

## Guilty until proven innocent

A cautionary tale for those who may share a birthdate with a recently pardoned sex offender.

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**A**s a physician of a certain age, I currently work as a family physician/occupational doc in Richmond, Monday through Thursday. I live on Vancouver Island (Nanoose Bay) for the remainder of the week. In mid-January my wife and I returned home from a trip down south to receive a slightly ominous letter dated early December from the Ministry of Justice in Victoria. We were informed that a recently pardoned sex offender with my birthdate

and (possibly) the same gender was now at large. There was a necessity for me as a physician and individual who worked with “frail persons” to provide my fingerprints.

“No problem,” I told my wife, “the ministry simply wants to verify that the pardoned offender has not changed (his) name and is not seeing my patients. I will do my civic duty.”

My MOA in Richmond contacted the ministry and was informed that it was mandatory that I do the fingerprinting close to my home and that their agent—the Nanaimo RCMP detachment—would be happy to oblige.

Leaving home the following Friday, it was with some small sense of civic pride that I made the 30-minute journey to the detachment in Nanaimo and presented myself, business card, and driver’s licence to the friendly member at the front desk. He was quite familiar with the process but informed me that, sadly, I needed to present two pieces of government ID. No, I did not have my SIN card, CareCard, or passport on me. He recommended that I return home and go to the Parksville RCMP detachment with the appropriate documents, or I

could return to the Nanaimo detachment. I sought his opinion on the potential consequences of my filing the letter in the round basket at his feet and he wisely advised me that the same may happen to my medical licence.

Early the following Sunday afternoon I made the 25-minute trip to the Oceanside RCMP detachment in Parksville. A notice on the door informed me the detachment was closed on weekends!

Back in Richmond on Monday, I called the ministry in Victoria and spoke to a helpful clerk who patiently listened to my attempts to convince her that I really am who I think I am and not related to the individual in question with the same birthdate (and possibly the same gender). The clerk expressed some concern that over a month had elapsed since the letter had been sent to me, but the ministry was fine as long as I submitted my prints (to Ottawa) via my local RCMP detachment in the very near future. No, I could not go to the Richmond detachment during the week at a convenient time. My local RCMP detachment was mandatory. She also helpfully reminded me that the College would frown on any failure to cooperate on my part.

Having convinced her that I really was not the bad guy in question, I resolved to return to the Nanaimo detachment the following Friday on my next day off.

Friday lunchtime saw my arrival there, happily with two pieces of government ID, which I knowingly pre-

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Dr Adams is a graduate of London University and worked as a family physician for over 20 years on Vancouver’s North Shore. He now works as a family/occupational medicine physician in Richmond. He has the misfortune of sharing a birthdate with a recently pardoned sex offender.

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sented to the different front desk member. On reviewing the documentation she advised me that, actually, I had to do this at the Parksville detachment as it is the closest to my residence (by 5 minutes). My protestations concerning the information I had previously been given fell on deaf ears, but she did give me the telephone number of the Parksville detachment and recommended I phone for an appointment.

Around 2 p.m., with BP a little elevated, I called Parksville with my request. The reply was “you have to come on a Monday or Tuesday—the only days we do this.” At that point I noticed the wall in front of me turning a dark red and voiced my angst to the Parksville member. He then recommended that I come straight away and, as a special dispensation, he would do the printing. But I must be there by 4 p.m. “Oh, and don’t forget to bring \$40 cash, plus a money order for \$25 made payable to the Receiver General for Canada,” he informed me. No, a cheque would not suffice; I must stop at my bank and buy a money order. “Make sure you are here by 4 p.m., and do drive carefully,” he added thoughtfully.

Sixty minutes and many deep breaths later I arrived at the Parksville detachment with said items and

the kind member ushered me into the fingerprint room. It was around 3 p.m. I had made it! Hopefully my frustrations were all behind me.

The new fingerprinting process does not use ink. You place your dig-

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its on a glass plate and the computer beeps when the prints are satisfactorily scanned, or it signals its disapproval when the prints are not read properly. Guess what the computer did.

Individuals of a certain age and those who wash their hands frequently apparently have flatter ridges on their fingers, which are not easily read by the computer. My first set of prints were unacceptable and the computer voiced its discontent.

We attempted to take prints following vigorous application of creams and oils, hand washing, and various other measures. Finally by 4:30 p.m. we were all getting tired

and the computer finally capitulated, beeping a somewhat unenthusiastic approval. The fatigued member happily told me that the prints were now in Ottawa and were (hopefully) acceptable. He really could not advise as to why it was mandatory for the prints to be taken in Parksville, as they actually had to be sent to Ottawa. He did recount, as I was paying my \$40 cash plus \$25 money order to the Receiver General, that a previous client (a dentist) had objected to the payments required to prove his innocence. I can only presume the dentist did not have my sense of civic pride!

The moral of the tale? If you receive a similar communication from the Ministry of Justice, take a soothing deep breath, read the document very carefully, and follow the instructions to the letter. Allow ample time in which to be processed and, above all, do not wash your hands.

Postscript: I have since determined that individuals who disagree with the foregoing practices of the Ministry of Justice are advised to communicate concerns to their MLA, as this is likely the only way changes in the administrative burden placed on an individual with an unfortunate birthdate (or gender) can be effected.

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