Baring all

'Hats off to the lads!' you might say. Except that if they then removed theirs it might all get shamefully immodest. And besides, it would be unfair on the ladies, of whom there are many too.

Depending on the month involved, tasteful placement of not only hats, but tools, furniture, and foliage are all in evidence. Even so, there is lots of bare flesh revealed by folk who normally have far more discretion. Much is not toned. The lighting and photography lack anything sensuous. And the digital trickery is confined to adding in outerwear and foliage where villagers had brazenly exposed far more than a bare-all calendar of this sort is meant to expose.

The local papers and radio were quick to respond. They sought interviews from all the main protagonists. Most remained polite and positive although a few strayed into innuendo and pun. Here at the practice we stayed on safe territory and proclaimed how wonderful it has been to have such widespread community support for a fundraising venture. This is true: the calendar's purpose has been to raise money for the benefit of a charity that helps support medical care in the area. And, after all, every copy sold.

No doubt the calendar lacks the gloss or salacious appeal to sell far beyond the village boundary. But then, far fewer would have cooperated with its production if it had been for wider consumption. There is safety in keeping it within our own community. There is credit too for the fundraisers 'behind' it. There are further spin-offs as well, such as for those whose self-esteem has been immeasurably boosted, their mood enhanced. This, in a nutshell, is a case study of what is so strong about communities. But it also shows why they are so easy to undermine without spotting the effects.

Let's say there was no calendar. No one would notice that, nor the absence of the money it has earned. The cohesive forces of being involved in a successful joint venture would probably not be rued either, because many of those involved would not yet be sure how they would feel. Perhaps the only measurable difference might be a slightly lower rate of prescribing.

Our community faces all the usual challenges. Our pubs, churches, and post office are under threat. The schools have falling rolls. Our high street has vacant shop fronts. What remains of the local consumer economy is dominated by chains that reproduce their formula endlessly and drain money away to distant investors. This is part of the reason fewer people can find work here and so move away, taking their spending power with them. Now general practice too is being sucked into a future still bearing the hallmark of the industrial revolution, with its emphasis on efficiencies of scale and market forces and its treatment of people as disconnected economic units.

We, as GPs, are often at the heart of our communities. We know their power. We can point to odd items of research that have shown the benefit to health and wellbeing of some aspect or other. But we know this evidence bears testament to only a fraction of the whole.

The calendar shows us how vital corner shop practice really is to the communities we serve. More, it reminds us this is true interdependence.

'Hats off to the lads!' you might say.

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