

DOCTORS WITH ONE NAME

IN BED at 11.40pm after a long day. The phone rings 30 minutes later. "I'm sorry to disturb you Professor Stewart, it's Cheryl at Westmead switch, I have a doctor in emergency who would like to speak to you."

"Cheryl, hi. I heard you were unwell, I'm glad you're back." "Thanks Graeme, I'm fine now. I'll put you through to ED."

"Professor Stewart, this is Jenny, I'm an ED registrar - we have a very sick patient with a problem we think is immunologic that we'd like your advice on and to admit under your care."

Then follows a clear description of a very ill 38-year-old woman. We agree on a plan of management and I accept responsibility: "If you don't have a high dependency bed, the safest place for her is to remain in ED until morning - I'll be in at 7am and will see her first thing. Call me if there's any change. You're doing a great job but I'm sorry, I didn't catch your name?"

"It's Jenny," she replied.

"Jenny, you've worked hard to be where you are and it's clear you're a very good doctor. At the risk of sounding like a rant, Jenny is the name your friends call you."

"I'm sorry Prof, it's Jenny Thompson* "

"Don't apologise, all of your peers do the same. I gather it's a Gen Y thing - it's considered pretentious to use a full name. But the unfortunate woman we've just discussed is seriously ill; without the intervention we've planned it's possible she could have died, leaving three young children without a mother. It's still not out of the question. We agree that our discussion was a solemn transaction. It didn't just happen between friends."

"You're right, I do understand."



"There's another aspect, albeit less important: I'm now legally responsible. In the sad event that this woman does die and I ended up in court I would report my discussion with 'Jenny'. We could imagine this exchange:

Judge: 'Professor, you say you gave instructions to a doctor called Jenny. Did you know this Jenny?'

Me: 'No, your honour'.

Judge: 'Can you identify her because she is the only doctor at Westmead called Jenny?'

Me: 'I suspect not.' Judge: 'Is Jenny her full name like Cher or Bono?' Me: 'I don't think so.'

Judge: 'Professor, can you promise me that you'll inform all young doctors at your hospital of the importance of identification that provides precise communication and befits the solemnity of their responsibilities. That it's about what's best for their patients, not them?'

Me: I can your honour. It's my favourite rant."

Graeme Stewart

*(*Not her real name)*