



Laughter and Tears



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Opinion

As a practising GP, I always did out of our visits and regularly at weekends. I loved doing home visits. I thought the experience of seeing a family in its home surroundings to be a valuable education. One Sunday at 8:00 am, I had to visit an overweight woman in her fifties complaining of indigestion and upper abdominal discomfort. I knew her well. She had been to the surgery only two days earlier. What was most remarkable about this patient was her laugh, typically hearty and loud, with a further short burst of laughter. I would know when she was in the surgery building.

She opened the door with laugh and exclaimed with delight, "Oh! It is you!" She led me into her living room where her husband was sitting quietly but anxiously. I obtained her history (large meal last night) and examined her, and both of these were inconclusive, but something said inside me that I should not rely on her laughter, as she might be using it to shield something more serious. I said to her I would like an ECG on her and a second opinion. She laughed and said "No need, I should be OK by the evening, I have already taken Rennie's." But I insisted on her going to hospital.

She laughed again and said with casually replied "All right, I will go tomorrow!" I protested and said "No, today. Now!" She laughed again and before her laugh could end I dialled the local hospital and arranged for her to be seen. I was going to dial for an ambulance and she said with a laugh "Please, no ambulance. I do not want my neighbours to see an ambulance in front of my house!" After a further protest from me she agreed, but only to keep me happy. I sent her on her way. Because my inner instinct was not to be overtaken by her laugh and casualness.

Later that day I had a call from another patient in the same area, so decided to drop in on my laughing patient. The husband answered the door and was in a state of shock. With tears in his eyes, he told me that the patient reached the hospital safely and seen by the doctor who arranged some tests. She was still in a trolley when she suffered a massive heart attack and died immediately. Like her husband I found myself in a state of shock, and even to this day her distinct laughter echoes in my ears.



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