



A small hospital's fairy sad tale: an allegory

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Once upon a time there was a little farming village in the valley, not far from a castle on the hill. The people in the village liked to help each other. The local healers were considered a part of their village "family." One day, as medical knowledge and technology developed, they all decided that they could best help their village if they built a healing centre. The healers and villagers got together to raise money to build it. They named it after one of their favourite village volunteers — The Memorial Of Mary Healing Centre or, the MOM-HC for short. It was the pride of the village — small, friendly, efficient and caring. Every year volunteers got together to canvass their neighbours to help with the cost of maintaining the MOM-HC.

The centre was always open to new healers who wanted to join. In other parts of the kingdom new healers had to deposit gold into the Guild of Doctors (GOD as it was known elsewhere) before joining. In this village however, the healers decided that money should not be a prerequisite to join. Indeed, they often helped out a new recruit by using their own gold.

Then one day a courtier from the castle came to town. He told everyone that the King had a good plan that would make life better for everyone. It was called the Village Insurance for Longevity for Everyone — the VILE Plan, for short. No longer would they have to pay their healers with chickens and eggs — the wealth of the whole kingdom would be shared to help all, even the country folk.

As the seasons passed, the quality of

life improved for both the villagers and the healing community. Babies were delivered, medical problems treated, operations performed. The local healers were often present, attending every stage of this life cycle, from the birthing room to the funeral home. They were there to guide their neighbours through the curing, caring and coping process.

Then yet another "one day" arrived. This time it was the Prince of Accounting who came. He lived in one of the towers in the castle and came down to tell the villagers that it was costing the kingdom too much to have babies in their village. "Babies are delivered better in the castle," he declared. "Wouldn't you want your babies delivered by those who do only that?" he asked them. The villagers reluctantly agreed, believing what was good for the babies was good for the whole village.

Soon more princes came down to visit. The village was ecstatic. What attention was being poured on them! How special they must be in the eyes of the kingdom. Among the visiting dignitaries was the Prince of Management. He came to explain to the village elders, who were responsible for the healing centre, that he had a plan that would give them more time to work in their fields. This way they would be more productive. In one of the castle towers he was busy training people to organize and run healing centres.

The MOM-HC, he declared, would have a revitalized name change. In order to make everyone feel they were being equally cared for, the name would be changed to the King's Royal All Purpose Healing Centre — or, KRAP-HC, for short. While tending

the fields, however, many of the villagers began to ask what the Prince meant by better, when everyone was satisfied before. They also wondered what the Prince meant by being more productive, since at the end of the day the Prince had his treasurer collect a large portion of the harvest, telling them it was for the villagers' benefit. He said the King's treasure chest had to be refilled so as to pay for the honour and privilege of having those specially trained courtiers leave the castle for the day to run the healing centre so well.

It was not long after this that the trained courtiers were busy expanding the healing centre. The villagers were thrilled. There would be new work for the artisans and more money spent in the local eateries by the courtiers. As for the cabinet-makers, they could not be more satisfied, as they tried to keep up with the requests for more office furniture. The town saw all this, and any doubts about the future of their healing centre disappeared.

Seasons came and went, the villagers were getting older, and so were their healers. They still met and visited in the marketplace, but when they wanted to see their healers in the centre they could not find them. They were in the building, but there were so many offices and so many strangers — all of whom lived their lives in the castle — that no one knew who was a healer or where they could be located.

There were now many banners in the mini-castle that was once their little healing centre. These banners were colourful, extorting the villagers to refrain from festivals, stop sharing food, stop children from playing outdoors, and use only the King's approved tools and equipment; all in the name of a new religion the Prince of Communication called PREVENTION.

This new religion had a creed, which was displayed over their old healing centre in large letters. It read:

LIVE Prevention.

It makes us

Stop

Accidents &
Disease

answered by the Lords and Ladies who worked at the far end of the castle. No one had ever seen these Lords and Ladies because they had to stay in the Tower of Algorithms, which, rumour had it, housed all the answers to all the questions the villagers could ever ask.

Back in the castle the King and his council were very busy indeed. They now had a growing population of courtiers busying themselves in all aspects of caring for the needs of the villagers. Included among their activities was an educational and training program. Entering into this program required the most strict set of criteria. Much preparation was required for simply getting accepted. The courtiers and their families invested much time and effort in helping their children, as it soon became apparent that the future welfare of their offspring depended on getting accepted into these schools. Meanwhile, in the village, the children, who continued to ignore the advice that spoke to them from the banners, enjoyed playing, running, fishing and occasionally helping their families tend to the fields. They also went to the local schools, but because the King's treasury was dwindling, the King had to make what he called "difficult choices." And so it came to pass that less money was sent down for the village schools.

It also soon came to pass that most of the healers who were now graduating were coming from the families living in the castle. They worked in a special tower in the castle, painted ivory and with the letters IT on the turret for all to see. This Ivory Tower housed ITs, or Information Technologists, who were organized into teams called the VICE squad (Very Impressive Curing Experts).

Because life was so stimulating and fun in the castle, the courtiers believed that no one should be left out. Education was therefore organized so enough free time could be had for all. The members of the VICE squad were trained to do only a few tasks and to work as a team. This way the brains of the healers would not be cluttered with too much knowledge. It would also allow the healers to be a part of the endless parties going on in the confines of the castle.

Villagers too, it was soon realized, would participate in the titillating experiences that were available in the castle. Their participation, the Prince of Accounting told the King, would bring in more revenue to the King's treasury.

Soon the villagers were more attracted to what was going on in the castle than participating in their local events. Streams of villagers could be seen flowing daily over the drawbridge. To some, it was

Indeed, they were encouraged not to visit their healers in the centre, but, instead, to phone 1-800-STAY-HOME. All their questions would be

surprising, since the castle enclave was getting more crowded, crime more prevalent and the air stale.

Back in the village, despite all the efforts by the Prince of Prevention, the healing centre was still being visited by the sick and dying. Attempts at recruiting new healers from the castle were proving futile.

The VICE squad did not like living outside of the castle walls. They worked best in their own milieu, it was said.

The King summoned the leading princes (now renamed NIGHTS, because they worked more effectively in the dark) to meet at the roundtable of thought. After many hours of reflection, which indeed took them into the wee hours of the night, they decided to do a study on the Cost Ratio Effectiveness and Analysis of Treatment In the Village Entity (a CREATIVE study). The study had to be stopped prematurely when it became obvious to the King that it would be less costly to his treasury to send all the sick people, who obviously didn't adhere to the new religion of prevention, directly to the castle for the special care that only the VICE squad could provide. But the CREATIVE committee realized that the villagers would not be receptive to this argument.

The CREATIVE committee then came up with a novel idea. The Prince of Information Management was called in. He was instructed to re-educate the villagers to help them realize how much better their care could be if it was done in the castle.

A campaign was started to reassure the villagers that as soon as the VICE squad did their thing, they would be sent back to the village. Of course this re-education program required many meetings and hours of preparation. It required more space in the ever shrinking building that housed the healing centre. More sick rooms had to be closed.

Before long the old village healers themselves could no longer work. When the villagers, who were treated in the castle, were supposed to come home, often still unwell despite the manuscripts that accompanied them, beds could not be found. The helpers of the old healers, who were still in the healing centre, soon became unaccustomed to dealing with the sick. As for the others working in the healing centre, the courtiers from the castle, they were too busy preaching and evangelizing the virtues of prevention. They had no idea what to do with the suffering. And so the villagers had to either stay in the castle longer or die far away from home.

It was not long after, that most folks did not even bother stopping at the KRAP-HC for their care. Slowly the courtiers began to return to the castle. The KRAP-HC began to look run down.

And so it came to pass, many years later, that visitors from all over could be seen entering this once proud healing centre, with a tear or two in their eye, as they scanned the pictures and artifacts of another era. It was now a museum: It was called The How Did This Happen Memorial.

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