A day in the life

Fourteen-year-old Ahmed. His nose is hurting. Had a fight, he says. Not broken, but still painful:

‘I beat him up though’. Hmm … tough guy.
‘I think ENT should have a look at this, it’s a little too painful for my liking’
‘Is it gonna be ok, doc’?

Ahmed’s scared. It’s not what you look at that matters, say wise people, it’s what you see.

My friend Steve was being bullied in school, so I decided to intervene. My heroics proved unrewarded however. Embroiled in a losing battle, I turned around to look for Steve; the only thing I could see was his back. Treachery. Uh-oh. Trouble. I call in the next one.

Twenty-one year old Jim:

These spots are really annoying doc. I’m not even a teenager anymore, and I thought these were teenage spots’. They are teenage spots; they must be on the wrong body …

Well, young man, I can either give you just the antibiotic lotion, or the combination one’.

A good bit of negotiation of management. I am impressed with me. Jim’s studying pharmacy.

We were all revising for pharmacology in second year medical school, looking through past paper questions. I’ll never forget question 4: ‘Aspirin. Discuss’ …

Thirty-five-year-old Jack is next; him and his wife will be travelling away. Which jabs will we’re dealt, only the way we play the hand.

When am I gonna get my new walking stick’, says 74-year-old Mr Hendry.

‘Good morning to you, young man,’ I reply. They always appreciate that.

‘Have you not heard anything from them then?’

‘No, bloody ‘aven’t’, he replies after a few utterances of the word ‘pardon’ while he adjusted his hearing aid.

‘Well, I’m going to get on the case right away ok’ , as I start typing the letter.

‘You do that’, he replies, still with a hint of anger.

‘Bloody nuisance.’ He continues, as he turns away.

I smile.

Eighty-six-year old Mr Farooq can only enter the surgery with the assistance of his family. One son holding his right arm, the other his left. He’s just returned from Pakistan. He looks deeply jaundiced:

‘He’s been unwell for the past few weeks, doc’.

‘How?’

‘Just off his food, staying in bed, not really
talking’, as they lift the being who was the source of them onto the examining couch.

‘Has he lost any weight?’

‘Yeah, loads’.

As I examine him, even my non-surgical hands detect a large right-sided abdominal mass. His deep jaundice has worked its way through even his dark skin.

‘He’s going to have to go in,’ I explain to one of his sons. And I speak with the on call team.

His sons look as though they know. It’s just that look in their eyes: that vague space between wanting and avoiding eye contact. They look as though they know.

Mr Farooq leaves the room, supported by his sons, and sadly, I turn from the view of the empty waiting room, back toward my desk, as I watch them leave the building.

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I move slowly towards the wash basin, to clean my hands before attending to my home visits, as I do catching a glimpse of myself in the mirror.

It’s not what you look at that matters, say the wise people, it’s what you see.

Majid Khan,
Full-time locum GP, and senior clinical teaching fellow at Warwick Medical School, Coventry.

DOI: 10.3399/bjgp12X630160

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A DANGEROUS METHOD
Directed by David Cronenberg, Produced by Jeremy Thomas. On UK general release

David Cronenberg’s A Dangerous Method takes for its subject the relationship between Freud and Jung in the years leading up to the First World War. Christopher Hampton’s script places at the centre of its narrative the astonishing figure of Sabina Spielrein, a Russian Jew, who is the first patient on whom Jung tries the dangerous method of the talking cure. This cure is so successful (Spielrein will become both a doctor and a psychoanalyst) that the publication of the case history leads Jung to go to Vienna to meet with Freud.

At first Freud welcomes the young acolyte. Psychoanalysis desperately needed medical respectability, and Jung is impeccably qualified with a position in Bleuler’s hospital. More important, for Freud, he is an Aryan in a movement that is exclusively composed of Jews. The film then juxtaposes the theoretical disagreements between Freud and Jung with the beginning and end of an affair between Spielrein and Jung. Jung becomes more and more intolerant of Freud’s refusal to brook disagreement. Freud more and more horrified at the abandonment of the scientific investigation of the sexual aetiology of the neuroses for a belief in a whole range of parapsychical phenomena that lead towards the occult. The background to these theoretical discussions is the conflict between Jung’s desire for sexual abandon with Spielrein and his Swiss burgher desire to enjoy the comforts provided by his rich wife. In a set of truly stellar performances (both Keira

Colin MacCabe,
Distinguished Professor of English and Film
University of Pittsburgh and associate director of the London Consortium.

DOI: 10.3399/bjgp12X630179

Carl Jung (Michael Fassbender) & Sigmund Freud (Viggo Mortensen) in A Dangerous Method.