

GP caught flashing

Tribulations of being a beacon-flashing doctor, by Dr Jon Garvey

NOW WE are allowed to race around the countryside displaying green, flashing beacons on our cars, one might expect a great saving in lives to result. My own first experience in their use, however, leaves me with some misgivings.

The phone rings in a busy evening surgery. 'Could you visit Mrs Oxney, Dr Garvey? Her husband says she's unrousable.'

As it happens, I know the lady. She is a notoriously unstable diabetic, and I have this very morning read a letter from the hospital clinic saying it thinks it has at last got her under control. I remember writing to the same effect when I was working in the clinic a year ago!

Well, diagnosis: probably hypoglycaemia. A case for Flying Doctor! Check bag to see if there are sufficient flagons of 50 per cent dextrose, and, grabbing notes from receptionist, make hasty exit via back door.

Images race through mind: 'Trainee GP in mercy dash'... blaring horns... flashing lights ... that reminds me; here's a chance to use the new practice green light — purchased via a well-known periodical, senior partner having been swayed by persuasive advertising, viz, 'you'll be the envy of your chums with our flashing green light'.

Rush back to surgery door ... locked... keys in car... back to car... back to surgery ... find beacon under pile of "BMJs" in staff loo, and we're off. Open window, Kojak style, and shove beacon on roof.

Plug into ciggy-lighter: this is probably quite a good way of helping doctors give up smoking. Seems to be about a mile and a half of cable around legs, pedals, and so on, but perhaps it's supposed to go like that.

Come to busy roundabout; rush-hour in full swing. Traffic not too bad, but I don't get the impression it is melting away before me. Impression confirmed as I progress along main road. In fact, nobody's taking a blind scrap of notice.



Come to traffic signals, which are, of course, just changing to red. Better not slip across, perhaps beacon isn't working. Stop, and stick hand through a side-window to check.

Beacon going fine; in fact, I feel a bit of a ninny sitting at a red light flashing at everybody. However, lights soon change, and we are off again, into stream of traffic consisting of human effluent from Marconi, Britvic, Hoffman's ball-bearings, and Asda Superstore.

Road here passes under railway viaduct, so, again, unable to do anything but sit and oscillate, unless I want to scream along grass verge and collide with several hundred tons of brickwork.

After five or 10 minutes I pass through the hiatus, and, somewhat impatient by now, use combination of horn and beacon to clear a swathe through the awe-struck peasantry. However, instead notice unusual phe-nomenon; the more I honk, the more people move out of their own lane into mine to block the way.

This presumably reflects the British dislike of impatience, but doesn't help Mrs Oxney, whom I visualise on the brink of respiratory failure by now.

Through two more sets of traffic lights, both red, and the way is clear. Ignore legal position regarding green beacons and speed limits, and make beeline for Nottingham Street.

At this point become aware that I have no idea where Nottingham Street is, so stop to consult street map, while pedestrians observe this pulsating piece of street furniture with bemused lack of interest.

Then off again, to encounter no more problems until I find street itself. Number 36, I want. Why do they put house numbers in half-inch high characters on front doors 30ft from the road? Here we go: 26...28...30...32...54—54!

Realise that side-street I passed was in fact an arteriole of Nottingham Street itself, a typical ploy by Chelmsford Council to confuse everyone—another favourite is to assign downstairs flats to one street, and the upstairs to another.

Probably quickest to walk now, so I grab bag and thrust door open. Beacon flex is trapped in window, and thus dislodges beacon from roof. I have to wind window down and retrieve lamp from somewhere underneath car before door will open.

Thus, I arrive at home, on foot, after 25-minute journey, of which 10 minutes were spent sorting out time-saving green technological life-saver.

Mrs Oxney, in fact, revives very satisfactorily on end of needle, but nobody is impressed, having seen it all before, and I somehow manage to leave house with her ballpen, which proves very handy for prising out fuse which blows when I unplug the green monster from cigar-lighter.

I see I could also be the envy of my colleagues if I purchase an electronic stethoscope, but per-haps I won't. It's bad enough taking all day to get to your patients, without electrocuting them once you do arrive.

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