

Musings on Matters Medical

I don't think that I am a vain person but as I start to tell this tale I think I really must be. My unsylphlike body is covered in lumps and bumps, most of which should not be there, but what really offends and upsets me most is my necklace of skin tags. The NHS refuses to have anything to do with them and rightly so, while my experience with the private sector was frankly disappointing. I could see the eyes of the consultant light up as she viewed my assorted protuberances with delight and saw the potential to enhance her pension pot, so that situation was quickly cut short, in a manner of speaking.

While on a visit to our favourite village in France I decided to give the french medical service a chance to prove its worth. After sounding out the locals I settled on Doctor Francois and duly went to check on his surgery, discovered that he was actually there, the surgery door was closed but there was no-one in the waiting room. I sat down and picked up a tatty french magazine which had all the recipes torn out. Why do all doctors waiting rooms have to be so dispiriting, at least I didn't have to suffer an aggressive receptionist. I could just about hear the murmuring of voices so just settled down to wait. Eventually the surgery door flew open with a burst of gallic voices and laughter and a man and a woman appeared. The woman shook the hand of the man and disappeared out the door, the man turned and smiled at me and with a stream of french ushered me into the surgery.

Dr F was of slight stature with a large head and a mop of unruly black curls and the most disarming and charming of smiles.

While I settled myself in the battered chair I tried to establish, in my fractured french, that I wasn't ill just vain and any help in eliminating the skin tags would be welcome. After it was decided to continue the consultation in English I was reassured that the tags were not a problem and he was similarly afflicted, indeed I was invited to inspect his neck in order to confirm this was so. It was an offer I felt I should and could refuse.

"You are lucky you came to see me," he said with his sexy french voice, "I have a special machine to deal with this problem, the only machine not just in the village but in the area." He pointed to a white trolley against the opposite wall with a metal box on the top shelf. It looked like the kind of thing my children made at play group when they were charged with making robots, a cardboard box covered in foil, red and green buttons represented by appropriately coloured fruit gums, stuck on clock faces as dials and assorted knobs and buttons. I was gestured over to the examination couch as he continued. "I take a pair of pliers, pull the tag away from the skin and cut it with the electric knife. It is of course painless and there is no blood and therefore no need for any plasters and you leave my office even more beautiful."

I was now beginning to feel quite queasy but my exit was blocked by the trolley and the machine which was making warm up noises and flashing a few lights. Just then his phone rang and he began what sounded like a conversation with a loved one, a wife, mistress or lover I couldn't decide. Several times he said he was in the surgery but who ever was on the other end was not going away. Eventually after blowing kisses down the phone he hung up and turned his attention back to me. He went over to a cupboard and returned with assorted items including a battered old tobacco tin from which he withdrew a pair of tweezers. "The pliers." He exclaimed triumphantly.

"No," I responded, "tweezers."

"Ah, yes, These are pliers." He said brandishing a pair of red plastic handled pliers in my face.

"What do you use these for?" I could not resist asking.

"Well sometimes the fishermen they get too excited and the fish hooks get attached to different parts of the body, then I need these."

I decided it was best to return to the matter in hand, "How long does it take for the machine to be ready?"

"Now, lets go, this will not hurt." He said pulling a pen like implement from the machine which ended with a needle. Quickly he used to tweezers to get hold of a tag and before I had a chance to brace myself there was a sharp pain as he sliced through the neck of the tag and the ominous smell of burning flesh, mine.

"A little blood, not to worry. I'll do this one now, that's better, no blood this time, and maybe the smell a little like a barbecue."

He stood back to admire his handiwork and then dabbed a tissue where the first tag had been. "Sorry can you just wait a minute." I said in a slightly shaky voice. "Can I see what you have done and then decide whether to continue."

He looked pityingly at me and handed me a mirror. The two largest skin tags were indeed missing but one had been replaced by a drop of blood, while I was in a state of semi-shock. The pain had been short but intense.

"I think we should stop there for today," I managed to say. "I am here for another week and I can come back later. I really am pleased that you have removed these two, but now I have to go and meet my husband."

Reluctantly he put down the tweezers, reattached the knife to the machine and gestured me back to the battered chair. The burning smell hung in the air, and I just wanted to get out of the room.

"Do you want to keep these or give them to your husband?" He asked proffering a slightly soiled tissue containing the two removed tags."

I refused the offer and asked how much I owed him. After handing over forty Euros he ushered me to the door but I could see that he was disappointed by my low threshold of pain.

So how did my brief encounter with the french health service compare with the NHS? Well for speed of treatment the french could not be faulted but in my opinion it lacked a certain sophistication. Who knows maybe on my next visit I will pucker up the courage to see him again.