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JOINT 2ND PLACE

The Technophobe's Guide to the Digital Age

Douglas Adams had it right. In his *Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy* series he perfectly encapsulates the way I feel about technology. I am one of those poor Earthlings who 'still thinks digital watches are a pretty neat idea,'¹ and wonders why no one has noticed that technology is only making life more complicated? Adams's infamous Nutrimatic-Drinks-Dispenser 'invariably delivers a liquid that is almost, but not quite, entirely unlike tea.'¹ And isn't it true? Machines can't even get tea right.

When the best part of technology is the 'sense of achievement you get from getting it to work at all,'² something is wrong. Despite having been born slap-bang in the middle of the digital age, I am dismayed to find myself a 'technophobe.' But when I look around at my colleagues-to-be, I don't believe I'm alone.

On every GP placement I have heard doctors bemoaning technology day in and day out. And why not, when all the patient notes spontaneously decide to reboot mid-surgery, when the electronic prescribing program takes itself out for a few hours, or when a glitch renames every patient in the system 'George' (alright that one didn't happen, although I bet it could). It causes chaos.

But technology is a wonderful thing. We should be exalting it, not quivering at the byzantine complexity of decrypting our own

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passwords. For goodness sake, people are printing pelvises; it's simply marvellous!

It's true, hospitals see the most dramatic breakthroughs — whereas on some of my GP placements I'd have been lucky to see a pulse oximeter — but even without the flashiest gadgets, over time, technology has changed the job of the GP in a subtle yet profound way. And the more I think about it, the more I am won over.

Gone are the dark days of paternalism where patients unassumingly followed advice. More and more, patients are feeling empowered by knowledge from the web. 'Cyberchondriacs,' as some are affectionately nicknamed, are developing increasingly unusual diseases and I think it's fun to be kept on our toes; having to explain why it's unlikely to be an amoebic liver abscess and more likely to be gallstones to someone who is alarmingly well informed. But all joking aside, technology is helping people to take responsibility for their health, which is fantastic news for everyone.

The development of health applications and online symptom checkers is part of this new age of patient empowerment. Of course they are currently far from perfect but their potential is incredible. Apps are being designed to make long-term conditions, such as diabetes, easier to manage at home, and apps that aim to improve diet and fitness could play an enormous role in the fight against obesity, a costly and growing concern.

I have come to realise that 'technology' is so much more than erratic computer systems and so what if I can't run HTML backwards while simultaneously lowering cholesterol? We all have our strengths and computers aren't mine: that doesn't mean I should condemn all technology and run from it terrified. Technology was never the problem, I was.

My GP placements have helped me to see technology for what it really is and for that I am incredibly grateful. Even though I may never know what 'the cloud' is, and I am still waiting for that perfect cup of tea, I am embracing technology at last and am happy I will be a doctor in a digital world. So for anyone out there who has ever felt like me, keep going, we'll get through it.

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DOI: 10.3399/bjgp15X685765

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