

## Apply healing paint daily

“**T**ake the coast road. It’s in way better condition and much nicer to drive.”

This was the e-mail advice I received from the nice woman at the hotel in Amalfi, Italy, in response to my query as to the best method of arrival by car. After spending a week in Tuscany and then another 10 days on a bike tour across Italy, the Amalfi coast seemed like a perfect ending to a fairytale trip. So on a beautiful Monday morning we headed out on our 5-hour drive from southern Tuscany. Apart from the numerous tolls and high-performance vehicles traveling around 200 km/hr on the autostrade, the trip was uneventful until I piloted my little Fiat 500 onto road SS163. Two Fiat 500s might be able to pass one another on this ever-twisting, walled avenue of death but not the collection of buses, trucks, vans, people, and bikes we encountered. However, none of the local drivers seemed to be aware of the physical principles of space and time, and drove as if God himself had blessed them with a protective bubble. The icing on the cake was when I looked to my left to see an even smaller Fiat honking and weav-

ing as it passed each vehicle in a long line behind some poor scared tourist a few cars ahead. There was even a grandma in the passenger seat gesturing as only an Italian can. I’m pretty sure she wasn’t mouthing “Welcome to the coast.”

### Like the Amalfi car, I now have numerous scars.

As you can deduce from the fact that I penned this editorial after my encounters, Grandma didn’t cause my death, and I sincerely hope her heavenly bubble wasn’t burst by a large, cornering, two-wheeling tour bus (prior to my trip I wasn’t aware such a thing was even possible). I did notice that the walls that lined “S-cared S-... less 163” have numerous gouges. I also noticed that the typical Amalfi vehicle has dents on all four sides.

This got me thinking about how we all develop scratches along the way. In my 50s I have to admit that, like the Amalfi car, I now have numerous scars, most of them from crashing

my bicycle. I remember one patient stating the obvious: “Dr Richardson, have you ever considered that maybe you aren’t very good at this bike riding thing?” This is probably why I’ve never had the urge to get a tattoo—I’ve been doing a pretty good job of that on my own. And physical scars are one thing, but emotional scars run deeper. As physicians, we often deal with our patients’ mental dents. A privilege of general practice is that as the physician-patient relationship grows through the years patients let down their guard and share their stories. We are trusted with tales of childhood trauma, relationship failure, addiction, loss, and more. It is in these moments that heartfelt words of support can mean so much to those we care for. Therefore, I have made a commitment to acknowledge at least one patient’s emotional dent each day and, if possible, to apply a little healing paint.

I wonder how much Limoncello and gelato I would have had to consume to calm my nerves had I driven the much more dangerous mountain road.

—DRR

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## Quest for Superdoc

**C**ock-a-doodle-doo! Sun rays hit the room. Max the cat is in my face whining to be let out. Baby's foot is in my ear. Hubby is snoring. It's 5:30 a.m. Good morning!

Here I go—hit the bamboo floors running. First sip of tea does it. Ahhh! Good morning world!

I owe, I owe, it's off to work I go.

Love going to work. Love my assistant, Connie, who seems to know what I'm thinking at all times and is always one step ahead of me. Love the patients who ask how my day is going and how my daughter is doing (every one of them asks) and who share special tidbits of their lives.

Love going to my family home with my husband and my daughter after work a few days each week to enjoy the most amazing Indian food ever made. And to enjoy seeing the whole family, but especially the two people who got me to this point in life and who continue to be my heroes—my parents.

Then I get to go home and spend time with my beautiful fur babies and play in my garden and run around on the farm after the chickens. Occasionally I get to go for a 10 km run and throw around some weights. Hercules!

So could it get any better? Could I be doing more as a family doc? Have I failed because I'm not a full-service GP? I don't do obstetrics and I have only associate privileges at the hospital. My dreams of being Superdoc ... gone?

Back in the day docs did 24-hour call and in some places they still do. Times have changed. Expectations to have a fulfilling family life have taken precedence. But there are docs out there who still do it all. And kudos to them.

I had to come to terms with the fact that I can't do it all. I'd love to, but there are not enough hours in the day to be Superdoc, Superwife, Supermom, Supersis, Superauntie, and Superfriend.

There is a fleeting moment of guilt when I discover that one of my patients has been admitted to the hospital—the burden on the ER and on the hospitalists, my patient seeing different docs during their hospital stay when it's already so stressful for them. I rationalize by thinking how great our hospitalists are and how my patient is receiving the best care. But in my heart I know there is nothing like seeing your family doc while

you're in the hospital.

So I am going to start visiting my inpatients once a week. I hope to provide some emotional support to my patients and any additional information I can to the doc looking after them.

But should I feel guilty? I've only taken 2 weeks off this year. I have a solo family practice with no locums available. I drag around my faithful computer, with my EMR, everywhere I go, tasking every free moment I get. I do my own call and have my cellphone on me 24/7. I visit patients in their own homes. I've adopted the open-access model for patient care at my clinic.

One day, when my daughter is in school, I may return to hospital work. I aspire to one day joining Doctors Without Borders.

I've spent my whole life trying to be Super Jeeves. But now I realize my happiness and self-contentment translates into healthy relationships with my family, friends, and patients. Life is like riding a bicycle. You can coast, brake, or go full speed ahead. But you always need balance.

—JKC

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