

QUERY



I'd like to eradicate all the unhappy people in the hospital. I'd get a big Death Ray and blast everyone who felt it was their tightly-held responsibility to gossip, complain or snipe. To launch long and unpleasant soliloquies on how unfair it is that X takes her break at 9:00 while other hard-working complainers must wait until 9:15. To wage epic campaigns over how little other people seem to be working — each day, the roster swells as a new person is singled out — as compared to virtuous them. Such people pre-empt esprit de corps, pulverize goodwill and cheer. They are a pox on this place.

I'm not advocating for hospital Utopia, a health-care commune where nurses sing and doctors dance, where bedpans and linens are replenished by magical forces, where unflagging smiles are compulsory (the other laws being LAUGH and LOVE YOUR JOB). No, what I'm arguing for is a quick and easy means of dispatching grumps.

I like to think I went into medicine because — bear with me — I wanted to help people. It's a ubiquitous rationale for those in the field, and an interesting litmus test when applied to colleagues. For the most part, they pass. It's obvious they enjoy their work, that they practise real compassion when a patient falls ill, and share in the success when a patient does well. But there are others ... ah, there are others I'd like to zap.

These are the people who would hinder any institution. I tell myself they're every-

where, but that doesn't help much, since I'm *here* and so are *they*. I see them every day, and I see how their misery infects my workplace. I've tried killing them with kindness, but unrelenting smiles have no effect. I've tried ignoring them as much as possible. But this does nothing to stifle a grump and only makes me feel like a wimp. So I've decided I need a Death Ray. Preferably one that goes ZAP!

But before I lay waste to the cafeteria, smoking pit and surgeon's lounge, I must confess I haven't always been a comic-book hero. I too have been harried by time constraints and Olympian patient loads, by my own errors and by exhausting patients. I've wondered: *Why me?* when chronically suicidal patients arrive in my office. I've worked shifts in emergency when the nurses seem to come to me with every head injury and heart attack while the other doc on shift sees sore throats and earaches. I've gossiped about the latest sexual scandals plaguing a certain department. (Fascinating, really, I must tell you about it sometime.) And I've complained about consultants who make me beg before they will see a patient. I'm above all this whining now. I tell you, I've seen the light. Death-ray light. But I do hope that Death Ray technology doesn't fall into the hands of the nefarious Grumpy People. I may hear one last ZAP! and then be dispersed into minute particles by an assailant for whom relentless good cheer is easily as irksome as gossip, complaint or snipe.

— Dr. Ursus