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'Care Navigators'? **So what happened to Family Doctors?**

The *Daily Mail's* headlined front page, *March of the GP Receptionists* (25.9.17), reports of NHS England providing 'care navigators' (trained receptionists) offering patients the 'right choice of treatment at the right time ... to reduce avoidable appointments'.

I have worked as a GP for forty years and know that this proposal will not work: it carries too many misconceptions.

Much of frontline medicine is not straightforward or what it seems. Often it is unclear – at least at first – why people ask for help. While some complaints are visible or clearly serious, many are more obscure. Many are not 'treatable' in the simply understood sense – our stress-related, our ageing and our mental health problems, for example. Most of us have all kinds of fears or loneliness beyond our words or understanding. None of this is easy, but our better erstwhile family doctors could greatly help when they got to know their patients: they could then offer skilled and bespoke guided support, comfort and encouragement. This kind of professional contact does not quickly 'treat', but certainly helps us heal, cope and positively adapt, and probably prevents more serious illness.

But these kinds of consultations require subtle skills, knowledge and experience – not just of medicine but of the patient's nature, their life and families. And these can only be provided from a *service that offers easily accessed personal continuity of care*. This can never be complete or perfect but the better old-fashioned family doctors used to be able to offer this kind of relationship far more readily than a current (likely locum and part-time) Primary Care Service Provider (as GPs are administratively designated).

Few patients now can even name their GP, let alone see the same one predictably. Recruiting receptionists to further fragment and deflect our already fragile and poorly accessed personal continuity of care will be counterproductive: it adds even more barriers and procedures to a service most of us find is already increasingly impersonal, unfamiliar and uncaring. All this will turn out more expensive, too. And more anxiety-prone. And more hazardous.

The authorities will assure us this will not happen; but it will.

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