



Query

I got caught yesterday. Not doing or dealing drugs in the hospital, not smoking, not having sexual relationships with patients. None of that stuff. No, I got caught doing something else: gossiping.

It was one of those interminable meetings where budgets are discussed in inchworm fashion, call schedules are castigated, incentive programs are proposed to siphon more money from the provincial government to recruit physicians who can alleviate call schedule woes. Everyone gets a chance to complain, and certain personalities try to top each other with their sob stories.

Perhaps the most flamboyantly annoying case was that of a young gynecologist. The father of three, he lamented how his call was impacting his family, his children were missing their daddy, they were growing up and he was missing their milestones. On and on he went, and though this was pretty typical of the collective sob storydom, it was made inexcusable because we all *knew* that he was cheating on his wife with his secretary, that he had been seen kissing her in public, that he was known for attending hospital parties with her while *pretending* to be on call. In short, it worked to his advantage to have a heavy call schedule: he could feign working when he was actually gallivanting with his consort. I was at a party where he was paged by his wife and he told her he had two c-sections back-to-back and wouldn't be home for a few more hours.

As I listened to his lies in the board room, I was seething. I thought: *Does he take us for fools? Are we supposed to believe him when he talks about how put-upon he is?*

I should have said something right then. I should have said, *Look. We know by your actions that you could care less about your family.* Instead, I said nothing. Or at least, not then. But after the meeting, I said to a colleague I trusted:

Don't you think that was one of the most selfish, self-centred soliloquies you ever heard in your entire life? He uses the call schedule to cheat on his wife, and then moans about how onerous it is. How sick is that?

I didn't check the room before I spoke. I said it quickly and heatedly. It was easily audible, and the gynecologist heard. He confronted me. *What do you mean, I cheat? What do you mean, I'm selfish? You know what you are? A burnt-out gossip!*

I felt like I was caught doing something wrong. I didn't know what to say. Then I became angry, because it *was* true. I was speaking the truth. Before I had a chance to retort, he turned and left.

Was I gossiping? Should I have spoken up during the meeting, instead of waiting until after the meeting to undermine him?

Now I have the unpleasant task of consulting him when my births go wrong or if I have an ectopic. When I call, he makes me pay. *Don't you know I'm busy when I'm on call? Don't you know that I work when I'm on call? Don't you know that we gynecologists do more call than you family practice people?* He says this every time. Every time it is unpleasant. I look at the day's call schedule with dread, fearing that his name will appear. The irony is not lost on me.

Yet, even though I didn't say anything incorrect, I think I should apologize for not saying to his face what I would say to other people. And I will add that he's not fooling anyone when he complains about a call schedule that is abetting his infidelity.

— Dr. Ursus