HASLAM'S VIEW



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What does your consulting room say about you?

HERE IN THE 'NEW NORMAL' OUR WORLD CONTINUES TO BE TURNED upside down. Almost every aspect of our lives has changed, not least the way we work and the way we socialise.

Of all the remarkable changes that Covid-19 has brought into our lives, one of the most intriguing has been the dramatic increase in the use of video calls and video conferencing. Only a few months ago it was just the tech enthusiasts and early adopters in general practice who were using video as a routine means of carrying out consultations. Now the technology has become ubiquitous.

At the time of writing, the country remains in lockdown. We have all become dependent on electronic tools to meet up with friends and family, as well as carrying out business meetings and discussions.

We are even getting an insight into celebrity homes. Chat shows, news interviews, and even concerts are now all transmitted from someone's front room or study. We get a tiny taste of what their home life might be like – or at the very least what they would like us to think it is like.

It's been quite an eye opener. The technology has been remarkable and was almost unimaginable only a short while ago, but the real revelation has been people's walls. Don't tell me that I'm not the only one who spends on-line meetings examining the walls and bookshelves in participants' rooms. There are the bookshelves that are chaotically disorganised, and others that are obsessively ordered and suspiciously neat. There are the displays of photographs, nick nacks, and certificates.

'The breadth and complexity of the books on display made me recalibrate my now unmasked prejudice about what the owner was really like'

There are also those who use computer-generated backgrounds to anonymise and depersonalise their transmissions. On line you can even buy wallpaper that looks like a well stocked bookcase. This can be positioned behind the user so that he or she appears much more erudite than they really are. It's a fascinating new phenomenon.

Judging people by their shelves and walls is absolutely nothing new. One of the great potential benefits of doing home visits as a GP has always been the insight that this gives you into a very different aspect of people's lives. There are excessively tidy houses, and those that are simply squalid. There are some where absolutely no books are to be seen anywhere. I will never forget the house where piles of explicit magazines were left next to the toy box. In another unforgettable house the breadth and complexity of the books on display made me recalibrate my now unmasked prejudice about what the owner was really like.

Of course, any form of wall decoration can transmit messages about the owner, and that applies to our consulting rooms too.

For years, I've been fascinated by media interviews with doctors – particularly doctors in the USA – whose walls are covered in numerous impressive looking certificates and diplomas. What's this all about? Is this a cultural thing? In America, in particular, is there a relationship between multiple diplomatosis and trust?

When I think of the consulting rooms of hospital doctors in the UK that I've consulted over the years, there appears to be no personalisation at all. As for the GPs that I have consulted or worked with, I don't recall seeing a single framed certificate. Family photos, holiday pics, children's drawings – all of these send a message too.

What does your consulting room – real or virtual – say about you?

It might be worth checking....

Tell us what you think?

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