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S O U T H A F R I C A N

FAMILY PRACTICE

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THE ART OF HOLISTIC CARE

Respect and encouragement

He is called to the emergency room of a rural hospital late in the evening. The young woman with acute dyspnoea is already receiving treatment. He soon discovers that she had neither bronchospasm nor cardiac failure. He pauses and thinks, 'What is going on?' After a while the patient starts talking about her suffocating situation at home. She is newly married, with a husband working away at the mines. She is living with the in-laws and having to share the husband's income with the whole family, including five children from a sister-in-law who disappeared with a new husband.

In consultation with the concerned accompanying relatives, he decides to admit the patient for the night. The family is aware now that the patient is ill, but this illness is part of a situation that will have to be faced by all of them. The doctor will see them on a follow-up visit soon.

In another rural hospital the superintendent tells how they have identified a room in each ward where the doctor can have individual consultations where privacy is ensured.

These stories came up in a recent training session discussing the principles of family medicine in response to the question: what is family medicine all about and what difference can it make? Both of these doctors have been on the family medicine course for less than six months.

Why tell these stories? I want to share the hope and inspiration that I got from them and what I learned from them. I learned a few things about respect:

I respect these young colleagues who are both ready and willing to practise medicine in a different way. I think it has something to do with the theme of the Family Medicine Congress: "The art of holistic care." Let us face the challenge to look at holistic care as generalists: how do we practise it, understand it and teach it? How do we research and review it? Let us also be encouraged. It is possible and it is happening, even where you least expect to find it.

Jannie Hugo
Guest Editor

RESPECT:

respect for the patient
the family

respecting the complexity of life

the ability of people to face their own difficulties
their ability to make sense of their own lives

the doctor:

self-respect: I can care properly for this person

respect for the body:

proper clinical examination
assessment and management
healing: the body can recover

Respect translated into action

learning and the courage to change
things become different
excitement!

respect.

GUEST EDITOR:

Jannie Hugo, Dept of Family Medicine, PO Box 459, Umhlanga 4320
PO Box 222, MEDUNSA 0204

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SALES/ADMIN/ACCOUNTS:

Claire de Jongh
PO Box 459, Umhlanga Rocks 4320
Tel: (031) 562-8509

EDITORIAL ADDRESS:

PO Box 459, Umhlanga 4320

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