Heart-Sink Patients

General Practice Unit
A Thankful Patient

Miss Smilie, 44 years old, First seen in 1989
Single, sharing a flat with a girlfriend
Part-time secretary/librarian to church
Presenting Problem

- Episodic Watery diarrhoea x 10 months
- Abdominal pain & occasional vomiting
- No weight loss, no blood in stool
- Consulted because she could not continue to work as a secretary
Past Health

- Frequent febrile illnesses & asthma in childhood, going to doctors more than going to restaurants
- Dysmenorrhoea & menorrhagia since 21 years old, Ix by gynaecologist in 1987: NAD. Herbal Treatment x 1 year before presentation
Diagnosis by Exclusion

- Nothing abnormal on P/E
- All investigations were negative
- Referral to the G.I. Clinic, further Ix: NAD, tried multiple drugs without much improvement.
More Problems

- Recurrence of asthma since 1992, fair control with regular drug treatment

- Knee pain since 1993, Low back pain since 1995, neck pain since 2000, x ray showed mild degeneration, little response to treatment
Every Time I See Her

She always smiles at me

But

My heart often sinks
Over the Years

- Alternative constipation and diarrhoea
- Exhausting all drugs available for IBS
- Multiple other problems
Died 96, aged 84
Constipation, Asthma, Parkinsonism
Aged home 1980
Quiet, Kind, Tolerant,

HT, DM, IHD
CVA 50+
Diarrhoea
Demanding,
Bad tempered,
Never listens

HT, DM, IHD
lived away since teenage

Black sheep & Angel,
Perfect child, Tolerant,
Protecting
left home 1982
Psychosomatic Family
Minuchin et al. 1975

- Little open communication
- Conflict is denied
- Rigid
- Poor problem solving skills
- A black sheep (an angel)
- Stress is detoured through illnesses
Family Stress and Illnesses

- Loss of a spouse increased mortality rates (Kruas & Lilienfeld 1959)
- Lack of marital support was predictive of angina (Medalie & Goldbourt 1976)
- Parental stress was associated with poor diabetic control (Minuchin 1978)
The Family System Theory

Family System

Illness in an Individual

Stress / Support

Nature / Nurture
Family System Dynamics  
Papp et al 1973

- Predictable chain reactions
- Labelling & role programming
- Collaboration
- Triangulation
- Repeat patterns
- Crisis brings changes
Levels of Family Involvement
(Doherty et al 1986)

- Familial Diseases
- Assess Family Dynamics
- Family Participation
- Basic Counselling
- Family Therapy
A Heart-Sink Patient
or
A Dysfunctional Family?