

Call the Midwife

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We now have a large plastic box in the kitchen packed full of pills and potions and plasters and lots of other medicinal stuff that doesn't start with a P. We keep it all in the same big box so we know where to go in an emergency, apparently.

“We don't want blood dripping all round the house while you hunt for a plaster do we?” said my wife when she consolidated the various plasters and pills I had inadvertently distributed about the house, although she missed the stuff in the loft.

Personally I always thought this was a convenient arrangement. In my experience pain can strike when you least expect it in different parts of the house, not just in the kitchen. Quite often painful things happen to me in my study for instance, which is why I had such an eclectic mix of first aid supplies in my desk drawers and cupboards. Now if I've maimed myself with a chunk of razor sharp plastic packaging I have to bleed all the way to the kitchen, work out which cupboard the big medicine box is in, drag it out and then wrestle with it until it decides to open. All the time of course I'm bleeding over everything, which wasn't really the plan.

This hasn't actually happened yet, but I conducted what you might call a dry run last week when I was gripped by something far more insidious and enigmatic. While working at my desk my stomach found something sharp to play with.

I tried ignoring it but eventually I was forced to start rifling through my desk drawers for a quick fix. Then I remembered the big box.

“It’s probably just trapped wind,” I announced as I dragged the heavy box out of its cupboard with both hands.

“Sorry to hear that,” replied my wife, “but if you can untrap it elsewhere that would be much appreciated.”

Ten minutes later I had completely emptied the plastic box over the kitchen worktop and was sorting through its contents like an archeologist on a dig.

“What’s that for?” I asked holding up some pink stretchy fabric that smelled vaguely of TCP.

“Nothing to do with me, thank you very much,” said my wife after a quick glance.

If I hadn’t been in pain I would probably have enjoyed this. There were things I hadn’t seen for years and new stuff that looked really exciting. There was an ear cleaning kit that looked particularly tempting.

“Rubber tubing?” I announced, holding up a length of brown snake-like rubber.

My wife just shrugged, “again, all yours dear,” she said.

Quite frankly I was amazed at the amount of different plasters and bandages we had, there was enough supplies for a mini MASH unit. This was nothing compared to the number of stomach related products. At a rough count there appeared to be more than two dozen completely different packets and bottles. All in duplicate. Obviously someone had filled out the requisition form wrong. Despite the fact that I was now struggling with the fencing match in my stomach I decided to take the time to divide the stomach pain remedies into two camps, stuff to make things happen and stuff to stop things happening.

“There’s a number in there for hypochondriac’s anonymous,” remarked my wife as I worked.

After a few minutes of sorting and examining I had two big piles of medication in front of me. Maybe it was the increasing sharp pains but I couldn’t quite work out what to take. Was it something that needed to be released immediately or gently talked down? Suddenly the pain started rising towards my chest.

“I wonder if I’m having a heart attack?” I moaned clutching my now inflated stomach.

“In your stomach?” said my wife reviewing my bump, “looks like you need a midwife to me. Is there something you want to tell me?”

Since the pain was getting worse I decided to play safe and take at least one of everything. Some big chalky tablets for indigestion were first down the hatch, another handful for wind, a couple from a strip without a packet which I think said something about IBS, two senokot tablets in case it was the egg sandwich I had for lunch that was bunging me up and a generous swig of some horrible pink stuff that that turned out to be three years out of date.

“One way or another,” I said, “that should get a reaction.”

A few minutes later I was lying on the couch about to expire with my wife dangling a bulging polythene bag over me.

“This lot’s going in the bin. Hopefully you’ve counteracted everything you’ve taken,” I think she said, although it was hard to tell over the garbled noise coming from my stomach, which had now assumed a thrilling life of its own.

“The midwife is running late,” added my wife, “but she said, just start without her.”

I got up groaning for another rummage through the big plastic box. I wondered if that ear cleaning kit would work at the other end?