

IF IT CAN HAPPEN, IT WILL HAPPEN!

As told to me by Dr. "Vladi"

The big annual party, in Grand Rapids, Michigan, for the Butterworth Hospital House Staff, was approaching. In a few days, on June 30, some of the interns and senior residents would be leaving for jobs elsewhere. Others would continue at Butterworth. Attending staff members, especially those who planned to celebrate by drinking alcohol, were scrambling to have other doctors cover for them the night of the big party. That night, the attending staff had to also cover for all the Interns and Residents! Dr. B, a surgeon, was very unhappy because his name was drawn from the hat. He would have to cover for his entire surgical group. He could not drink any alcohol that night.

Dr. Wall, the chief of Radiology at Butterworth, was also very unhappy because he was covering for his group. He, also, loved to drink and party when he was off duty. But, almost at the last minute, he found an unsuspecting "victim". A few days before the big party, he had hired Dr. Vladi, a Radiologist who had just passed his Michigan State Medical License Exams. (Michigan and Florida were the only States who would not accept licenses from any other State, even if the doctors had passed the National Medical Board Exams!) He had given his new man a quick tour of his department and talked him into covering for the party. "Don't worry", Dr. Wall told Dr. Vladi, "John, the technician on call, has been here for over twenty years. He knows how to run all the equipment. All you will need to do is read the X-rays. But we seldom get any night calls; so it is unlikely you will be called away from the party! But, you will need to attend the party at least long enough for me to introduce you to our Medical Staff."

Dr. Vladi and his wife had been well known physicians in Eastern Europe. Both of them had extensive training in their specialties. Dr. Vladi was a famous Radiologist in his Country. He had published many articles in Medical magazines. He and his wife, Olga, had had struggled through WW II. After the War, they were finally able to have a nice home, afford a few luxuries, and had started saving money for their retirement. This required a lot of hard work and sacrifice! They had married later in life and had no children. But then the Communists took over their Country. Soon, jealous colleagues were spying on the Vladis and telling lies about them. That was the easiest way for them to eliminate their hard working competitors! The two doctors were shocked when friend in the Government told them that the Police were coming to arrest them for "Capitalistic Offenses". Serious charges had been filed against both of them! They grabbed their important papers and left their Country with just the clothes on their back. If they escaped, they would have to start all over again! Friends had them smuggled out of their Country.

After a few weeks, as refugees, they were able to contact an American colleague who sponsored them to settle in United States. To practice here, the doctors had to pass exams in English and take a year of internship. They worked as "orderlies" at a University Hospital, while learning English. But they were really Instructors for the students and house staff. Then, both

doctors were able to pass their ECFMG exams and worked for a year as Interns. Finally, they passed their Michigan State Medical Board Exams and obtained their State Medical Licenses. Later, Dr. Vladi had no trouble passing his Radiology Board Exams. He knew more than many of his instructors! After several months working as a locum tenens, Dr. Vladi was hired by Dr. Wall to work at Butterworth. He thought that his troubles were all over. He was in for a big surprise.

Dr. Vladi knew that they would meet almost all the doctors in Grand Rapids, Michigan, at the party so he and his wife rented very expensive outfits. The party was a great success. Everybody, at the party, wanted to meet them.

Suddenly Dr. B's pager went off and he left the party to see a child in the Emergency Room. Then, Dr. Vladi was called away from the party to join him. Dr. B met him and said; "I have a child with Intussusception. His father is one of the richest people in town so I want to operate on the kid. Ordinarily I would not call you, but I have had problems with the Tissue Committee. They think I am doing too many unnecessary surgeries. So, to prove the diagnosis, I want you to do a Barium Enema. But, whatever you do; do not reduce the obstruction. If you do, you will cost me a lot of money!"

"Where is John, my helper," Dr. Vladi asked. A young lady spoke up; "Oh I am Kathy, John asked me to cover for him. He says he has a family emergency! I am new here. This is my first night on duty. I know nothing about this set up." Dr. Vladi asked to examine the patient. He said; "I can feel no masses or tenderness, this is the wrong age for the disease. The child has gastroenteritis. Why are we doing this exam?" "Oh, children in this country are fatter than in your home country. The disease is different in this country! You can't always feel the mass", Dr. B. replied. "You HAVE to do the test because I ordered it. All you have to show is the barium not reaching the right colon! Don't you dare let it go any further across the bowel!"

Finally Katy called Dr. V to the X-ray room. "See, I have finally figured out this machine. The child is on the table. I have hung the plastic bag of Barium solution. The nurse has inserted and inflated the Foley Catheter in the rectum. The fluoroscopic screen is over the patient. All you have to do is let the barium run into the bowel and press the foot pedal to turn on the X-ray machine" The lights in the X-ray room were suddenly turned off. Dr. V kept pushing the foot pedal but could not recognize the image on the screen. The objects were dim and out of focus. Then, the back of his head started getting hot! Then he recognized a skull on the screen. Finally he recognized his own teeth with crowns. After fumbling for the light switch for some time the lights were turned on. The X-ray tube which should have been under the table was only a few inches above his head. He had been radiating the back of his own head the entire time. Finally, he saw the patient's body on the screen. He asked his assistant to unclamp the tubing and let the barium solution run into the bowel. But no barium was seen on X-ray. He did not know that a second plastic bag of barium had been opened up until he realized the side of his coat was very heavy and fluid was running down the side of his leg. When the lights were turned on, he found that the balloon on the Foley Catheter had not been inflated enough. The end of the tube had popped out of the child's rectum and had lodged itself in the side pocket of Dr. Vladi's brand new coat. His pocket was full of barium. It had run down his leg and was

starting to puddle on the floor. His suit had been ruined.

It took a long time to clean up the mess. All the time the impatient surgeon was making suggestions that were far from being helpful. Finally, Dr. Vladi figured out the machine, took over completely, and the test went smoothly. The Barium went into the bowel under very low pressure. The entire colon and part of the small bowel was seen. There had never been any obstruction. Dr. B threw a temper tantrum yelling and saying; "You fool, you reduced the Intussusception, I told you not to! Now you owe me a lot of money. This has been a complete waste of time for me." Dr. Vladi had to go home and clean up. His suit could not be returned. He felt like he was a complete failure! Dr. B returned to the party and told Dr. Wall that he had hired an incompetent Radiologist!

The next day Dr. Wall reviewed the X-rays and confirmed that there had never been any obstruction. Dr. BJ had to apologize for his antics. He soon realized that the Dr. Wall had hired a very fine experienced Radiologist. The four years I was a Surgical Resident at Butterworth, Dr. Vladi was a great help with my patients. Most of them could not pay! He also gave outstanding lectures when I rotated through his Department. He sometimes included this story about his first night on duty.

A few weeks after the above fiasco, Olga noticed that her husband had developed an expanding bald spot on the back of his head where the X-ray tube had been wrongly positioned. Her husband was very upset. He blamed it on the extra radiation he received while doing the Barium studies on Dr. B's patient!

In a way, Dr. Vladi got his revenge. When his wife, Olga, needed cancer surgery, Dr. Vladi had her referred to Dr. B. The surgeon had to do several surgeries on her. But, because she was not only a doctor's wife, but a doctor, he could not charge her even a penny! Back in those days, doctors would not advertise or charge their colleagues, ministers, missionaries or any of their families! Instead of sending delinquent bills to collection agencies, many surgeons, just before Christmas, would send Christmas Cards to their patients who could not pay their bills. Enclosed would be the patients' bills stamped PAID IN FULL! When a surgeon would be praised for his generosity, he would just shrug his shoulders and say; "Please tell me if there is a better way to get surgical referrals! This is the only way I am allowed to advertise!" He would deny having any altruistic motives. Our own self directed "Affordable Care" worked very well without government interference! We also made friends with Drug Detail Reps in order to keep supplied with free samples, or drugs, soon to expire, collected when they resupplied pharmacies. We dispensed these for free to all our poorer patients. Malpractice lawsuits were very rare back then! Because our overhead was so low we could treat all patients regardless of their financial status! In 1963 my dad had bilateral hernias fixed at Butterworth. The total cost was \$145 for two days in the hospital! The surgery was free! How medicine has changed!!!

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