

Trust

John and Fiona Earle

This account began over 60 years ago, so it is time the story was told.

John qualified as a doctor in 1948, shortly before the NHS came into existence. Since then the state has paid for the majority of medical care in hospitals and general practice. At that time, there were only a few blood tests available. X-rays were mainly used to detect fractures and to see how they were healing. Also, good X-rays of the chest showed the presence or absence of infection, including TB.

Doctors relied on Clinical Medicine to make a diagnosis, start treatment, and then they followed the patient to see that all was going as expected. This was relatively quick and inexpensive. No one waited for laboratory results to come in before starting treatment and there was no charge for any blood tests. When the patient got better, as expected, there was often a feeling of satisfaction. Synthetic penicillin was only widely used after 1948.

So, come with me and my time machine to 1948. A newly qualified doctor was expected to do a year in junior hospital jobs. Then he did National Service for 2 years. John became a Lieutenant in the Royal Army Medical Corps and was posted to the Canal Zone in the Middle East. While at Khartoum he saw a stage hypnotist at work. This man would hypnotise people and make a "post-hypnotic suggestion". This meant he roused the people from a hypnotic trance during which he had said "After this, when you hear 'So Tired' played, you will fall asleep and raise your right arm – this will not happen if you are on parade, or driving a car, or in any other situation when it would be dangerous."

During the evening, with the hypnotist off stage, this happened several times. It was most impressive.

A few years later, John was the junior partner in a practice in the north of

England. A hypnotist came along and anyone who wanted to could go and learn to hypnotise. John offered himself as a model and was hypnotised, and learnt how to hypnotise.

About a fortnight later there was an incredibly cold night with the stars brighter than ever. Quite suddenly and slowly, some small snowflakes began to fall. Not in a single straight fall from the sky; each flake was very small, like a capital C on its side. Each rocked gently to and fro and was easy to see in the light from the house. They looked very attractive. Then the picture changed. The tiny flakes became heavier. They fell vertically. There was no wind. Then the snowfall became a blizzard. John could scarcely see his hand in front of his face. However, he could see a street lamp from the other side of the road, but this was only just possible.

Then the phone rang. It was a girl. She was having an attack of asthma. Could I come please? "Sure". I explained I'd need to walk and luckily she only lived a few hundred yards away. Her door was open, and she was sitting in a chair, looking very distressed.

Asthma is a strange group of problems. The air to the lungs goes down a series of tubes that get smaller in diameter as you go from top to the lungs. If the lower part of the tubes gets narrower, and there are plenty of reasons for this, then you hear a wheezing noise. If the tubes get even smaller, the wheezing stops and the patient is almost unable to breathe, and close to death.

She was like that. Nowadays there are several drugs that will ease the problem. Then, there was really only one and she couldn't take it. It was desperate. I imagined meeting her parents "After six years of training was there nothing you could do? Did she really have to die?" Well, maybe there was something. "I think it would help if I hypnotised you. Would that be OK?" She nodded. So I started and

suggested she should relax, breathe more slowly. She did. After ten minutes, she began to wheeze. I thought we were winning. I talked and suggested gentle breathing. After half an hour she was fine. I "woke her up". I didn't think she would start again. If she did, she should phone immediately. I'd get my partner to pop round in the morning and see her. She was fine.

Curiously there were other occasions when John was apparently the only person present with knowledge of how to prevent a person from dying. Three incidents were in the north of England. One was in the French Alps. Another was in Italy. Another was in the Sudan, in the desert. The last one was in a French train between Paris and Calais. The threat of death was different on each occasion, and the solution was found by simple clinical medicine, by listening to the patient, and relatives, thinking carefully, deciding what needed to be done and then doing it.

The threats included severe blood loss (twice, in very different circumstances), a baby who had become unconscious due to being very cold (hypothermia), alcohol abuse, severe dehydration, obstructed labour when forceps were needed, an unconscious patient with extremely acid blood – seen at about 3 am, and then he had to find a bed for him in a hospital.

Somehow, life was simpler then, yet in a way more difficult. Getting tests done, purely to cover your back in case the patient makes a complaint is a poor way to live, and expensive. Also treatment is likely to begin later in the course of the illness, and that will cost more. Paper work has to be costed, too.

The recent rising costs of the NHS have been blamed on the government who in turn blamed the team(s) managing the NHS. This led to a strike of junior doctors. We know that legal costs, as measured by the Medical Protection Society, are rising. It really looks as if the rising costs of the NHS are largely because the patients and doctors do not trust one another any longer

to give adequate care based on clinical medicine, supported by a few tests.



Fairtrade Fortnight **29th February – 13th March**

Martin Luther King famously once said: 'Before you finish eating breakfast in the morning, you've depended on more than half the world'. And eating breakfast is just what Fairtrade Fortnight has in mind for you this year - the campaign hopes to get as many people as possible to eat a Fairtrade breakfast in their homes during the Fortnight.

As a spokesperson explains: "It's a scandal that the people who grow the food we take for granted can't always feed their own families. We can support farmers and workers to put food on the table for their families by harnessing the power of a Fairtrade breakfast. When people are paid a fairer price, they can have more control over their lives when times are hard, and worry less about how they will feed their families." More details at: www.fairtrade.org