

# I'm back

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**There is only one thing worse than getting back to the practice after your holiday... hearing about everybody else's holiday.**

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Many a true word is spoken in jest and the cliché of being forced to look through other people's holiday pictures is a metaphor not only for long nights spent hunched over a pack of slightly out of focus snaps of indeterminate moorland but also for those moments when colleagues get back to work from holiday.

Much of the time you are anxious for them to get back to the practice and ease the burden created by their absence, not that anyone of course would say so in as many words. 'When is Margaret back?' the troops ask, 'Monday, isn't it? Those two weeks have passed so quickly haven't they?'

And you have to admit that they have passed rather quickly as you get momentarily all glassy eyed about the difference Margaret makes around the place and how you'd never quite realised how strange it was without her. Then, suddenly, right on cue, she's back. Not just Margaret, why should we pick on her? No, anyone who has been sojourning in foreign climes. Well, not even foreign climes, anyone who has been collecting more glass lighthouses filled with coloured sand from the Isle of Wight for a week, walking in the Lakes (am I the only one to find a slight incongruity there?), protesting about GM crops in a secret location. There they are again, large as life, probably tanned, and looking relaxed and somehow bigger than you remember them. Why is that? Suddenly back and suddenly filling the doorframe to a far greater extent than you ever remember.

'I'm back' they say, a vaguely triumphant tone in their voice as if making it in from Hunslet has been a feat of gargantuan proportion. The polite riposte is unquestionably, 'so, did you have a good time?' and it is said as if you really care. Well, deep down you do really care, but not NOW. Now there are one hundred and one other things to be done and started and organised and

switched on and turned off and tuned in and it's Monday morning for goodness sake. 'Oh, it was wonderful,' Margaret sighs and leans against the bleached lime trimmed, American cherry-bark simulated cabinetry as if snuggling comfortably up to the wall of a soapy Turkish hammam.

And it really, really isn't that you are not interested it is just that waiting outside is your least favourite denture-easing patient, followed by the family with triplets, each of whom you would glad-

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ly pay for to go to a Turkish bathhouse if it meant that they didn't have to come in and have their molars sealed.

Conscience tells you that you owe it to the returnee to listen and to empathise, to share and to bond with their quality vacation experience. That little inner voice says 'is three minutes a year really too long to listen to how the Germans always got to the sun-beds first, how the Maldives at sunset glow with an incandescence that sends a tingle down a hygienist's spine, how Gary and Dean could, I swear, have spent every damn hour of the holiday in that Spanner and Gearbox Museum if they'd had their way?'

Interestingly, the British disease of naturally having a terrible holiday seems to have declined somewhat in recent times. Gone are the days when the hotel in Spain wasn't yet built. So much more sophisticated now, we com-

plain if the performance targets in the Tacos buffet facility were not met on a daily basis or that the shuttle bus from the long term car park didn't have a large enough no-smoking area.

Then again maybe we want everything to be too instant nowadays. Ideally, when we ask, 'did you have a nice time?' a one-word response would be fine. A simple 'yes' or 'no' would suffice. We've asked, shown we care, got the answer and now we can get on until the next holiday brochures are out and the beach balls bounce across our television screens again denoting that it must already be as late as Boxing Day.

There is, however, one glaring exception to this. It is the sensational moment when you return to work. At the very least the bunting should be out, the team making an arch of mouth mirrors through reception and unalloyed joy palpable throughout the premises. 'Welcome back,' they all shout with elation, 'did you have a good time?'

Walking in Tuscany, visiting the world famous eel sanctuary in the Canaries, eating al fresco on a windswept mountain-side in the Tyrol, oh how it all comes flooding back. Least favourite denture-easing patient in the waiting room? Not to worry she won't mind waiting a bit longer, after all it is only once a year and Margaret is so obviously interested in your exploits.

Finally you do have to see some patients though and first through the door is a very tanned young man who, it turns out, has been to the same Greek island that you have. 'Did you have a good time?' you politely enquire.

'Yes, I...'

'Good, let's just make you numb then shall we? Margaret pass the local please, did I mention that we saw over two dozen Perch the day we hired the car and drove into.....' Thank goodness you're back, for another year.

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