

## HASLAM'S VIEW



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# How supportive are your partners?

**THEY HAD BEEN PARTNERS FOR 15 YEARS BUT ON THE DAY HIS FATHER WAS TAKEN**

critically ill Tom first discovered just how supportive partners can turn out to be. Many people say a GP partnership can be like a marriage, though frequently longer lasting. Partners go through so much together, the highs and lows of everyday practice. The relationship can be one of genuine support and friendship or just someone to share the odd beer and moan with.

So when Tom had an early morning phone call and heard that his father had been admitted to hospital, gravely ill and unlikely to survive more than a couple of days, he phoned his partner during breakfast to say that he wouldn't be coming in that day.

His partner said: 'Forget it. You're duty doctor, and it's my half day.' So Tom came in, shell shocked and distressed, and did a day's work. He never saw his father alive again.

He felt that he never wanted to see his partner alive again either but the partnership struggled on for a few more months before Tom couldn't stand it any longer and quit.

When Sally's house burnt down, and she phoned to speak to one of the partners to say she simply couldn't face work, she really expected more sympathy and understanding from the practice where she was an assistant than a demand that she still come in to work that day.

When Brian's child was admitted to hospital with a major head injury, he didn't expect to be told he was still needed in the surgery, where he was booked to do a locum session, with the words: 'His mother can be there, after all.'

I'm well aware that these stories are exceptions. Most partnerships are genuinely supportive, genuinely friendly, sources of great strength. I've personally been blessed with great partners.

**'We should care about the people we work with just as much as we care for our patients'**

But for many years I have given presentations at conferences or meetings on handling the stress of being a GP, and always afterwards a doctor will come up to me and share his or her experiences of how insensitive and unfeeling doctors can be when it comes to dealing with their colleagues.

And I'm genuinely puzzled. Doctors are members of a noble caring profession, and this should be so much more than just a cliché. Caring should be in our DNA, and we should care about the people we work with just as much as we care for our patients.

After all, when each of the three doctors whose problems I described

here went into work, I can be pretty certain that they felt worse than most of the patients they saw that day.

We all know that doctors are generally pretty hopeless at coping with ill health in themselves, either overdiagnosing disaster or ignoring symptoms they should take note of. But it's quite another thing treating each other in this offhand and ignorant way.

Maybe the comments about a partnership being like a marriage aren't too far off the mark. We all know wonderful relationships, and we all know of abusive ones too.

We also know that marriages need to be worked at, and even the strongest relationship will go through tricky times.

Partners in successful marriages work at the relationship, not taking it for granted. Partners in practices probably need to do the same – caring for each other as human beings rather than just someone who shares the business account cheque book. This isn't soft and fluffy psycho-babble. It matters.

Ask Tom, Sally, or Brian.

### Tell us what you think?

If you want to share your experiences or views with other readers, write to: [editor@thepractitioner.co.uk](mailto:editor@thepractitioner.co.uk)