

# THE BackPages

## Viewpoints

### Contents

892

ESSAY

**What future for UK general practice? Enlarge, adapt, or perish?**

Jeremy Gibson

893

VALEDICTION

**The health of a nation**

Patrick McEvoy

894

ESSAY

**Summative assessment: a historical perspective**

Stuart Murray

896

ESSAY

**The narrative in patient-centred care**

Jeff Clark

897

DIGEST

**Book review**

Lesley Morrison

898

SERIAL

**A patient's diary: episode 24 — From the electronic portfolio of Dr Sally T Greengage**

John Salinsky

899

**Learning difficulties scandal**

Mike Fitzpatrick

900

STORIES

**Scattered Limbs: fragments for a history of medicine**

Iain Bamforth

906

**The Light Side**

James Willis

### GOD BLESS AMERICA!

In Turkey, to give the opening lecture at an international medical congress, I woke from a mostly sleepless night just in time to hear the election results announced. I knew immediately that I had to change my introductory remarks — to say that for the first time in a very long time, I was proud to bring greetings from my country — a country which had finally gotten it right, a country which had elected a black man, a country which might begin to treat others as friends, or equals, or even adversaries worthy of respect, instead of as imperial subjects.

I didn't really need to say any of it, as it turned out. By the time I got to speak, only a couple of hours later, I'd been congratulated by literally scores of Turks, and others from all over Europe and Asia. People told me how proud they were of America, and how wonderful I should feel. I could only congratulate them back — for the cloud is lifting for all of us.

I don't know if things will really change, or how much better it may actually get. But even as my mind keeps telling me that scepticism is still very much called for, my heart insists that it is important to be hopeful — and that there is much to be hopeful about.

If we want a better world, we can't merely celebrate, or hope; we have to hold Obama to the best of his promise. Still, as dangerous as it is to raise one's hopes too high ... it is more dangerous not to hope at all. Especially now, when so much seems possible.

**Jerome Hoffman**

DOI: 10.3399/bjgp08X376311

As a medical student in Chicago in 1968, I spent a long week ministering to the masses of demonstrators who were in the streets at the Democratic Convention. The country was exhausted by all that had already happened that year: assassinations, war, a country circling in despair and anguish. Late in the final evening of the convention, I was standing with thousands of others in Grant Park. The night had been filled with police riots and the surging crowds and the Illinois National Guard marching in to station themselves in front us with fixed bayonets and fierce expressions. At the top of our lungs, we chanted 'The whole world is watching.'

Forty years later, the same park in Chicago held 100 000 people waiting to hear Barack Obama give his acceptance speech as President of the United States. Again, Chicago was the centre of the country, not geographically, of course, but the centre of all the expectations for what was going to happen next. My generation had tried. But, as Barack said repeatedly, 'this is our time.' And this time, the whole world really was watching — and dancing, and weeping with joy. The one campaign poster we are definitely keeping for history is the one that simply says, 'OBAMANOS!!'

**John J Frey**

DOI: 10.3399/bjgp08X376320