

## From the Editor

### Many a true word spoken in jest

The idea that the truth may be found in comic utterances was probably first expressed in English by Geoffrey Chaucer in *The Cook's Tale* published in 1390 but was more clearly evoked by William Shakespeare, 'Jesters do often prove prophets', in *King Lear* published in 1608. We cannot be certain whether the article authored by David Kerr and published in this issue is fact or fiction (pp 515–6). It is unique and we are neither seeking to turn the paper into a series nor to attract similar contributions. We and the reviewer, however, felt that many of the descriptions resonate with clinicians' recent experience of acute medical admissions.

The rapidly increasing number of those admissions, with the concentration of clinical resources in one area, the need to adapt to the reduction in junior doctor's hours, the lack of continuity of care and the ageing population all contribute to the problem.

This paper looks beyond these challenges to another and perhaps even more pervasive problem of the 'tick-box mentality'. We all make lists and tick the completed tasks. The structured history may simply be an extension of this approach and the routine completion of a checklist should ensure all the necessary data are recorded. If one list works well why not use five or more to ensure that the data collection is complete?

The message is that completion of checklists as an aide-memoire is no bad thing but in the current climate completing the list has become all important and overrides individual thinking and common sense so that key issues of personal care are simply overlooked.

Has the completion of tick boxes become the prime aim of treatment and an end in itself? Or is the description a misrepresentation of real life? While this paper is not part of a series it may well prompt a flurry of correspondence.

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