

also do not know is the best way to give safety net advice: trials on children being discharged from hospital suggest that parental knowledge and satisfaction are better when written information is given in addition to verbal information.^{21,22} This may be particularly important in conditions in adults where memory could be affected.²³ While we improve the evidence base to underpin safety-netting, we recommend that all practising clinicians involved in first contact care try to implement the consensus recommendations on the basis of their own clinical experience. The recommendations might also be considered core competencies for GP vocational trainees and others working in first contact care settings.

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COMMENTARY

Thanks for the plug, folks. It's gratifying to find that what just seemed common sense when I first wrote about safety-netting in 1987 has survived the scrutiny of proper researchers and is now thought 'arguably the most important part of the diagnostic process.'

So why was I left feeling a tiny bit flat? It's certainly not for any lack of facts, logic, or passion in this cogently-argued piece.¹ I suspect it's more to do with how general practice itself has changed in the interim. Twenty years ago, safety-netting seemed a necessary safeguard against a sloppy over-confidence that made some of us think that, in general practice, near enough was good enough, and only other people made mistakes that mattered. But now, it seems, we need safety-netting as a remedy for under-confidence; under-confidence that flows from reduced clinical exposure in the training years and the 'fear of God' effect of an inundation of guidelines and protocols disobeyed at one's peril. We have become so used to GPs 'managing uncertainty' that you'd think uncertainty was all there is.

To me, safety-netting was primarily a mind-set thing, a little voice whispering, 'Remember you're fallible, and don't let this patient come to harm as a result.' I hope the little voice isn't now saying, 'Write it all down, spell it all out, and you're covered.' No, of course it isn't; it's saying both. Isn't it?

Roger Neighbour

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