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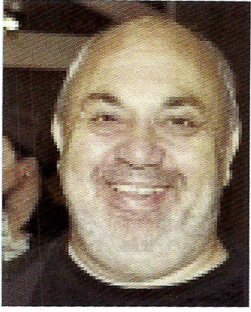
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DR VANDENBURG WILL SEE YOU NOW

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An important anniversary in October, I realised I have been living in Brighton for exactly one year. I am now a fully fledged Brightonian. I live on the beach and eat fish and chips walking along the front, except when the seagulls dive bomb at me to snatch the "poisson et frites" away. I am sure that they are French seagulls on a day trip. English Seagulls would never be so rude. It's really hard to believe that they are an endangered species?!

I had hoped by now to have ended my commutes to London, however, the Private Sexual Health Practice has not taken off as expected in Brighton. Before I moved, I was told that due to the libido and morals of the citizens; I would be inundated with work. Either someone has added bromide to the water, or the safe sex message is now Brighton's favourite mantra. Alternatively, and I'm sure that this is more likely, the NHS Sexual Health Clinics in Brighton are far more efficient and patient-friendly than those elsewhere in the U.K. So I regularly take the "fast train" to London and continue my clinics in Harley Street.

If the two most often told lies in the world are "I love you" and "The cheque is in the post", I now need to add a third; "Brighton is only fifty minutes from London." This maybe true if you are an aforementioned endangered seagull living at Brighton station visiting your genetically related cousin pigeon who lives in the rafters of Victoria Station, who manages to get a train running on time, but for all other commuters, it is a fallacy.

You have to get to Brighton Station, the train has to run on time and then you have to get to your London destination from Victoria, London Bridge or St Pancras. There are a few stops in South London and First Capital Connect makes some stops on its way through London but

otherwise you have to get to your destination on public transport or if you are a lucky boy like me, taxis. Door to door, even on a good day, it takes me two hours.

I never realised that the number of excuses there are, when trains do not run to time, exceeds the number of excuses of both my children when they haven't done their homework and my patients when they unfortunately put themselves at risk after "unlucky" sexual encounters. I am sure that all readers can add to this list but here are mine in the first year. There is not only the wrong type of leaves, ice and snow on the line but we also have had sheep.

There has been a wheelie bin, a person hiding under the train and also excess water and a mudslide outside East Croydon. I thought this only happened in Malibu?

The train doors don't work, they are stuck open or stuck shut.

The toilets don't work or they overflow. The electric motors freeze, fuse, malfunction or just give up in disgust because every light bulb in the train has popped at the same time.

A tunnel partly collapsing, okay it was not much, but this still meant the line closed for two hours.

The points don't work for a million reasons, the signals don't work for a trillion reasons and the trains don't work for a zillion reasons, "uncontrollable factors or circumstances"

Passengers are a textbook of medical case studies more varied than those of Emergency Ward 10, Casualty and Holby City combined. They have panic attacks, heart attacks, unexpectedly go into labour, become psychotic, manic or just plain drunk and there are a few unfortunate souls, who can't access appropriate medical care and jump in front of the train.

When I recently was travelling up to

London with a friend, who's lived in Brighton for many years, I was told that I was either exaggerating or unlucky when I told her the above scenarios frequently increased my journey time to three hours.

She was not so scornful by the time we arrived, for not only did we have train problems but we had taxi problems as well. The taxi to Brighton station was held up by road closures and public demonstrations. Our train departed late as the driver did not turn up for his shift and we were held up outside East Croydon because the train in front had broken down, and then further delayed outside Victoria as no platform was available.

Our taxi ride from Victoria was no better, almost every North to South road in Central London is now blocked due the building of Cross-rail and there was a protest march in Park Lane. Marylebone High Street was shut with a large crane hoisting an even larger air conditioner on to a building roof and Hampstead was all but shut down due to subsidence of the main road.

"I told you so", I said to my friend very quietly. "Don't yell at me", she replied. "It's never happened to me, before." I didn't answer but smiled to myself, disbelievingly, knowing that her statement was either not true or she was the luckiest woman in the world. It could of course be that she; herself, either had delusions or memory loss due to one of the medications she takes, as so frequently happens to the poor defendants I see in my Medico-Legal practice.

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