

## Diary

### 8 June

Dermatology Study Day  
The Celtic Manor Hotel, Newport  
Contact: Sali Davis  
E-mail: [sdavis@rcgp.org.uk](mailto:sdavis@rcgp.org.uk)  
Tel: 02920 504604

### 8 June

Minor Surgery Course  
RCGP, 14 Princes Gate, London  
Contact: Hilary Sellers  
E-mail: [bedsandherts@rcgp.org.uk](mailto:bedsandherts@rcgp.org.uk)  
Tel: 01582 404088

### 14 June

Cardiology 2  
Brookfield Hotel, Emsworth  
Contact: Carol White  
E-mail: [cwhite@rcgp.org.uk](mailto:cwhite@rcgp.org.uk)  
Tel: 01264 355013

### 15 June

Mentoring Development Day  
Tidworth College, Hampshire  
Contact: Carol White  
E-mail: [cwhite@rcgp.org.uk](mailto:cwhite@rcgp.org.uk)  
Tel: 01264 355013

## Neville Goodman

### I AM EXTREMELY SORRY (BUT NOT HERE)

Somehow, it was always acceptable that the speaking clock wasn't a live person. It doesn't make sense to have lots of people sitting around waiting to read out the time. Now digitised, the speaking clock was a marvel of clicking electrical contacts and tape-loops: 'at the third stroke' is part of our culture.

The more modern automatic messaging systems are not so well loved. They make equal sense, but are infuriating. 'Thank you for calling. If you have a touch-tone phone and want the service department please press one.' We complain about them but set up properly, and if there is a human being available to be contacted, they are an efficient way of organising calls. And although I am thoroughly sick of Vivaldi's *Four Seasons*, of which a segue of the opening and closing bars recycle while our switchboard connects you, it is better than sitting with a silent receiver against your ear, wondering if you're still connected.

Station and airport announcements are also now largely automated. Again, it makes sense — provided the announcements are of the expected: 'The train now standing at platform 5 is the 1215 to Newcastle.' Things are less satisfactory for announcements of the unexpected. The least a service provider should do if a train is late is to apologise. Only real live people can apologise. For some time now, late trains have been announced by a recorded voice. 'Virgin Trains ...' — or whoever is failing to provide the service — '... is sorry to announce that the (small pause as the specific train latches in) 1215 to Newcastle is approximately (small pause) 15 (small pause) minutes late due to (small pause) a signalling failure near (small pause) Newton Abbot. I am sorry for the delay this may cause to your journey.'

When the train is very late, there is a subtle change. I've not yet worked out the exact lateness necessary, but there is some criterion for 'I am sorry ...' becoming 'I am very sorry ...'. Eventually, it becomes 'I am extremely sorry ...', with real emphasis on extremely, and instead of 'delay' we get 'severe delay'. No doubt, these qualifications are also automatic.

Was there ever a less sincere 'I'? I is the first person pronoun: it has to belong to someone who will bleed if you cut them. A disembodied 'we' is bad enough, but 'I' is insulting. Mind you, it would save confrontation when yet another operation is cancelled because there isn't a bed.

Oh, and we've got a new government; same as the old government.