients to attend A+E, and in doing so defeat the original object of extended hours, namely to lessen the load on emergency services. Now, let’s go and think up an amusing chant ready for the National GP day out at Westminster. What rhymes with hours? Ah yes, “arse”.

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