

Out of Hours

Side effects

“Lying on the operating table, after receiving antibiotic prophylaxis (which, unknown to him, would start the cycle off again) and reflecting on the unfortunate chain of events that had beset him, he sought to classify all the organs that had been affected.”

One morning a man woke up early with a sore throat. After a brief wrangle with the out-of-hours service he was prescribed antibiotics. These produced the unfortunate side effect of heartburn, alleviated with antacids, which in turn led to constipation, treated with laxatives. The result was abdominal spasms, subdued with spasmolytics, but these blurred his vision giving rise to glaucoma. Extensive use of beta-blocker eye drops led to hypotension and a further series of awful problems. The solution to each of which caused another: vasoconstrictors led to vertigo; antihistamines led to depression.

Humiliatingly, treatment for his depression with an SSRI reduced his libido and gave him a form of impotence. He braved his GP again, with whom he was on first-name terms, and was given a drug for erectile dysfunction which gave him a terrible headache. At this point his doctor prescribed paracetamol and codeine. His headaches worsened and he was prescribed a triptan. Nothing could have been worse: he broke out in terrible hives, was forced to take corticosteroids, and his blood pressure went up. Never fear, he was treated with ACE inhibitors and calcium channel blockers. These caused a cough and swollen legs. The water retention resolved with diuretic therapy but

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the diuretics and the ACE inhibitor rather hammered his kidneys. This acute renal failure alongside the bisphosphonate he was on for the steroid-induced osteoporosis resulted in hypocalcaemia.

Alas, enthusiastic doses of calcium and vitamin D3 gave him kidney stones. Lying on the operating table, after receiving antibiotic prophylaxis (which, unknown to him, would start the cycle off again) and reflecting on the unfortunate chain of events that had beset him, he sought to classify all the organs that had been affected. The only ones spared were his tonsils, adenoids, gallbladder and (varicose) veins of the lower limbs. Because he no longer had them. But that is another story ...

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