

It's Friday, I'm In Love: Pete's Hidden Curriculum Part 3

"When you're in love, it's the most glorious two-and-a-half days of your life." - Richard Lewis [1].

The good news is that we are over the hump now and past the most depressing day of the year, which is known as Blue Monday, and falls on the third Monday in January. Even better news is that it is fast approaching Valentine's Day. And why is that good news, I hear you ask? Well, it's because I thought that on this occasion, I would share the love. Although there are many aspects to love that I could discuss, I thought that I would cover some of the things that I actually love about medicine, and in doing so prove that I am not a total Victor Meldrew curmudgeon when it comes to my career. "What Time is Love?" is the question the electronic band The KLF once posed shortly before they burned a million pounds on the Scottish island of Jura, for reasons which are still unclear [2]. Well, the answer to the question "What Time is Love?" is: "Right now, on Pete's Bogus Journey."

One of the main reasons that I was attracted to becoming a doctor was because, like *Alan Carr: Chatty Man*, I have always loved communicating with people. I like to think that I am not a complete jaw-me-dead though, even though my wife might say otherwise, especially given my penchant for staying up late at night chatting away with incessant demands of "talk to me" and nudging her awake. But in a clinical setting, if there is time, I like to have a brief conversation with the patient about their life, and try to get them to talk about something that they are passionate about. In doing so, it not only puts them at ease and lightens the mood but also provides positive feedback for me, lifting my own spirits at the same time.

From the many topics that have previously been discussed in the clinic, my favourites have included the perpetual current collection of eejits (Scots: idiots) on the TV programme *The Apprentice*, the contender for the best Indian restaurant ever, and stories from a patient working for BRIXMIS gathering intelligence behind the Iron Curtain in East Germany during the Cold War, which I really could have listened to all day if there were not more patients to see [3]. However, there is one topic, above all, that I love engaging a patient



in conversation with, and that is football. The reason for this is that, like football supporters the world over, Scottish fans are truly passionate about the sport, and their faces come to life when discussing it [4].

I first realised that I had a love for football at the age of 14, during the infamous 1986 Mexico World Cup. I religiously watched England qualifying through the fraught group stage matches, followed by their resounding beating of Paraguay 3-0 in the round of 16. They were through to a quarter-finals grudge match against Argentina, with tensions high as a result of the recent Falklands War. Devastatingly for me, England were knocked out by two notorious goals by Diego Maradona: "The Hand of God" goal, followed by "The Goal of the Century" goal. Even now, I struggle to come to terms with the injustice of the first goal scored illegally with Maradona's left hand. In my 25 years living in Scotland, I have learnt also to accept the Scottish trait of supporting "anyone but England" in a tournament, and I believe that this goal is any Scottish football fan's favourite footballing moment closely followed by Archie Gemmill's classic goal against the

Netherlands at the World Cup in 1978. These two topics are perfect to bring a smile onto the face of any Scotland supporter in the clinic.

I have also encouraged a love for football in my two sons, who sadly for me, have adopted Scotland as their National side. When they were very little, I took them to their first football match, Scotland vs Macedonia at Hampden in Glasgow. After a first half, where Macedonia dominated and the score was still at an unexciting 0-0, with the kids becoming fidgety and the rain lashing down, I took them home early. As we left through the quiet turnstiles, the security guard smiled and looking at their dejected faces said to me: "Have the kids had enough punishment for one day?". I do fear for my kids' future happiness, but they have made their choice.

I also love my colleagues. I know that this sounds like something from a sickly sweet rom-com, but it is important. They are a decent bunch, all approachable with no abrasive personalities, and from decades of experience this seems to be something of a trend in ophthalmology. Crucially though, they are all supportive. Whilst Google and

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the PubMed search engine can be your friends when managing a complicated patient, my colleagues can always be counted on for advice as well.

Once, when I was on-call at a weekend, shortly after becoming a consultant, I had to manage a young child with a rapidly progressing periorbital cellulitis secondary to an unusual frontal sinusitis and subperiosteal abscess. It was clear the patient most likely needed orbital surgery, but neither the ENT consultant on-call or I knew what the best plan of action was, and we both felt slightly out of our depth. In medicine, this is known as a "brown trousers moment". I then had the "Who wants to be a millionaire?" bright idea and phoned a friend, contacting one of the paediatric ophthalmologists who was not on-call. He promptly came in from home and operated on the patient with me assisting, for which I have never been more grateful. Which leads me on to my advice for the Hidden Curriculum for the medical students, which is that when looking at a department or GP practice to work in, make sure to choose one with supportive colleagues, as this is key to being happy and comfortable in your job. It may be hard to establish in advance, but do try and carry out some Columbo-style detective work, as it will pay dividends.

Lastly, with a penchant for a bit of schadenfreude, I love beating Harry, my vitreoretinal colleague, to the last space in the staff car park in the morning. It's the NCP car park or an illegally parked car sticker from security for you, Harry. Your choice.

Robert Smith from The Cure once told us that "It's Friday, I'm in love". We all know why he chose Friday though, and that is because like the 80s chocolate advert which said "Thank Crunchie it's Friday", it represents the end of the working week, and time to go home and enjoy other pursuits which we love for the weekend. With that I will sign off and wish you a "Happy Valentine's Day". Also, if you have a partner, don't forget to plan ahead for the 14th. Petrol station flowers, whilst being useful in an emergency, do not really cut the mustard on Valentine's Day.

References

1. With regards to being in love with my medical career, that represents the first two-and-a-half days of medical school.
2. The reasons for the KLF burning of a million pounds has been debated ever since, but even Bill Drummond, co-founder of the band, said in 2004: "It's a hard one to explain to your kids and it doesn't get any easier. I wish I could explain why I did it so people would understand." However, there was no love from his former protégé Julian Cope who complained: "He burned a million pounds which was not all his, and some of it was mine. People should pay off their creditors before they pull intellectual **** stunts like that."
3. BRIXMIS was the British Commanders'-in-Chief Mission to the Soviet Forces in Germany, and was created as an agreement to maintain a liaison with the Soviet equivalent SOXMIS. This allowed for formal events to be attended by both sides where they could share the love, if there was any. It also unofficially enabled the all-important military intelligence gathering, which was obviously fully exploited by both sides.
4. The Scottish football player and manager Bill Shankly once eloquently described the love which football supporters have for the game: "Some people believe football is a matter of life and death. I don't like that attitude. I can assure them it is much more serious than that."

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