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Health and

BY THE DOC

Sometimes, a phone call just can't replace a face-to-face diagnosis

One of the many things suggested to help GPs cope with increased workload in the NHS is phone triage. It is exactly as it sounds – doctors diagnosing conditions over the phone.

But of course sometimes a GP will be able to work out how ill a patient is more quickly and more safely by seeing them.

Last week I was visited by an anxious mum and dad who came to the surgery with their baby.

The wee one had been up most of the night with breathing difficulties, and it had obviously worried them no end.

A few days prior to that the bairn had the symptoms of a typical cold – a runny nose, cough and fever.

Nothing unusual in that but, after a couple of days, baby's cough got worse.

She was wheezing and irritable enough to not get a good night's sleep. Feeds were becoming a bit of a struggle.

The new parents brought her in for me to have a look.

It looked to me like bronchiolitis, a condition usually caused by the respiratory syncytial virus (RSV). In adults RSV causes a normal cold.

In babies, though, the virus tends

to travel deeper into the lungs – the little airways called bronchioles, to be precise – which become inflamed and full of mucus.

Most of the time babies who develop bronchiolitis are fine – they will struggle a bit for a few days, but generally they will go on to recover without any problems.

Sometimes they need to go to hospital, however, and to make that decision I'd like to actually see for myself how the baby is coping.

On the phone I wouldn't be able to see if the baby's nostrils were flaring, or if her chest muscles were pulling in sharply, either.

In short I wouldn't have been able to see if the baby was really laboured or not, although naturally I could get an idea from talking to the parents.

Treatment in hospital is largely supportive until the baby recovers. The baby may be given oxygen and fluids, or even given help with breathing for a bit.

There's antibody injections which can protect against RSV, but they're only given to babies who have severe heart or lung conditions.

Not passing on the virus in the first place can help though – so try to resist kissing any babies you come across if you have a cold!

THE DOC REPLIES

What's the best way to deal with jet lag? I'm travelling to New Zealand soon.

Getting a good night's sleep before you go, making sure that you are well hydrated and avoiding alcohol on the flight can help. If you arrive in the morning then it is best to stay up until what would be a normal bed time to help get you accustomed to a new routine. Avoiding caffeine-rich drinks is a good idea as these stimulants will affect the ability to sleep and may increase the time it takes to recover. You may be one of the lucky people who are not particularly affected.

What is a varicose vein, and should they be painful?

Veins tend to carry blood back towards the heart. A varicose vein is one in which the valves preventing blood backflow down the leg have weakened. The blood tends to pool in these veins and causes them to swell and be uncomfortable. They can cause skin changes causing varicose eczema. They can also be quite painful if they get inflamed and this condition is called phlebitis. As a general rule I'd advise you to keep active but avoid standing for long periods of time.

My partner is Muslim but has diabetes – is it safe to fast during festivals like Ramadan?

In Islam there is a requirement for adults to fast during Ramadan, but it is not an absolute must for Muslims with diabetes or other medical conditions where prolonged fasting may cause harm. However, this is down to personal preference. A lot of my Muslim patients with diabetes seek guidance from their Imam, as well as me. Diabetic clinics, if your partner attends one, and also the hospital, are also very used to discussing this.

Unfortunately the Doc can't directly respond to each query, or guarantee a reply. When in doubt contact your own GP.

CASE STUDY

Surgeon fixed the 'plumbing' in my eye to save my sight

Glaucoma almost blinded Teresita, but operation means she can still look after her autistic son

By Murray Scougall
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Just a few months after Teresita Winsor began suffering severe headaches and blurred vision, she was told she could be blind by the end of the year.

As a mum to a son with severe autism, the thought of not being able to give him the same level of care terrified her. After visiting her optician, the Buckie mum was sent to the eye clinic at Aberdeen Royal Infirmary.

She was diagnosed with acute angle-closure glaucoma, a rare form of the condition which means pressure in the eye can increase at an alarming rate due to drainage canals becoming blocked – almost like a sink filling with water when the drain is obstructed.

The 62-year-old was given three sessions of laser iridotomy treatment, which uses a focused beam of light to create a hole in the rim of the iris, but the treatment failed.

She was given drops and medication which caused bad side effects, so Teresita investigated other options. She contacted the Moorfield Eye Hospital in London, where a specialist put her in touch with respected glaucoma surgeon, Dr Andrew Tatham, at The Edinburgh Clinic.

Within days of contacting Dr Tatham, Teresita was given some shocking news. "He told me I really needed to think quickly, otherwise I would be permanently blind by Christmas."

Teresita had lens replacement surgery to create a larger space at the back of her eyes and an anterior chamber to allow better drainage. Most importantly, Dr Tatham saved her optic nerve.

Immediately after the first replacement, she began to feel better.



The nausea and fatigue she had suffered disappeared within a week and slowly life returned to normal.

"I'd been signed off work for months and desperately wanted to regain normality," she said. "Dr Tatham gave me this."

"My son's condition means our lives have to be organised with military precision and when my symptoms were at their worst I wasn't able to work, drive or care as I'd like.

"Now I'm back at work, driving again and supporting my son. "Dr Tatham saved my sight and I'm so grateful."

Having faced up to possible blindness, Teresita knows how important it is to have regular eye checks to detect glaucoma.

Today marks the beginning of World Glaucoma Week, which aims to raise awareness of a condition that affects 2% of Scots over 40.

Dr Tatham is a consultant cataract

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family



Surgeon Dr Andrew Tatham, above, saved the vision of Teresa, left. Now he hopes to continue his work with a pioneering new technique involving a stent, right

and glaucoma surgeon at both The Edinburgh Clinic and Princess Alexandra Eye Pavilion. He has a specialist interest in new treatments and since Teresa's op a game-changing new procedure called CyPass Micro-Stent has been introduced.

Approved for use in America in 2016, Dr Tatham used it for the first time in Scotland six months ago through the NHS at the Eye Pavilion. It has just been approved by NICE, meaning it will be rolled out further in the coming months. Using minimally invasive keyhole surgery, a femur plastic stent – no bigger than an eyelash – is placed directly into the eye to drain fluid and alleviate pressure on the optic nerve.

The procedure can be combined with cataract surgery, with the stent inserted in just five minutes. Patients can be fully awake with a



local anaesthetic and released the same day.

"Symptoms of glaucoma can be very difficult to spot early on, so early detection and treatment is crucial," Dr Tatham explained.

"Glaucoma is essentially a plumbing problem in the eye, so by improving drainage we can alleviate pressure and avoid blindness.

"The stent itself is tiny and, once implanted, patients recover faster with vision restored within a matter of days.

"One of the problems with glaucoma is it causes you to lose vision gradually, often peripherally, so people can lose 80% of their sight and not notice.

"The only way to have early detection is regular eye examinations and Scotland has the best provision for this in the world. People most at risk are the very short-sighted, those with a family history of glaucoma and older people, but everyone should have regular examinations.

Maggie listens



Looking for practical advice, relationship help or emotional support? As a mum-of-four, grandmother-of-eight and dear friend to many, Maggie's years of experience make her the ideal person to turn to with your worries

I'm so worried after thousands of pounds appeared in my account...but it's not mine

Dear Maggie Two years ago I left \$500 in one of my bank accounts and have checked the balance in the last few days to discover \$5000 in the account. I queried this with the bank and they assured me it was correct.

I'm worried about there being an investigation so I have removed the \$500, plus interest, in case it gets frozen.

I don't know whether to leave the account open to see what develops or close it and hand the surplus to the police.

The bank are not taking me seriously. The payments in to the account were about 18 months ago and I noted two withdrawals but not by me. I am puzzled.

Maggie says I think you're a very honest man.

Many people would never have told the bank that \$5000 had been deposited in their account, instead they'd have gone on a mammoth spending spree.

It is tempting, I must admit! If you feel the bank is not taking this seriously enough you must let them know how much this is worrying you.

I suggest you ask for an appointment with the bank manager and take someone along with you. Is there a relative or trusted friend you could rely on?

Tell the manager you want the situation clarified and would appreciate a letter stating exactly what has happened.

It is important to talk to someone at the bank in person. You cannot rely on a phone conversation when it comes to something of this nature.

The situation is clearly worrying you so I'm glad you've shared this with me.

Please arrange to meet the bank manager as soon as possible and insist you want this matter dealt with, and a resolution reached quickly, because it is troubling you.

I do hope you get a positive outcome soon.

Hurt by my boyfriend's holiday

Dear Maggie For the last few months I've been going out with a really nice guy and we've grown very close, very quickly.

I've been looking forward to spending more time with him so I was really upset when he told me about his plans for his summer holiday – which didn't include me.

I tried to hide how hurt I was, but he must have guessed as he apologised.

He said he hadn't expected to be in a serious relationship when he booked the holiday last year, but the trip means a lot to him.

I'm not sure I believe him. Surely if he genuinely cared for me he'd with cancel or find some way to include me?

Do you think this is his way of giving me the brush off?

Maggie says You may not want to hear this – but I think you

are being a bit unfair to this nice guy.

As you say, this is a special trip which obviously means a lot to him – and I'm sure given your strong feelings for him you don't really want him to feel bad or guilty about it.

I hope you can find it in your heart to be positive about his holiday plans.

His holiday doesn't mean he is giving you the brush-off or doesn't care for you.

It just means he's doing something with a different group of friends.

In relationships, it's important to be independent and have your own interests as well as doing things together.

Talk to him about the two of you going away together at a later point. Or you could plan a surprise weekend away together for you.

WRITE TO: Maggie Listens, The Sunday Post, 2 Albert Square, Dundee, DD1 9QJ
OR EMAIL: maggie@listens@sundaypost.com

Maggie's reads of letters but cannot enter into personal correspondence. Names will be changed if you wish