



Chris Ellis

The sign of the sparkling stool

There is now a whole catalogue of objects that patients or their friends (or enemies) have pushed up their bottoms. These objects range from money or recreational drugs (used for illicit purposes) to food, especially fruit and vegetables, to children's toys such as a model submarine (although we still await the aircraft carrier).

There are also the other exotic objects such as vibrators that have found themselves on the wrong runway and objects of easy access and shape such as condiment containers and the whole range of bottles from tomato sauce to Heineken beer.

Last year a couple of young men wandered into our general practice casualty department after an evening out on the town. We had on duty a somewhat shy nurse and an equally shy lady doctor of the English Rose variety. After a certain amount of perambulatory circumlocution one of the men gave the history that his friend has pushed an avocado pear up his bottom.

Further refined investigation revealed the fruit to be too large to remove digitally and the patient was referred to hospital for removal under general anaesthesia. The surgeon on call attempted to remove it with an orthopaedic screw set but the fruit was too ripe to hold the screw. It was eventually delivered by Wrigleys forceps, as is so often the case with avocado pears in mid pelvic arrest.

The following day after finding his old hospital notes it was revealed that he was a recurrent offender with a variety of fruits to his name. A psychiatric opinion was sought and a diagnosis of Alcohol Disinhibition Syndrome (ADS) was made. This syndrome, as you know, affects people in different ways. After a couple of drinks most of us react either with increased verbiage or by singing or by leering at the hostess. A few others have specific reactions or routines that they go into. For instance there are "stackers" who start stacking glasses

or objects one on top of each other on the table. The more advanced stackers do it with chairs and tables. The most dramatic effects of ADS is in those few people who, after a rum or two, take off all their clothes, which makes for a great hiatus to a party. The avocado pear pushers are thought to be in the same category.

When I was a medical student in the sixties there was an eccentric physician, who lectured to us about the Sign of the Silver Stool. This apparently occurs when there is a bleed from a carcinoma of the ampulla of Vater, which is obstructing the pancreatic ducts. The combination of bleeding onto the fatty pale stools is supposed to give a silvery sheen. Of course, I have looked for this all my practising life but never seen the sign.

Yet I did come near to it once. I was working in the diamond fields of South West Africa, which is now Namibia. The miners had a tradition of stealing the diamonds by either swallowing them or inserting them up their rectums. As the company medical officer I was called in as the official excavator if they did not emerge spontaneously. Luckily I was only asked to excavate on two occasions. It created quite a role tension so I always asked the miner's permission and sought his opinion on the matter before I proceeded (some of them were quite big chaps). The first cache was twelve small diamonds, each wrapped in masking tape, inside a condom. I got my fingers around the knotted end and pulled it out fairly easily. The second case was a single large diamond, which was about the size of my thumb nail, and turned out to be fifty seven carats. It was a pale yellow. At least it was after I had cleaned it. It was the sign of the sparkling stool.

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