

## Sour Milk

By Chris Ellis

Ten years ago a new patient made an appointment to see me. I was running late and getting nowhere when I heard the surgery door slamming shut. The patient had gone. Two days later a letter arrived.

June 27 1978

Dear Sir

re: *D I Loam: Prospective Patient*

An appointment was made with your receptionist for Mr D I Loam to see yourself at 12h00 hours on Monday 26th June 1978. Mr Loam presented himself at your Surgery in Estcourt

at 11.50 hrs and filled in the necessary administrative proformas for a new patient. Mr Loam was then requested to wait in the Surgery Waiting Room and having been seated until 1230 hours informed your receptionist that he would wait no longer and departed from your Surgery. It is noted that you are a Professional Medical Practitioner and that your time is vital for earning an income. However, it is brought to your attention that Mr Loam is a Professional Civil Engineer and that his time is essential in earning an income for his Company.

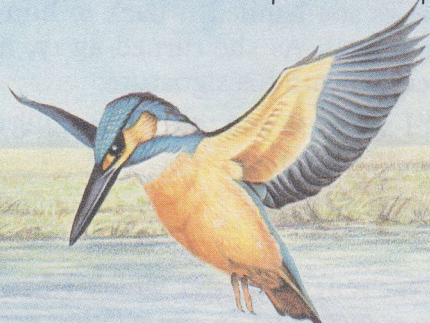
Adopting the premise that you are quite entitled to charge standing time due to broken

SALBUTAMOL

S2 VENTEZE Inhaler. Each metered dose contains 100 µg Salbutamol. Reg. No. R/10.2.1/292.

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The Kingfisher. A tiny miracle of speed and accuracy. Like a lightning bolt he shoots from the sky to spear his prey. He depends on his speed and well-aimed action for survival.



Venteze Inhaler is also fast and direct.

- Inhalation of Venteze produces near maximal bronchodilation within 5 minutes.
- Highly selective action avoids cardiovascular stimulation at

therapeutic doses.

- When administered by inhalation, Venteze reduces the risk of skeletal muscle tremor.

Give your asthmatic patient rapid and direct relief – prescribe Venteze Inhaler.

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appointments, Mr Loam in turn wishes to submit for your attention a claim for standing time for the duration of one half hour only and all its inherent costs — thus:

Direct cost of Company = R2 250 for 25 working days of 9 hrs.

$$\begin{aligned}\therefore \text{Hourly rate on direct costs} &= \frac{2250}{25} \div 9 \\ &= \text{R10 per hour}\end{aligned}$$

Allow for mileage (return trip) in travelling from Mr Loam's office for an abortive appointment = 12c/km x 18 km = R2,16c.

$\therefore$  Cost for standing due to abortive appointment by having to wait for an unreasonable period: = R2,16c (travelling) + R5,00c cost (labour) = R7,16c.

This correspondence is written with "tongue in cheek", but it is hoped that the principle involved is accepted and that if an appointment is made this appointment then kept punctually by both parties.

Yours Faithfully.

**D I Loam**

This was in fact a very reasonable letter but it didn't stop me from having my standard grief reaction which runs from disbelief to anger and then to resentment in roughly that order. I asked our receptionist to type a reply.

27th July 1978.

Dear Mr Loam,

Following your letter, I am reminded of a story which my father cherished and, I suspect, embellished.

My maternal grandfather was Lord Lieutenant of Cambridgeshire, a squire of the tiny village Babraham and a man of fiercely peppery disposition. One day he received from the local vicar, whose church was actually in the garden of my grandfather's huge house, a letter of mild complaint about the milk emanating from the Home Farm.

My grandfather sat down at his desk, smoke jetting from his nostrils.

"Dear Jones..." he wrote, the pen scoring the paper and etching the words into the leathery top of the desk. There followed a page of

magisterial invective, ending with the words: "I must ask you to get your milk elsewhere".

He showed it to my grandmother, who was appalled. "You can't possibly send that", she insisted, arguing that it would make all further communication with the vicar impossible. Reluctantly my grandfather tore it up and started again, this time modifying his tone to one of mere abuse. Again my grandmother vetoed it emphatically and again it was torn up. Six other rough drafts followed, becoming progressively milder but still starting:

"Dear Jones..." and ending with the words, "I must ask you to get your milk elsewhere".

Each time he was persuaded to tear them up, until at least an acceptable form of words was agreed on.

The final letter went:

Dear Jones,

I very much regret that you have had cause for complaint. I will look into the matter myself and will ensure that it does not happen again.

Yours etc.

My grandmother allowed herself an indulgent smile as she handed it back to him with a nod of approval. As she turned away, he hurriedly added beneath his signature:

PS "I must ask you to get your milk elsewhere".

Yours Sincerely,

**Dr C G Ellis.**

I never sent this letter which I had plagiarized from a magazine in the waiting room. Instead I sent a rather tame note:

Dear Mr Loam

Thank you for your letter. I am so sorry you were kept waiting... very busy day... you will understand that at times...

Please feel free to make another appointment etc...

Yours etc.

**Dr C G Ellis**

He did and we got on very well. I wish now that I had sent the first letter as, knowing him, he would have enjoyed it much more.