

My hospital

It's not really that impressive—painted concrete walls, nondescript rooms, lighted hallways. Simple enough, but when put together in the right proportions it makes up my hospital. It is a very generic building, but I have a fondness for it as I have spent 19 years managing its nuances. In those years I have seen it change, and not in the ways you would think.

What I find most amazing is that the population in my community has grown by 50% and my hospital has been able to manage this influx in demand with the same number of hospital beds and doctors. Somehow I don't think this achievement is related to improved operational efficiency. Something is not right here.

Other things I have noticed. Rooms are now coed, often with self-conscious seniors of different gender separated by a thin curtain as they are bathed and toileted. Meals are no longer prepared in the hospital kitchen. These preserved meals are prepared elsewhere (try another province) and rethermalized on site (“reheat” sounds so 19th century). The scrambled eggs have an unnatural yellow glow, which perhaps serves the dual purpose of saving on heating and lighting costs.

Cleaning and laundry services are now being outsourced to private companies. Even the cafeteria and its hospital workers have been replaced by a privately run establishment. In the past my colleagues would often meet in the cafeteria for coffee after rounds were completed. I went down to the cafeteria the other day and there was not a doctor to be seen. Speaking of physicians, if you look at the stats the number of specialists has increased but the number of GPs with hospital privileges has decreased. We now have hospitalists who manage the majority of our inpatients. I have nothing against my hospitalist colleagues, but they are shift workers whose job is done when the patient is discharged.

The doctors' parking lot is now only reserved for physicians during certain hours and then, except for a few spaces, open to all paying customers. Speaking of paying, my yearly parking fees went up 30% this year. I think the memo stated that the increase was for “landscaping, lighting, and security.” I am still waiting for some guy with flowers in his hair to be standing there holding a gun and a flashlight. If I don't want to pay I always have the option of parking on some quiet side street. Oh, wait a second, they put up “no parking” signs to terminate this clearly criminal behavior.

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Our logo has changed at least four times (the original logo, Langley Memorial Hospital, sufficed for 48 years). Every morning I find my hospital right where I left it the day before, but our region and health authority seem to be in a constant state of flux. I wonder how many trees have been victim to logo changes.

Over the past two decades my hospital has changed from a predominantly GP-run institution with a strong sense of community to an apparent satellite unit of a huge health region. The stakeholders and powers that be don't seem to have the same local interest or passion for our town. Sadly, many of them aren't residents and associate our community with the stretch of highway they drive through on their way to work.

One largely unappreciated constant is the people at my hospital. The doctors, nurses, pharmacists, physiotherapists, occupational therapists, and more continue to work hard and strive to provide more with less. I am proud to call many of them my friends and acquaintances. Often, I draw from their strength and am motivated to pick myself up and stop being so negative about the changes I see.

This is my hospital. Sound anything like yours?

—DRR

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Lost and found

A family vacation is a time to leave the office behind, a time to relax, a time to reconnect with one's family and, if one is away from home, it could be a time to have an adventure. It is a time to lose oneself, perhaps in a good book or a new adventure. Recently, I had the pleasure of doing exactly this.

In December, my family and I traveled to South Africa to celebrate the bar mitzvah of our son Levi. A bar mitzvah is the time in a Jewish boy's life when, at the age of 13, he attains his religious maturity. A girl becomes equally responsible at the age of 12 on her bat mitzvah. This occasion is cause for great celebration.

As many of our family members live in Cape Town, we chose to celebrate this occasion there, in the same synagogue that was the venue for our wedding, the wedding of my in-laws, and of my bar mitzvah and those of my brothers. It was also in this synagogue that Levi's great-great-grandparents used to worship. Needless to say, Levi gave his parents and family lots of joy (the word in Yiddish is *naches*) on his special day. A week later we traveled to Israel to take our sons on a very meaningful religious and historical journey.

I had a relaxing time in South Africa, reconnected with family, and lost myself in a few good books. However, it wasn't until we arrived in Israel that I really got lost.

Driving in Israel is challenging at the best of times. The drivers are far more impatient there and love to honk their horns at you if you are too slow. I have managed to navigate the streets of various cities in Canada, the US, Australia, and South Africa with relative ease. I don't believe in stopping to ask for directions. Jerusalem, however, is in a league of its own. The streets are tortuous and chaotic. The street names are printed in Hebrew, Arabic, and English, but are not that visible when having to travel at a speed that doesn't incur the wrath of the driver behind you.


Without GPS and cellphone, I relied on maps and directions that I had downloaded from the hotel's web site. I should have realized I was heading for trouble when I read the directions to the hotel. They gave the same instructions from whichever direction one was traveling! We arrived in Jerusalem as the sun was setting. After following the hotel's directions, we were terribly lost in the opposite end of the city. Darkness and rush hour had

descended upon us. Although the hotel was large, well established, and part of an international chain, it was not known to the taxi drivers of whom we asked for directions.

We must have been horribly lost for me to stop at a gas station to ask for directions! The gas station attendant could not help us. A Minnesotan tourist filling his car with gas had a GPS and offered assistance. Unfortunately, the GPS was no help either, as the hotel's address was an intersection, not a street number. Another customer told me she knew where I needed to go, but it was too complicated to explain! Her comments made me think that we may never get to our hotel that night. Thankfully, she pointed me in the right direction. After stopping a second time to ask for directions, after multiple illegal U-turns (I was secretly hoping I would be stopped by the police so I could ask them for directions), and after an unplanned 2-hour driving tour of the city, we finally stumbled upon our hotel.

For the rest of our stay in Jerusalem we walked and took taxis. Now don't get me started on the topic of Israeli taxi drivers!

—DBC



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