

By Dr Tan Yia Swam, Deputy Editor

## 12 ANGRY PEOPLE



Please allow this Humble Storyteller to relate a story about twelve angry people. This is nowhere near as dramatic as the original play, but I'm sure this story will strike a common chord within you, my Dear Reader.

Once upon a time, there was an **Angry Patient**. He was angry for many reasons. He first started having pain on the right side of his tummy two days ago, and he saw the polyclinic because it was cheap and near his flat. He was given painkillers. Yesterday, the pain was still there, and he started feeling feverish, and experienced some nausea and diarrhoea. So he went to his GP downstairs, who referred him to the ER for appendicitis. He was registered, and given a Priority 2 status. He waited for maybe an hour; it felt longer, before the doctor came, took a history and dutifully performed a per rectal (PR) examination. Doctor called Surgical Registrar on call, and admitted the patient under Surgery. Up in the ward, **Houseman (HO)** came, clerked and PR again. **Medical Officer (MO)** came, reviewed the history and PR again. **Registrar** came, felt the abdomen and PR again. By now, Angry Patient was really, really angry – nah, furious! – because he had fasted from 11am, and it was 3am by the time Registrar came, and he was told to fast some more for

a scan. Of course, having been PR-ed four times did not help his mood any. Luckily, KY jelly was used.

The **Filial Daughter** of Angry Patient was also not that happy. She felt that she had to keep her father company until admission, and “no one” attended to them for hours on end, because all she was waiting for, was the doctor with the black tag to decide whether or not surgery was needed. The other doctors before that could not make a decision anyway. At 3am, while relieved that there was no need for urgent surgery, she also felt miffed because she still needed to work the next day at 8am, and had spent the whole night waiting for nothing. Next day, when she dutifully visited during visiting hours, she had to queue to register, get her temperature checked and receive the sticker, get the mask and queue again for the lift. Her father was not in bed. Apparently he was down in the scan room. Filial Daughter threw a fit demanding to know why the scan was not done at 3am last night. **Nurse** tried to explain but she would not listen. Nurse called HO, who was in the middle of taking blood from a demented patient who was spitting at him, so the phone went unanswered. Nurse called MO who was scrubbed up in surgery. Nurse called Registrar who was scrubbed up in the same surgery. Nurse didn't dare call **Consultant**. HO tried to call back but the phone was engaged. Filial Daughter

went back to work in a huff, threatening to complain to the **Chairman of the Medical Board (CMB)**.

HO was angry because he was drop-dead tired after a busy call, the round was long and there were so many changes to do. For this patient alone, he tried to call Radiologist for the scan last night, but the creatinine was high, so everyone decided to hydrate and repeat creatinine and proceed in the morning instead. Then, the IV plug dropped out mysteriously while Angry Patient was allegedly sleeping and he came to re-site it. NBM was ordered, written in black and white in the case sheets but Patient was somehow mysteriously fed, earning HO a scolding from everyone in the morning round. At 11am while Patient was in the scan room, **Angry Radiologist** called him to reset the plug, and of course Angry HO could not understand how a plug that he just set at 5am had mysteriously dropped out again. Of course, the spittle in his face, courtesy of the demented patient did not help his mood any. Luckily, he had a mask on.

Nurse was angry because the night staff passed a report that Patient pulled out his own plug, which had already been reset, so why should Nurse get scolded by the doctors? Nurse was angry because she had to constantly be the first in line dealing with angry patients and relatives. Nurse was angry because she always had to do non-nursing work

like adjust temperature controls for patients, feed them while relatives look on, fix the printer when it is spoilt and punch holes in case sheets for filing. Meanwhile, doctors didn't sign the results so she couldn't file them, and they also conveniently forgot to "off hourly parameters" for patients who were due for home soon, resulting in even more unnecessary work. Nurse was angry because she had been coming in early and leaving late just to finish all this miscellaneous non-nursing work, and there didn't seem to be any appreciation for her work.

MO was angry because HO was slow at clerking and doing changes, so there was a lot to do, plus his Registrar asked him to go to the OT to assist in a major operation. So when morning round came by, the patient list was incomplete and results were not traced. Everyone was unhappy. Registrar told him he must supervise HO. Consultant told Registrar that if the ward was busy, he should let MO work outside rather than scrub in for OT. MO was angry; what was a surgical posting without doing any surgery? MO was also angry because post-call, he still had to finish some minor operations from the night call, and there was a full day clinic ahead of him. Luckily, he would get to sit down during clinic.

Registrar was angry because he received so many phone calls from the whole hospital during the night that the battery went flat, was recharged, and was now flat again. Some of the calls went like this, "Hi, I have an acute abdomen here. Very guarded. Bloods? Nope, not taken yet. Erect CXR? Er... not done yet. Can you see now?" His own MO was still quite new, and could not operate alone yet, so he was in OT for every single case, including the abscesses and appendices. He was angry because Consultant scolded him for not remembering details of every case, when

there were 25 admissions, 12 blue letters, and 8 reviews. He was angry that his HO couldn't get CT scan and couldn't prepare the list in time. He was angry for many things, not least because his 2-year-old son called him "Uncle" yesterday, and his wife went back to her mother's house crying that he did not spend enough time at home with his family. Unfortunately, it would be a late day today as he had to prepare some patients for laparotomy, and could not buy flowers to pacify the wife. Too bad. Work came first, or so he'd been taught.

Radiologist was angry because he was asked to do an urgent CT A/P with contrast in a patient with raised creatinine of 160. Didn't these idiots know the implications of contrast nephrotoxicity? What has happened to the good old days of abdominal examination and PFO if guarded? Why must every patient be scanned? When the scan was finally done after adequate hydration, he called up the requesting HO to inform him, "It's sigmoid diverticulitis, but that's not why I'm calling. There's a sealed perforation. So don't ask me to do a barium enema." Thinking back, he could not understand why he said that last bit. It was probably the years of frustration of having to do "urgent" scans for conditions that were not urgent, and doing multiple investigations for the same condition without having adequate clinical information. Luckily, they never bothered him again for this same patient.

Surgical Consultant was angry because the round was a damn mess. The post-call team was slow, and didn't know their patients. Why, in his day, there were just as many admissions, or even more! There weren't any fancy subspecialties, ALL patients came under Surgery, and he managed every patient on his own. How could the MO not know how to perform appendicectomy? Why, in his day, even the HO performed appendicectomies!

Consultant was also angry because there was no parking available when he arrived at work this morning, as all the lots were taken up by HOs and MOs. Why, in his day, few junior staff drove; now, it galls him to see a HO driving a BMW. Truly, times have changed...

Angry Patient had another relative looking for him, a Son who had been working overseas for the past ten years. He rushed back when he heard that his father had been admitted. **Overseas Son** was angry because "no one" updated him. When it was pointed out that the medical team had been updating his sister, the alleged caregiver, everyday, he gave them a blank look and stated, "But I'm the Eldest Son!" That's right, HO has nothing better to do except call up every member of the family to update them everyday. Being Eldest Son gave him the right to dictate major decisions for the whole family even if he had been out of touch for years. How stupid of the medical team to not recognise this, right? Afterall, even Angry Patient told them, "I never studied much, you talk to my son. I don't know anything; you call my son and talk to him."

CMB was angry because even though he has a protected parking lot, these young punks parked their cars everywhere, blocking the way and he cannot get to his lot! He was also angry because he had to deal with the hundreds of complaints that flooded his office everyday. Couldn't these people on the ground do their work better? Was it that difficult to provide good customer service and smile, and make people happy?

**Registrar's Wife** was angry because he forgot their wedding anniversary, her birthday, their son's birthday and their first kiss anniversary. Even though he also forgot his own birthday, she was not ready to listen to reason. She was angry at being the only parent to attend a PTM (Parents-Teachers Meeting) all the time. She was angry at eating dinners

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alone all the time, and having the other plate untouched and growing cold. She was angry at having to look after her son alone, and having to do the housework all the time. Most of all, she was angry that she always had to do the gross things like unblocking the toilet, removing dead insects or cleaning up Son's vomit when he was sick.

**Registrar's Son** was angry because his friends laugh at him at school, calling him a mummy's boy, and saying that he had no daddy. In his poor confused 4-year-old mind, he KNEW that he had a loving daddy who used to take him out to the playground and read him storybooks. But strangely, daddy seemed to not have been around for quite a while. The man who came home late at night sometimes looked angry and old, not how he remembered daddy. This man made mummy cry all the time, while daddy and mummy were always happy together. He was a confused, sad and angry little boy.

So my Dear Reader, which Angry person do you relate to?

These twelve are just for starters – I have neglected to include the reactions of: Angry Renal Registrar who had to reply to an “urgent” referral for renal impairment; Angry Cardiology Registrar who had to perform an “urgent” pre-op assessment; Angry Medical Social Worker who had to do discharge planning, and listen to all the myriad complaints of the patient and family and staff; Angry Parents of HO who had not seen their Darling Son for two weeks running; Angry Grandmother of HO who was upset that her favourite grandson forgot her birthday, and so intended to write him out of her will; Angry Cat belonging to Angry MO who had not been fed for two days, and ate up the goldfish in the fish tank. Of course, when Angry MO got home, he was even angrier. And Angry Cat gave him angry scratches.

This Humble Storyteller does wish that there could be less anger at the

workplace, and a happier working environment could be created. I also wish that there were more Hobbits than Orcs around. Oh well, might as well wish for ten million dollars while I'm at it. **SMA**



*Mrs Loong has been happily married for 3 months. Meanwhile, Dr Tan has resumed surgical training, and is still looking for an AST position. It is strange to think that if she were in the new residency program, she would have finished her training by now, instead of having to wonder when she can start her 4-year AST. Incidentally, her MOH bond expires in 7 months.*