

## SATIRE

### The metamorphosis

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There is a loud knock at the door that arouses me from my catnap. A slow-to-progress labour and eventual call for a cesarean delivery had rendered my night insomniac. I'd assisted, since I was there already, and it was outside the basket of prepaid services. I'd managed a 3-hour power snooze before licking my wounds and heading to the day's clinic. Now, I think I can get through the evening clinic because our family health team is blessed with a multitude of interprofessional health care providers who will likely see all of the 20 or more patients who will arrive. Easy peasy. I can perfect my Angry Birds technique.

"Dr. Kafka, Dr. Kafka, should we open the clinic doors for the after-hours clinic?" the receptionist questions.

Is it already 5 pm? "Of course, of course," I shout. She doesn't hear me.

"There are quite a few patients waiting, and it's already 5:02 pm, Dr. Kafka. Should we open the doors?" the receptionist asks again, a little louder.

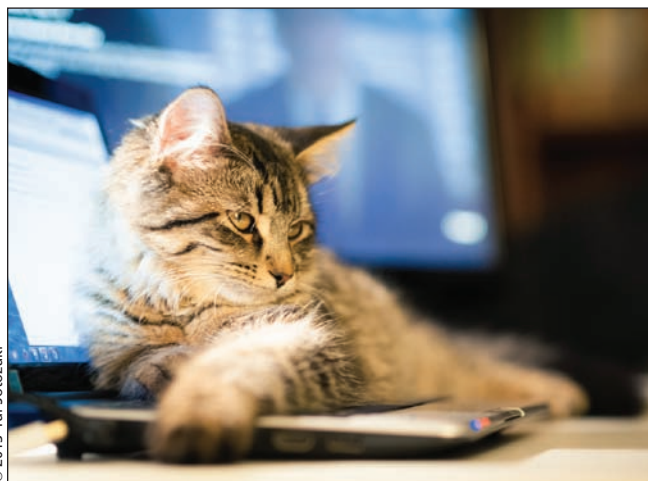
"Yes, go ahead!" The buttons of my laboratory coat pop and the sleeves tear. Distally, I see funny-looking, fuzzy, feline paws, which have replaced my hands, and a purring, corpulent midsection. This central obesity is a serious setback, I think. What will my personal trainer say? What will my wife say?

"Is there a cat in there with you, Dr. Kafka? Linda, what should we do? He is not answering, and I think I hear a cat in his locked office."

Linda, the nurse practitioner, quickly takes charge. "Just open the front door, Sherri, and start registering the patients. We will deal with the patients and let Dr. Kafka have all the credit when he returns." Linda gathers the troops, which comprise 2 physician assistants and 1 registered nurse. "Dr. Kafka is indisposed. He may have been attacked by a cat," she smirks. "Just joking! We need to get things organized and start seeing the patients for the evening walk-in, and when Dr. Kafka returns he won't be so far behind."

The members of the health care team are ready and willing. They are specifically trained to manage most conditions in primary care.

I hear all this while I look down at my stubby, fuzzy legs with tabby lines. I feel uncomfortable as I feel a posterior growth stuck in the leather chair. I sit incredulous and contemplate this metamorphosis. What is going on? This is ridiculous! I stand up like an ataxic drunk and walk on hind



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legs (hind legs!) to the mirror. A big round face, with pricked ears, stripes and whiskers, stares back at me indignantly. I am a cat, a fat cat, a FAT CAT! The politicians have been calling us "fat cats" for years now. I thought it was rhetoric. But now I see a conspiracy, an act of propaganda. Who is behind this transformation?

Perhaps it is not politicians and the media, but Big Pharma. Now I remember, the smiling rep from I-OWN-YOU Pharma Inc. brought lunch and "educational material" earlier today. Damn the peddling of those transmogrifying pharmaceuticals. Where WAS that lunch from? McLab Experiments, possibly. Change-A-Guy Dim Sum House, perhaps.

I have to do something. What are my symptoms? OPQRST? That's stupid; I am a cat. This is beyond medical analysis. Is this a karma thing? No way, I am a family doctor — I help everyone without complaining. Just don't look at one of those doctor-rating websites. How can anyone imagine us as fat cats driving supercars around town? We are more like hound dogs following our masters loyally. Government disapproval of approved programs now makes our practice challenging. We've gone through kaleidoscopic changes in policy: patient-enrolled models to a wait-list strategy to cancer care strategies to urgent care centres to home care, and who knows what's coming next. There seems to be no rhyme or reason to it. Things were easier in the olden days when health care was comprehensive and less fragmented. I want to yowl for the years when being a doctor meant being a

responsible, autonomous deliverer of clinical care rather than a cruise ship coordinator of services negotiating medical care based on the regime's key mandate du jour ("we-will-make-up-something-and-you-will-deliver-it-with-a-smile-so-that-we-can-be-re-elected").

Should I go out and see patients? Carry on as if there is nothing wrong? Definitely not. That is decided. Could this be just my imagination? I pinch myself. MEOWWWWW! Fortunately, it is so busy in the walk-in clinic that no one hears me. I was last human after lunch before falling asleep. Should I go back to sleep? That will not work because I need someone to rub my belly to fall asleep now. What did Gregor Samsa do in *The Metamorphosis*? He starved himself to death. One look at the size of my belly and I know that's not going to work.

I cannot stay a cat. What about my allergies? I think I am going to sneeze. Ah-ah-AH-CHOOOO!

I am lying in a puddle of saliva and blood on the floor near my desk. My head hurts. My hands are back. I am not a cat anymore! I must have fallen asleep and hit my head on the desk. It was all a terrible daymare. What a relief that I won't need to buy a Dr. Seuss hat: "I am lucky to be what I am! / Thank goodness I am not just a clam or a ham / Or a dusty old jar of sour gooseberry jam!"<sup>1</sup>

"Dr. Kafka, should we open the door for the walk-in clinic?" Sherri enters my office after knocking. "Why are you under the desk?"

"It's a new yoga pose, the downward tabby," I reply. "Give me a few moments to get organized."

"Don't worry. Linda and the staff are all ready to start. You take your time. We can't lose you, Dr. Kafka. You are the KEY to the whole operation," Sherri says as she walks out of my office, and I'm sure I hear her quietly mumble in the hallway, "Besides, who else could write the cheques?"

## Reference

1. Geisel TS. *Happy birthday to you!* By Dr. Seuss [pseud.] New York (NY): Random House;1959.

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