

Useful/valuable/important medico-legally



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I've never been very sure why spring should be the season for cleaning. However, the wisdom of our forebears is in the expression and it would be a braver man than me who would challenge such tradition.

So, as the longer evenings take hold, the lawn once again needs cutting and the Easter eggs are just a messy memory of broken chocolate bits in scrunpled foil our attention turns to spring-cleaning the practice. Well, that is, it is not so much our attention that turns to it as the attention of the practice manager or nurse or some other very organised team member. It is their suggestion that it might be a good idea as people can no longer fit anything else in the cupboard in the staff room, the space under the stairs, the loft, in fact anywhere in which 'stuff' gets put for the euphemistic 'meanwhile'.

The whole need for such seasonal clearouts arises because we don't do these things on a regular basis. Logic says that we should but habit dictates that we don't. And the pattern continues despite the advent of technology, in fact the added complexities actually increase the burden. For example, exactly the same principle gets completely ignored with 'in boxes' of emails. We always mean to go through and delete those which are no longer needed but we somehow never get round to it. Although it would only take a few moments a day to do so, it is precisely those few moments that are so valuable, too valuable indeed to warrant giving up merely to clear out history when shaping the future is the imperative.

Donning old clothes, as it happens some favourites that you managed to salvage from the recycling pile the last time your partner had a spring-clean at home, you click on the cobweb fustered light switch in the cupboard under the stairs, and head into the depths of the paint peeling interior. Well, that is your intention but the stack of stuff that meets you also prevents you. Clearly this requires a radical solution, so you set about the task with a resolve to be entirely brutal about the choice of whether or not to keep particular items. In fact there is the temptation to say that since you

have no idea what is in there anyway, and you haven't been in there for at least three years and haven't apparently needed anything from there in that time either, wouldn't it just be easier to get someone in to clear the lot into a skip and solve the problem in one fell swoop?

No, you see it just doesn't work like that does it? The reason being the special dental gene, that accursed pragmatic one which makes us think the 'well there could just be something useful/valuable/important medico-legally' thought, which in turn makes us check just in case.

Cardboard boxes of yellowing paperwork vie for attention with bulging files of order forms back to 1982. Actually though that's quite interesting. You pause for a while as you look through the invoices and realise how the cost of composite has actu-

ally failed to keep pace with inflation over the last twenty years or so. You turn over one for the new super-restorative called 'Impact' and recall how it lasted about two sessions before setting so hard in the tubes that the nurse, oh what was her name? She was the redheaded one with the boyfriend in the army. Oh well, anyway, she squeezed it so strongly that the seal broke and she had an explosion of 'Impact' all down her uniform. Gosh, you'd never have remembered that if it wasn't for turning out this cupboard.

And now, oh look, look, you'd completely forgotten the handy endodontic reamer-sharpener that you'd bought as a special offer from a dental exhibition and only ever used once because it smelt so awful that you had to open the windows

for the rest of the morning to get rid of the waft of burning metal. Yes, and look, here's the stash of plastic carrier bags from the same event, two with the denture cleaner samples still intact and one with some sensitive toothpaste, oh, that'll be handy. Put that somewhere safe. Anyway, is that the time? Right. Must be more discerning. Out goes a broken pedal bin and two tubs of time-expired mouthwash tablets, although didn't someone say that you could use those for cleaning fish tanks? No, you can't hang on to things for ever, out they go. You realise just how decisive you can be when you turn your mind to it.

Continued digging confirms that the survival instinct of the protective gene kicked in at just the right time. Quite a lot of the contents are there for very good reasons. Primarily they remain from the last spring-clean for precisely the same rationale that you've carefully tidied them and replaced them today, they could be useful/valuable/ important medico-legally.

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Unquestionably it looks so much better now. Admittedly not a lot more space but enough for a few further months of accumulation, especially as now you are determined to keep a much tighter control over what is saved day-to-day and what is chucked. Closing the door you glance around with great satisfaction, if slight surprise at all that you've thrown out: one half-full black bin liner. Then you suddenly realise that you were keeping the broken pedal bin in case the compressor leaked. Phew, you just manage to tuck it back in a corner of the cupboard before the bag goes out to the dustbin. Well, that's that for another year, what a good job done.

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