



# Query

The unpleasant doctor arrived from another town, and it wasn't long before the hospital was condemned as "archaic," certain physicians characterized as "bumblers," the ORs condemned as "torture chambers" and CME rechristened as CMRE, "Constant Medical Re-Education." The list of the unpleasant doctor's dissatisfactions goes on. I was singled out for special mention. Here are a few choice quotes filtered back to me from sympathetic staff: "It's amazing that any of his patients are still alive." "How did he get through medical school?" "You'd think he'd know something after so many years in practice."

I'd be offended if these remarks had come from any other source, but this particular detractor could be discounted as a cartoon, ridiculous in his umbrage, comical in his entitlement to pronounce and denounce.

I'm unsure why, but the unpleasant doctor was as sweet as could be whenever he was around me. I never heard a harsh word; his method, apparently, was covert character-assassination.

What could I do? To confront the unpleasant doctor would likely intensify the dirty war, yet to be silent would mean that I was somehow complicit, that I accepted his behaviour. My other colleagues certainly didn't: they were coming to my defence, meeting the really unpleasant side of the unpleasant doctor — who, when confronted, would resort to shouting like a common bully.

How to deal with a bully? I don't usually back down from an argument, and I've had my share of conflict with colleagues, but I thought I'd left this kind of schoolyard antagonism behind long ago. So I decided I'd finally confront the

unpleasant doctor and tell him that I thought he was bad for the physician community and that he was making himself very unpopular.

All of which I suspected would be wasted words, for the unpleasant doctor did not have a good history of listening. But, for the sake of my own dignity, I had to say something.

I met him alone in a corridor. Before I even started to say anything, he began complaining that the hospital staff were out to get him and that some physicians weren't talking to him and that this town had turned out to be a distinctly unwelcoming one and why wasn't anyone listening to him when he made suggestions and some doctors were trying to run him out of town.

I must admit, it was better than a shouting match. But it showed me that this person conceived of the world as a harsh place where things were constantly being withheld unfairly and given to others less deserving, and located the source of his problems as outward, not inward.

I had a simple answer for him. Instead of commiserating, I told him he was disliked because of his incessant criticisms of other staff. That's all I had the chance to say, for with that brief comment I ignited a fuse. He called me a nincompoop, irresponsible, incompetent, lazy, egregious, stupid ... After a while I stopped listening; I was more interested to see whether he'd actually stop than in what he had to say. After some minutes of this, with no sign of him letting up, I left.

I still wonder, though, if I was right to tell this guy that he was disliked by "everyone," and if at that moment — when he seemed to be questioning how he got to be so isolated — I had also assumed the role of the bully. — *Dr. Ursus*