

Running the supermarket gauntlet

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“**A**nd now, ladies and gentlemen, it's time for another thrilling episode of ... Supermarket Gauntlet! Watch as our hapless rural physician tries to shop for groceries anonymously! Will he succeed? Of course not! But it's fun to watch him try! Take it away, Dr. Gray!”

Parking lot:

When I arrived I was pleased to see the parking lot was only about one-quarter full. I pulled into a stall and scanned the area. The coast looked clear. I disembarked, ducked my head down low and started speed-walking toward the main entrance. I hadn't got more than 5 paces when a loud voice behind me boomed, “Hey, there's Dr. Gray! Hi, Dr. Gray!”

Aargh! Parking lot ambush!

I turned around. It was one of my patients, of course. Like *Savoir Faire*, they're *everywhere*.

“Hi, Mr. Snodgrass.”

“Gotta love this weather, eh, Doc?”

“Absolutely.”

“How's your family doing?”

“They're well, thanks. And yours?”

“Great! Say, I'm running low on my little white pills, and I was wondering if I could get a refill.”

“Your little white pills?”

“Yeah, you know the ones, they're about *this* big ...”

“What do you take them for?”

“Geez, that's a good question! I think they're for my cholesterol. No wait, they might be for my blood pressure! Or gout, maybe? What colour are gout pills?”

To my credit, I didn't roll my eyes. I hardly ever do that anymore.

“How about you check the name on the bottle when you get home and leave a message for me at my office? Then I'll

be able to fax a refill to the drug store for you.”

“Sounds like a plan, Doc! You have yourself a great day!”

Pharmacy:

I bolted inside. As I passed the tiny drug store near the entrance, Fred, the pharmacist, waved at me.

“Hi, Dr. Gray!”

“Hi, Fred. How's it going?”

He motioned me over and dropped his voice to a clandestine whisper.

“Hate to bother you, but would you happen to recall if you told Mr. Johnson you'd phone in a Viagra refill for him yesterday?”

“Oh yes, I did, but then things kind of went sideways on me and I forgot. He can have eight 100-mg tabs with 3 repeats.”

“Thanks!”

“No problem!”

Shopping cart:

I went to get a shopping cart. One of the women from the hospital auxiliary was sitting at a makeshift desk strategically located right beside the trolley corral.

“Hi, Dr. Gray! Care to buy a raffle ticket to support the Disease-of-the-Week Foundation?”

“I'd love to!” I paid my trolley tax, selected a cart that didn't squeak too much and wheeled it into the store.

Bakery:

Aside from a few nods and waves, my trip down the produce aisle was completely uneventful. Next up was bread. After scoping out some candidates, I leaned over and began covertly squeezing loaves. I had a firm grip on a promising loaf of Wonder Bread when I got the distinct feeling someone was watch-

ing me. I looked over my shoulder guiltily, expecting to encounter a frowning store clerk. Fortunately, it was just some flaxen-haired, gappy-toothed kid.

"Hey! Dr. Gray! Remember me?"

"Er, no. What's your name again?"

"Ralph! You put a cast on my leg when I broke it last summer."

"Hi, Ralph. How's your leg feeling?"

"Great! I can rollerblade and skateboard and everything now!"

"Awesome."

"So, what are you doing?"

"Shopping."

"How come you're not at work?"

How come you're not at school?, I thought.

"My office hasn't started yet."

"Oh. What's the matter with that loaf of bread?"

"Nothing."

"So then why were you squeezing it just now?"

"I, uh ..."

"Come along, Ralphie," his mother called from the far end of the aisle. Leave the peculiar, bread-squeezing doctor alone ...

Cereals:

"Hi, Dr. Gray!"

"Hi, Mrs. MacLeod!"

"Did you get the results of that ultrasound I went for last week?"

"Not yet."

"How about my diabetes test?"

"Um ..."

"My cholesterol test?"

"I don't remember."

"My —"

"Usually no news is good news, but if you want you can call my office and they'll look up the results for you."

"Okay, thanks!"

Eggs:

"How's it going, Dr. Gray?"

"Just great, Mr. Polokov. And you?"

"I'm fine. Will your office be open this afternoon? I need to get some travel grants signed."

"We'll be open until about 6 o'clock."

"I also need some Workers' Compensation forms filled out. How long do you think it'll take you to do them? We're going on a cruise next week and I'd really like to mail them in before we leave."

"If you speak to my receptionist, she'll let you know."

"Thanks!"

Toiletries:

I needed some bathroom supplies, but a cranky ex-patient I recently had to jettison from my practice was parked in the middle of the aisle. Oh, well, who needs soap, anyway? It's so overrated. Detour, detour ...

Meat:

"Hey, Doc! Thanks for stitching up my finger last week."

"My pleasure."

"It's almost healed already! Do you want to see it?"

"No, that's okay."

"You sure?"

"Positive."

"Actually, would you mind taking a quick peek at it just to make sure it's not getting infected?"

"Okay, let's see ... Uh-huh ... Looks fine to me."

"Thanks! Say, can you write me a note to give the wife saying I won't be able to do the dishes for the next couple of weeks? Har-har!"

Dairy:

My last stop. I was reviewing the expiry date on a carton of Lactaid when someone tapped me on the shoulder.

"Dr. Gray, am I ever glad to see you!"

Oh no! The Kiss of Death!

"Hi, Mr. Runciter. What's wrong?"

"I've been having one heck of a time with my bladder lately!"

"I see ..."

He started pulling up his shirt.

"I think maybe it has to do with my prostate."

"Uh-huh ..."

He began fumbling with his belt buckle.

"The last time I got this you ended up having to send me to the urologist."

"Ah ..."

He started unbuttoning his pants.

"Mr. Runciter, *what are you doing?!*"

"I figured I'd show you —"

"Not here!"

"Oh, okay, Doc. Do you want me to drop by your office later?"

"Sure! Five o'clock!"

I skedaddled.

Clearly this incognito *sbtick* isn't working out for me. I wonder if it's possible to order my groceries online and have them delivered to my house instead.

Competing interests: None declared.