already in place and the pace of further change currently occurring it is hard to turn the clock back, nor indeed might it be appropriate on health, economic, or current political grounds to even try.

So it seems to me that English general practice had a good and worthwhile life which is now ending.

At the end of my time in the UK both my parents died. They too had good, long, and worthwhile lives but the quality of life in their last few months was not good. Such rationalisations do not seem to make the loss any easier to bear though.

My father died 8 days after my mother — I had not come to terms with the loss of one parent before I had lost another. For now, I have returned to a style of general practice in rural Australia that, by chance,

remains closer to the ideals that inspired me during my UK training in the 1980s. But where English general practice goes, Australian practice tends to follow (like my parents' intertwined destinies) and I do not think it will be long before I have more mourning to do.

Adrian Elliot-Smith

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Book review

**JOSEPH'S BOX
SUHAYL SAADI**

*Two Ravens Press, Scotland, 2009
pp670, £13.99, ISBN: 9781906120443*

This is a big book, in every way: it is excessive, extravagant, exuberant, exhilarating, erotic, esoteric, entertaining, entrancing and eccentric; and like the boxes that give it a structure, of sorts, it contains layer upon layer of allusions and connections. The narrative sweeps across continents, and the cultural references include everything from hip hop to classical verse forms of the Moghul emperors. The psychological landscape ranges from the hard realities of what we are used to calling, rather primly, 'the doctor-patient relationship' (transgressed in the most shocking way) to hallucinatory meanderings along the wilder shores of the subconscious.

Zuleikha Chasm Framareza MacBeth (Zulie for short) is a middle-aged GP grieving the loss of her Afghani mother and, some years earlier, of her only son Dhaoud. On an evening of despair she wanders along the banks of the Clyde and finds, bobbing in the current, a strange box. With the help of another recently bereft wanderer, Alex Wolfe, she retrieves the box, and they take it back to her flat. There they begin the adventure of unravelling the spells that lock each of the seven nested boxes, deciphered through Alex's magical mutating lute and his computational skills.

Other significant characters include Archie McPherson, once an aircraft engineer, now a patient of Zulie's, dying of mesothelioma yet imbued with a power over his doctor that she can neither explain nor resist; Laila Asunsi, 'ageing hippy' extraordinaire who lives in an old house near a Lincolnshire aerodrome where Archie once worked, danced, and made love; Peppe Ayala, Sicilian cousin of Laila and an archaeological historian; Petrus Dihdo Labolka, a juggler and impresario of Russo-Punjabi parentage, ex-lover of Laila living in Lahore; and young Zulfikar Ali Lobsang, a Baltistani guide who takes Zulie and Alex on their final enlightening journey to the high mountains of Ladakh, where their weird

COMMENTARY

'Don't worry about the world coming to an end today. It's already tomorrow in Australia'. Charles M. Schulz US cartoonist (1922–2000).

'A final g'day to general practice' is a poignant and thought-provoking commentary on modern general practice.¹

As a young GP myself, I see disillusionment among my peers. The emerging two-tier system and a sense of 'tick-box medicine' create dissatisfaction among new and old doctors alike. It is little wonder that many young doctors are following the author's lead and emigrating to Oz.

Interesting too are the comments on communication with our hospital colleagues. Last week I met a paediatric oncologist who reminisced mournfully about GPs phoning for 'a bit of advice' and expressed a real enthusiasm for more human contact. Choose and Book has yet to reach Scotland but clearly it may widen the communication gap further.

Despite this, general practice remains, I think, a highly rewarding job with much hope and promise for the future. The RCGP publication *The Future Direction of General Practice* states that 'The generalist who can provide holistic and patient-centred care is needed now more than ever'.²

Perhaps then it is not time to mourn for the loss of general practice but rather to fight to keep it alive. With the words of Thomas Jefferson, 'A little rebellion now and then ... is a medicine necessary for the sound health of government'.

Faye McCleery

GP Retainer, Wishaw Health Centre.

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