



West of England Medical Journal

Formerly Bristol Medico-Chirurgical Journal

WEMJ Volume 115 No.3 Article 6 Sept. 2016



The e-journal of the
Bristol Medico-Chirurgical Society

Book Review:

National Elf Service -

a tragicomedy in several parts, portrayed in cartoon form

by Paul R Goddard

Clinical Press, Bristol ISBN 978-1854570895 £6.99

Reviewed by

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For those who do not know him, the author Prof Goddard is one of those highly irritating people who never give up making annoying observations, but that's only if you're a pompous, overinflated Health service administrator. He is a thorn in the side of the top-heavy bureaucracy that clogs the wheels of our NHS, the confederacy of dunces who, P re Ubu-like, emit clouds of bullshit and bureauspeak while the front line troops toil and sweat.

This is no finely honed erudite scientific paper suitable for the august pages of the Lancet or British Medical Journal. Nor is it a polite, well reasoned series of debating points about NHS reform under our present leaderships, for the Spectator or Guardian. Rather, it is a volley of furious polemic from a hardened warrior in the battlefield of today's National Health Service, a blast from both barrels of a sawnoff shotgun rather than a deft rapier thrust.

Make no mistake, this is a pamphlet or broadsheet, reminiscent of the scurrilous, satirical missives of the 18th century rather than a book from the 21st. It is passionate, hasty and vitriolic, owing more to VIZ and Shrigley than Swift and Rowlandson. But the polymath Prof Goddard, equally at home looking at x-rays, raising all the money with his jazz band for Bristol's first scanner, helping defuse and recycle Ukrainian nuclear missiles, and infuriating hospital bureaucrats, has turned to cartooning. Besides writing, publishing and distributing it himself, he has illustrated this, in a squiggly, quasi-infantile style. Alarming proportions of elves, dwarves and gnomes roam the pages, while the medics lose the battle for common sense and good clinical care against the Right Horrible Jellybean Shunt MP. Now, who can that be?

The general effect is of a message scribbled on the back of a mess bill, wrapped around a brick and hurled through the window of NHS HQ. And management in Paul's fantasy Faerie land are only a cog in the wheel - urged on their treadmill by political appointees, who in turn have their strings pulled by Fat Cats.

Perhaps his conclusions are less focussed than his polemic. His three wishes from the Good Fairy are :

Support for whistleblowers (instead of punishment and ostracisation),
Public education as to what is and cannot be available,
and a GMC (with teeth) to curb managers. But - those are actually SMART* objectives, are they not?

Buy this book, if you are an NHS elf or dwarf, like a good belly laugh, or use the NHS and wonder what's going on in it.

(*management speak for Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Realistic and Timely)

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