

Enjoyable very busy days

By Dr. Sanjiva Wijesinha

“My days in the river house were of three different kinds. There were lazy days, busy days - and enjoyable very busy days”.
-Elmo Jayawardena: Sam's Story

I have a friend who has been working as a GP for nearly fifty years. While most of his contemporaries in other professions have retired and are living out what, at the time of their retirement, they believed would be the twilight of their lives, he continues to go for work just as he has been doing for decades. He still gets up early every morning, does a brisk 45 minute walk and follows this with a quick shave and shower. He then has his breakfast - the menu of one banana, two cups of tea and three slices of toast has not changed over the years – and then leaves for the short drive to his clinic.

Of course he now has a couple of younger doctors working with him, and he only works half day sessions – but he still sees patients as he used to do. Many are the faithful old patients who regularly book in to consult him. He is now seeing the grandchildren of patients he first got to know as a young doctor starting out in practice. When I asked him why he keeps working when he no longer has a financial need to do so, he smiled.

“When you are a young doctor” he replied, “you HAVE to work long hours to earn your living. If you don't put in the hours, you have no income – so taking a day off from work becomes a rare privilege. But now that I'm over seventy and the children have grown up, I don't need to earn as much. Nowadays, being able to spend a day working becomes a privilege!”

For him, seeing patients every day is a way of continuing to keep busy and staying connected with people. The intellectual exercise of taking a history from a patient, putting together the information he gathers from the history plus his examination, and then formulating a diagnosis – all this keeps his brain in fine fettle. And when one considers this matter of Job Satisfaction, the idea of making a correct diagnosis and observing his patients getting better as a result of what he has done – how good that must be for his own emotional wellbeing!

“Sometimes” he added “there are patients who have nothing seriously wrong with them. What they want is the opportunity of seeing you – so you can have a look and reassure them that they are OK. Even if they have been to see a highly qualified specialist, they insist on seeing you – because over the years they have built up a trust in you. All they want is a chat and reassurance from their own doctor.”

Even though his work keeps him busy, he describes it (like the hero in Sam's Story) as being “enjoyably very busy”. It is good for his patients' health – and good for his own health and wellbeing as well.

As he himself observes, “How much better is this at my age, doing what I like to do and even getting remunerated for it, instead of thinking of myself as a Retiree past my “Use-By” date? In a sense, I am being paid by Medicare for having conversations with my friends!”

“And even my wife is happy - because I leave home to come to the clinic every day and don't infringe on her domain as head of the house!”

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