

## FOREWORD

Turning a series of articles, written over several years, into a book is a trickier job than it would first appear. These articles vary from the deeply moving and reflective to those of great levity and even, occasionally, of questionable plausibility. Tears still roll down my cheeks when I read some of them, and I don't count myself a particularly emotional fellow. The style and quality of Dr Moody's writing changed somewhat as the years elapsed. He seemed to write increasingly fluently and candidly. Never dull or serious, his earlier articles were a little less tongue-in-cheek and somewhat shorter and it could easily be argued that they just got better and better. The chapters herein were not assembled in any particular or chronological order and more insightful readers might spot the earlier from the later ones. I know of at least one ongoing PhD looking at this very subject.

Thanks must go to Fiona Pagett who approached him in the first place with the invitation to record his experiences in the *Peeblesshire News* and *Border Telegraph*. It took more than one request (and reminder) before he removed the stethoscope and took to his typewriter one evening each week to document memorable and amusing stories and events. Dr Moody agreed to write his column, *View from the Surgery*, on the understanding that neither Fiona nor the editor, Atholl Innes, should expect dry, informative lessons for patients' "tea-time" reading. He went so far as to say that should he ever be found concluding a piece with the recommendation that a reader "should see your own GP first thing Monday morning" he would cease being a scribe forthwith. If that were the case, he felt he would: "be obliged to offer grovelling apologies to my

beleaguered colleagues whom I would have undoubtedly burdened further with extra work from the already flooded market of newspaper doctors who sell themselves down the river by regurgitating commonly known facts and playing on people's anxieties." (Such candour, righteous indignation, clichés, medical imagery and long sentences are typical of the man!)

The plan for a twice-monthly trickle of 300-word articles cascaded into weekly 900-word epistles. The initial 3-month contract burst like a dam.

Journalists on the paper tried not to voice their objections too loudly as the "Doc Column" grew ever broader (in dimension and in range) and moved to the centre pages. Perhaps they were only too aware that they might find themselves, one day, on his examination couch.

Late evenings of good wine and searching questions led eventually to Dr Moody admitting to me that some of the patients mentioned had names and details altered to protect their anonymity. He claimed he was torn between the accuracy expected of a clinician and finding material that would make for a good story. He asked patients' permission where appropriate but said that, even if he missed a few, those recognising themselves would be tickled pink, though many had already gone to "the great waiting room in the sky."

I have no doubt that this book is unique. It will not sit comfortably on university or academic bookshelves, as it is not directed specifically at a medical readership, nor is it likely to induce sleep. There are no alphabetical lists, incomprehensible Latin terms and no high-resolution photographs of human innards (thankfully!). It breaks no new ground in any field of research nor even in the doctor-patient relationship. I suspect general practice boffins will raise shaggy eyebrows at some of the practises and remedies Dr Moody adopts and at his strategies for coping with the challenges of rural general practice. It is also unique in that patients (for that is what we all ultimately are!) will find his lack of pretence, his obvious

humanity and his sense of humour most refreshing.

This is no reference book either. If you are in need of urgent medical advice do not waste precious minutes leafing through these pages. There is a further danger too that you will be distracted from more serious issues. If, instead, you are in desperate need of cheering up, I suggest you are holding the right book.

One of the joys I got from compiling and editing these articles was that I took different meanings from excerpts and phrases, each time I read them. Whether this is what Dr Moody intended is another matter, but I believe the wisdom and insight he displays transcends the moment or even the generation from which he writes. He and his work are timeless. He is rather conservative by nature and traditional in outlook, and I notice there is practically no reference to political or historical events. Yet he is modern enough to accept change, eventually or under duress, and seeks what is ultimately best for his patients. What more could one ask and expect of their doctor?

His column always has a photograph or image, appropriate to the subject matter. I know it is often great fun for him choosing these pictures, and articles sometimes are in fact written after one has been selected.

I was keen to involve his long-term colleague and friend Dr Bodie Aiken in the preparation of this book. Bodie, however, professed a chronic shyness and reticence, belied by his years working with the public, and declined to “interfere”, as he put it. He was aware of his junior colleague’s column but declared he rarely read it for fear of what “the whipper-snapper might be saying about me now.” When Bodie retired from medical practice an article was dedicated to him. The picture featured was of a benign looking dinosaur. Whether Bodie found this endearing or offensive remains unknown for he never once referred to it.

My interviews with Ken were lengthy and tremendously entertaining. In addition, his sharp intellect and singular insight into psychology and human nature are worthy of more serious and

weighty medical tomes. He once said, though, that he would rather be remembered for spreading a little light-heartedness than spreading medical knowledge “that would only be proven as bunkum the following year.”

Dr Moody seemed bemused at first that I should wish to share his witticisms and observations with an audience outside his native South of Scotland, as “these are God’s chosen people and I know how they think, drink and breathe. Why in tarnation would others be interested in what this old duffer has to say?” I daresay we don’t know the answer to this but perhaps after reading what follows you may find a good reason.

When asked for a comment that would sum up his motivation for writing a humorous account of his career, without hesitation he declared: “Laughter is the best medicine and medicine the best laughter.” He seems to see it more or less his Hippocratic duty to amuse readers, patients and colleagues, and who are we to stop him?

This book is in places heart-rendingly poignant and elsewhere side-splittingly funny. It is my keen desire that what you read in these pages is a real tonic. It certainly was for me.

*David Carvel*  
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