



## Surgeons are sane – I'm not so sure about the others!

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*Sometimes wrong but never in doubt.*

Anon.

**I**N CLINICAL PRACTICE, AS IN other disciplines, attempting to gain an understanding of the cause or aetiology of some condition can reveal much about its nature. When I was a medical student, it was with some trepidation that I embarked on an attachment in psychiatry. The whole discipline seemed a bit strange. I saw myself as a budding surgeon – I was keen to get on with sorting and straightening, removing, unblocking, and redirecting. That's what surgeons do and to be honest while we have developed an impressive and sometimes impenetrable language all of our own, the basics are not too difficult. Basically it is down to re-shaping, re-wiring, re-plumbing, and quite often re-moving! Psychiatry, on the other hand, is a totally different ball game! Weird and wonderful, surprising and unpredictable. I can think of a couple of patients who, although they were not aware of it, taught me some vital lessons that have real relevance and application beyond the world of healthcare. Let me tell you about two incidents and you will soon see how both of these lessons apply to the way we think about the wider problems which are encountered in trying to make sense of the world.

orthodoxy that it is hard to know where to start. The end result, of course, is that many more questions than answers emerge. If only these clinical problems were readily reducible to the fundamental principles of biochemistry, physiology, and pathology, we might have a better handle on how to manage them.



Modern medicine has made dramatic strides. Our ability to make refined diagnoses and offer personalised treatment is one of the most encouraging and thrilling advances of the past few years – so-called precision medicine. For the future, we can envisage a time when an individual's diagnosis will be made with uncanny accuracy; sophisticated imaging and the application of genetic and modern molecular techniques will help to classify the individual genome, proteome, and metabolome, such that we not only have a clear understanding of the cause of a particular problem, but we can characterise it in detail and define exactly the right treatment option from the menu of available therapies.

For now, however, there are still many clinical conditions that are a puzzle. Let me lead you through a few examples.

### **Take home message ...**

At a practical level, many aspects of clinical medicine may appear to be well understood. The whole enterprise is peppered with assumptions and unanswered questions.



## The Golfer's Questions

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*I do not feel obliged to believe that the same God who has endowed us with sense, reason, and intellect has intended us to forego their use.*

Galileo Galilei [1564-1642]

**A** LOT OF GROUND CAN BE COVERED on the golf course, both literally and metaphorically. Golfers are obsessed with distance. They primarily want to know how far they will need to hit the ball, and that will be the major factor in determining their club selection. They

