



Activity reduction

No! Not that: this is management-speak! We're still against Activity Reduction where it equates with a Lack of Physical Exercise. But we're all for it when it equates with Admission Avoidance. Indeed we are! We can earn 25 pence per patient simply by sending a few less to hospital each month. Oh, such riches!

The problem is, who to keep?

Today has thrown up yet more conundrums. Let me tell you what they are. Perhaps you might even agree with my conclusions! Don't worry if not though, just remember to record your reflections and you will have covered Probity in your next appraisal. Bingo!

First up is Betty. She was never big but was chirpy and strong. In recent months, she has shrunk to a sparrow and lost her song. A few times she's wobbled on her perch. Her husband is older too and one 15 minute visit by a carer each day does not provide much relief. Yesterday, a blood test showed she's anaemic and has a raised white cell count but goodness knows why! Today she fell off her perch and couldn't get back on. A neighbour helped with that and then asked for a visit.

Second is Phil. He smokes and drinks and never comes to the surgery, not even to help us earn cash-for-checks. His belly precedes him like a cruise ship's bow. Today, he had a funny head at work and even missed his break. Someone found him sunk to the floor and called an ambulance in case it was a mini-stroke. There was a poster telling them to do that, the same someone said when she rang the surgery to let me know. I don't think she detected the insincerity of my thanks.

Third is Charlie. She's middle-aged too and has also bloated with the years. She woke up last night in severe pain. She's got a fever today and did well to make it to the surgery given how sore she is. Her tummy spills out around its edges like a wind-blown pond but somewhere in the middle something clearly lurks in the deep.

Colin is fourth. Colin lives between his bed and his chair. His daughter lives with him but works long hours and wants the accommodation but not the imposition on her social life. Weeks ago he forgot to take

his tablets and sometime since forgot how to reach his chair. His sugars are off the scale but he's got no ketones yet. He'll down a glass of water in one but can't stop himself from leaking it out at the other end. His daughter's working or clubbing though and won't let carers in. I'm meant to feel privileged that she does allow me.

So, take your pick! Who to keep at home? Ah, you've noticed there's nothing I can do about Phil? He's gone already! Perhaps I'll ask that the poster be binned, but the choice is really from three.

I choose Betty.

'It'll be your waterworks!' I shout, although I don't know if she really gets that. At least her husband can be relied on to get the tablets down her beak.

'Don't bother calling an ambulance if she has another fall!' I warn him with a pat on the shoulder. 'Got to give the antibiotics a few days to kick in!'

He gives me a thumbs up in the traditional way and I set out to celebrate with a healthy English plum.

Oh, what joy! It even costs 25 pence: how symbolic! I thought I'd have to kill two birds for one stone.

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