

**December 24, 2008**

## **Santa and the Poor GP Joke**

One Christmas Eve, just before midnight, a poor GP was pondering his sad existence, having just finished his morning surgery. Since he was now having to spend all his time providing Prolonged Extended Hours throughout the week, weekends and bank holidays, he didn't have any time to go home and see his family, so he had been living at the surgery for the last three and a half years.

He was thinking about the 1000 QOF points he would have to earn doing Prolonged Extended Hours (subject to the results of the obligatory patient experience survey of course) and in view of the financial crisis in the practice, he was wondering whether it had been wise to pay his hardworking staff another Christmas bonus this year. They had all left tonight to see their families. He was all alone. Very alone.

He thought how depressed he was, after achieving only a 96% trust rating this year, failing to hit the PCTs target of 99% trust rating for family doctors. He knew he would be called to see the Medical Director at the PCT to explain his poor performance yet again. He thought of the revalidation, relicensing, recertification, reaccreditation, redevelopment, reeducation and reindoctrination hoops he would have to jump through just to see the patients that he truly cared for. He didn't have any more time for his family, himself, his life. He didn't think he could carry on any more.

He thought, that's it, he would end it all, he couldn't carry on in New Labour's New NHS. It was too much. The latest evidence-free initiative of having to provide six monthly health checks to the over 5s had been the last straw. He climbs onto the roof of his surgery, carefully stepping through the newly fallen snow. He stands there, on the roof, preparing to throw himself off. He looks out across the top of the town, feeling the cold against his skin.

Suddenly there is a gust of wind, a flurry of snow, and through the darkness, nine reindeer and a sleigh appears, coming to rest on the roof beside him. A man steps out of the sleigh and walks over to him. The man looks hauntingly familiar to the poor GP, but with his fine red suit, shiny gold buttons, black boots, portly tummy, white beard and red pointy hat with a white bobble, he is Father Christmas all right. The poor GP rubs his eyes and tries to make sense of it all.

"Ho ho ho" says Father Christmas. "What are you doing up so late on such a special night? And why are you looking so sad?"

"Well, Santa, I was just about to kill myself."

"Why's that?" asks Father Christmas with a note of concern in his voice. So the poor GP tells Father Christmas about all his troubles and why he thought he should end it all.

"Now now. That's not the way to go," says Father Christmas. "Look, I don't usually do this, but here, if I can grant you three wishes, will you agree not to jump and come down from the roof?"

The poor GP considers this, and being a trusting and somewhat naive sort, agrees to the suggestion.

“So, what’s your first wish?” asks Father Christmas.

“Well, firstly, I’d like to see an end to micromanagement in the NHS with the eventual aim of returning the emphasis to high trust of qualified professionals who will devote their entire career to improving the welfare of their patients and achieving the best outcome for them,” the poor GP says.

“Ohhh”, says Father Christmas, taking a sharp intake of breath. “That’s a tall order, but yes, I think I can grant you that one. So what’s next?”

“Well, secondly, Santa, I’d like to see all QOF changes completely peer reviewed and backed by a strong clinical evidence base, especially looking at the practical aspects achievable within a patient-orientated consultation, and with no place for last minute interference according to the latest political whim,” says the poor GP.

“Gosh, now that is a tall order!” chuckles Father Christmas. “But, if it’s what it’ll take for you not to jump, I’ll have to get my elves working on it pronto. So what’s your last wish?”

“Lastly, dear Santa, I’d like to see a complete rethink of the regulation of doctors in line with feasible, workable, friendly processes based on promoting the principles of self learning, professionalism and holistic care within an ultimately time and resource limited system, rather than costly, impractical and above all unproven processes based on mistrust, guilt and hatred,” says the poor GP.

“Ho ho ho, you have done your research haven’t you?” says Father Christmas. “That is going to be perhaps the most difficult. Now let me see, yes, I just about think I can do that one for you.”

The poor GP is really excited, and can’t believe that this could be happening.

“Now, close your eyes and I will grant you your three wishes,” says Father Christmas. The poor GP closes his eyes. “Now, open them,” says Father Christmas.

The poor GP opens his eyes. Suddenly he feels renewed, recharged, he can see that things will be better. His world is back to the good old days of the doctor-patient relationship of good clinical care and sound medical practice. He can sense the change in the atmosphere and it feels so good! He realises he doesn’t want to end it all, he wants to continue in the New New NHS. He becomes excited at the prospect of practising as a real doctor again.

“That’s absolutely great Santa. I can’t believe it! Now what can I do for you?” asks the poor GP, full of gratitude and happiness, keen to return the favour.

“Well, there is just one thing” says Father Christmas.

“What, what is it, anything!” exclaims the poor GP.

“Well, can you drop your [REDACTED], bend over, and let me [REDACTED] [REDACTED] from behind?” says Father Christmas. “Look, I’ll even give you a few quid for it. Just consider it to be a locally enhanced service that you’re providing.”

The poor GP thinks this is a bit unusual, but since his wishes have been granted, and he's getting paid as well, he does as he is told. But after what seems like an age, he's getting a bit sore and starting to have some doubts about it all.

"Erm, Santa, will my wishes still come true?" asks the poor GP.

"Ho ho ho. You're a bit too old to believe in Father Christmas, aren't you?" says [REDACTED] in the bright red suit.