

# Guest Comment

by George Davie

I often wonder how many of my colleagues make errors of judgement by simplifying their diagnostic procedures.

This point was brought home to me in my own practice, when Mr M (40), a patient of long standing, came into my consulting rooms recently, complaining of a pain in the left wrist.

A cursory examination of the acute angle of the offending part clearly indicated a Colles fracture. I could have given up right there, and referred him to an orthopaedic surgeon, but Mr M's anxious demeanour made me pause.

I hinted at the nature of the injury, hoping to draw him out on the underlying aetiology.

"Have you broken anything before?" I asked softly.

"Only a few promises", he answered with a wry grin.

Further gentle probing yielded the following significant information: it appeared that 20 years previously, Mr M, then 20 years old, had in fact broken off his engagement to a sweet and lovely young girl. It is interesting to note that the fracture was in the **left** wrist – traditional site of the engagement ring.

Upon delving yet more deeply, I learned that Mr M, after being prematurely weaned from his mother's breast, had formed, as an infant, the habit of sucking his left thumb.

"I can't believe the thing's really broken. (DENIAL). I've never broken a thing in my life. Why does it have to happen to me at my age?" (ANGER).

I naturally assured Mr M of his blamelessness.

In a low voice, I said: "No need to feel guilty. Many people of just your age suffer similar injuries".

Glancing down at his hand, he said, "Well, it does look a bit funny". (ACCEPTANCE).

"Do you have much pain?"

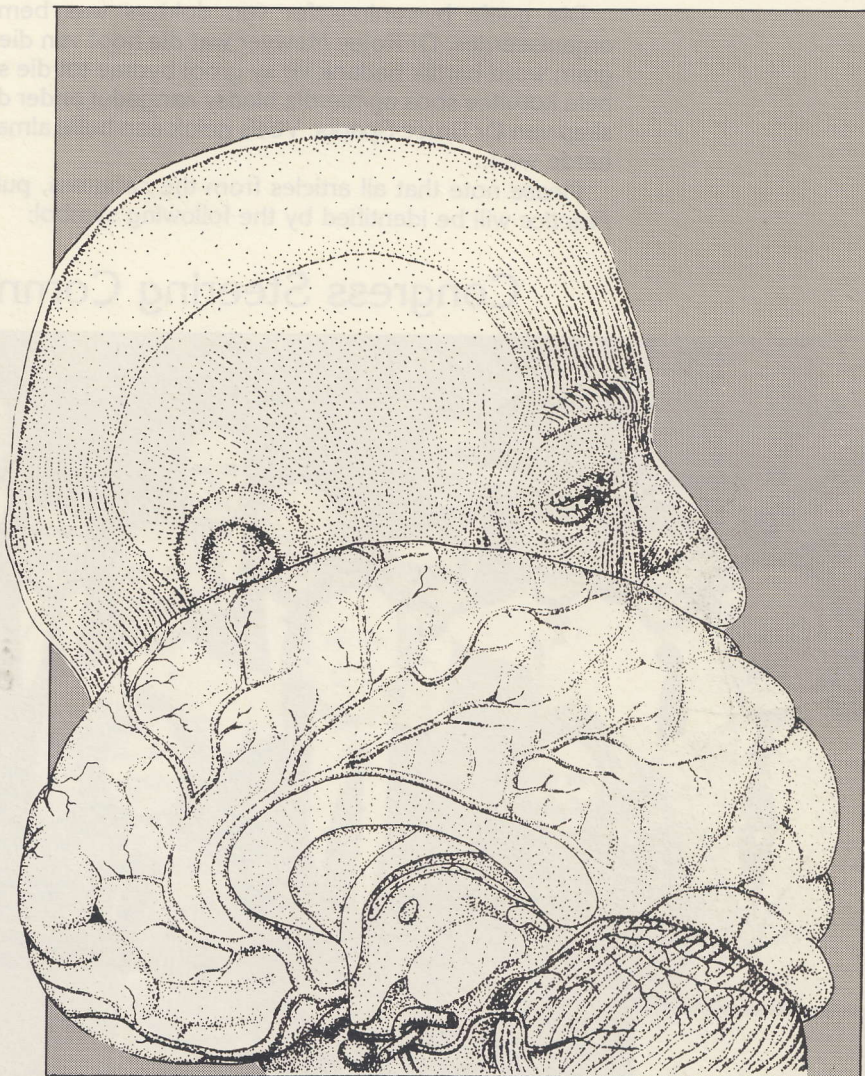
"A little".

"A little?"

"Well, quite a bit actually".

"I can understand that. These things are sometimes very painful."

"Mr M, despite the pain, which



## Where the hurt lies

must have been growing throughout our lengthy interview, showed no inclination to give way to emotional behaviour.

I jerked his elbow sharply, and was rewarded for my pains with some highly cathartic, though unprintable, responses.

Having lived through his pain, I felt

he was on the road to full recovery.

As he left my rooms, his wrist dangling, he winced.

"Ah", I thought philosophically, "These psychic hurts are not cured overnight".

Were it not for Mr M, I would have missed out on yet another important chance for psychosomatication.