

HAIRLESS IN ARCADIA:A Cautionary Tale for Bounty Hunters

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The people of Arcadia were up in arms. "Why", they cried, "must we pay such high fees to the medicine men each time we fall ill? Some of us are rendered bankrupt at a time when we are least able to support ourselves; others among us are forced to suffer unattended because we are unable to save sufficient gold pieces to satisfy the medicine men." So strident was the cry of the Arcadian people on this matter that the government of the land passed a law declaring that henceforth the fees of the medicine men would be paid from a public purse to which every citizen, whether in sickness or in health, would contribute three gold pieces each week. And so it came to pass that cash registers in the working places of medicine men disappeared, and scribes and agents were engaged to collect the gold pieces of the people and pay the medicine men their fees. In this manner did the Arcadian government bring about a reconciliation between the medicine men and the people (except those citizens who earned only five gold pieces every week).

However, although this almost happy new arrangement seemed to please many in the land, some Arcadian medicine men continued to harbour an irk which had troubled them for many years. In Arcadia, as in other lands, medicine men belonged to one of two guilds. One guild was for medicine men who wielded knives to remove cuniform sacs from the cavities of the body; the other guild was comprised of those medicine

men who (although they sometimes administered potions and embrocations) provided kindly reassurance and tender loving care to citizens who sought their help.

It was the medicine men in this latter guild who continued to experience an enduring irk, for they saw that the Medicine Men With Knives received many more gold pieces for plucking out inessential cuniform sacs than they themselves received for providing time-consuming reassurance and tender loving care. And so it was that some suggested that the system of fees should be abolished and that all medicine men, from whichever guild, should be paid equal salaries for comparable skill, work and altruism.

These suggestions infuriated the Medicine Men With Knives, and their leader rose up to declare the folly of these radical views. "Medicine men", he thundered, "are frail and fallible and respond to incentives. If a fee-for-service system gets large numbers of cuniform sacs removed, then that is what is needed." But having thus dismissed the fundamentalist fringe of the Guild of Medicine Men Without Knives, he hastened to build bridges between the two guilds in the spirit of a true professional. "If I may be so bold", he said to the Medicine Men Without Knives, "I see a way by which you could increase the number of gold pieces you receive from the public purse. The secret of my success and that of my fellow guild members is that the cuniform sacs which we cull from body cavities can be counted. Government statisticians, who in former times were engaged in futile attempts to assess the health of Arcadians, can now furnish us with information

on the size of our cuniform sac cull at the touch of a computer switch - and every sac culled attracts a handsome bounty from the public purse. Bounty would be yours likewise if only you could provide the government with some tangible token of the reassurance and tender loving care which you use to deal with unnecessary consultations by malingering citizens."

The Medicine Men Without Knives listened to these words and acknowledged that the key to their advancement lay in countability of their work. If they could find a means to provide the government with countable evidence of their reassuring and tender loving caring activities, not only would they attract bounty for each item of such service, but they would have an incentive to seek out citizens in need. "If a fee-for-service system could get a large number of cuniform sacs removed," they mused, "then, by Jove, it could also promote increased reassurance and tender loving care (possibly even of an anticipatory nature)".

The Ways and Means Committee of the Guild of Medicine Men Without Knives was therefore mandated to address the problem with the utmost urgency. After nearly two hours of detailed deliberations, the committee emerged with clear directives for guild members. The committee expressed its grave concern that guild members had so far failed to apply a recent scientific discovery to their everyday practice. The previous week, it had been convincingly demonstrated that reassurance and tender loving care could be greatly enhanced by prior shaving of the patient's head. Indeed,

head-shaving held great promise as a treatment for nervous debility, lumbago, neurasthenia, biliousness, fatigue, dyspepsia, rheumatics and other common ailments.

Within three months of the committee's statement, an overwhelming body of professional opinion among medicine men had accepted that head-shaving represented a major medical advance which was ripe for the fullest possible exploitation. The media had not been backward in bringing the Arcadian people the joyful news of this breakthrough, and increasing numbers of hairless people were to be seen in towns and villages throughout the land. The demand for head-shaving burgeoned, and within a few months the renamed Guild of Medicine Men with Scissors and Razors (but Without Knives) was lobbying the Arcadian government. "The application of this new advance in medical treatment", they stressed, "involves the exercise of exceptional clinical skills and demands considerable resources of time. If the people of Arcadia are to benefit fully from this new advance in medical care," the government must ensure that Medicine Men With Scissors and Razors (but Without Knives) are paid a suitable fee for each head-shaving."

Bowing to expert professional opinion concerning the importance of this scientific breakthrough, conscious of the public demand to reduce waiting lists for head-shaving, and given a conditional promise of donations to party funds from manufacturers of scissors, razors and shaving soap, the government agreed that head shaving should henceforth attract item-of-service bounty from the public purse. For their part, guild members acquiesced in the government's only condition

for payment of fees - that all claims be accompanied by at least 25 grams of human hair, hygienically packaged, and subject to random checks by tissue committees set up by the profession. The Guild of Medicine Men With Scissors and Razors (but Without Knives) were well please with this victory for medical science, common sense and fairmindedness, and they rapidly narrowed the difference in just rewards which had previously distinguished them from the Medicine Men With Knives.

As the years passed, every citizen's weekly contribution to the public purse was raised from 3 to 6 gold pieces to pay for the improved medical care. It is true that special arrangements had to be made for those men and women who still earned only 5 gold pieces per week, but the extra expenditure was undoubtedly a sound investment in the nation's health. The capital hair yield per capita (a direct statistical measure of national reassuredness) showed a continuing rising trend, and, in addition, there was encouraging evidence that the health goal to extirpate all cuniform sacs in adult Arcadians was well on the way to realization.

Yet in spite of the fact that the statistics clearly showed that the dedicated medicine men of Arcadia had every reason to be pleased with the extent of their conquest of Arcadian ill-health, there were signs that the mood of the profession was characterized by displeasure. The problem began when the bounty available to Medicine Men With Knives began to fall. The prospect of large cuniform sac culls had always attracted young medicine men to join the Guild and so

there were many Medicine Men With Knives ; but now, after years of intensive cuniform sac culling, citizens still in possession of their cuniform sacs were few and far between. This over-culling had led to suggestions of other cutting procedures which might be exploited in addition to the removal of cuniform sacs; but it had also led to unseemly squabbling between medicine men over the few remaining Arcadians still in possession of their sacs.

Furthermore, quite apart from its internal problems, the Guild of Medicine Men With Knives was once more at loggerheads with the Guild of Medicine Men With Scissors and Razors (but Without Knives). This was because members of the latter guild had begun to use head-shaving in the management of biliousness and dyspepsia, conditions which had previously been treated by cuniform sac removal, and which had thus been the exclusive preserve of Medicine Men With Knives. This failure to respect demarcation lines had prompted retaliatory responses by Medicine Men With Knives who were to be seen using head shaving in the management of limb fractures.

The councils of the two guilds, concerned that these wrangles would jeopardize the professional reputation of medicine men as a whole, agreed to hold a joint meeting to try and resolve the crisis. They first suggested that net levels of bounty could be restored by increasing fees, but this was rejected outright by the Arcadian government because an economic recession had necessitated public expenditure cuts to allow the private sector to recover. The two guild

councils considered sharing cases of biliousness and dyspepsia on a 50:50 basis, but this plan was abandoned as being impossible to administer. Finally, faced with no other alternative, the two guilds decided reluctantly that they would have to take their conflict to scientific arbitration.

Scientific medicine men (who, being salaried, had no financial interest in the conflict) were therefore summoned to judge whether head-shaving or cuniform sac removal was the better management in cases of biliousness and dyspepsia. The scientific medicine men proposed that the two treatments should be tried by an ordeal known as randomization (for this ordeal was least likely to bear false witness); but they insisted on one important condition - some of the sufferers from biliousness and dyspepsia must be given no treatment at all (a proposition considered thoroughly unethical by many medicine men).

Time passed while the trial was conducted. But finally the results were ready and the members of the two guilds gathered to hear the outcome of the arbitration. "I will announce the results of our judgement in ascending order of effectiveness and safety," the leader of the scientific medicine men said. "Worst of all was treatment by cuniform sac removal because death sometimes resulted from the operation. Second worst was head shaving because it was often associated with chilblains of the scalp during the harsh Arcadian winter. The best method of management was to refrain from active management while awaiting spontaneous remission of

biliousness and dyspepsia; the only undesirable side effect of this management was that patients occasionally felt that they were not getting good value for an outlay of 6 gold pieces a week."

Science could not have dealt a more threatening blow to the interests of Arcadian medicine men. They (together with the manufacturers of knives, scissors and razors) dissociated themselves from the judgement, and demanded a re-trial with a different jury. But news of the trial had already become the subject of intense debate among the largely bald and cuniform sacless populus. The people were seized with righteous indignation as the implications sank in; medicine men had for years been subjecting them to cuniform sac culls and head shaving with no good evidence that their health would be improved thereby; and all this was costing each of them 6 gold pieces a week! Furthermore, scientific medicine, kindly reassurance and tender loving care had all taken second place to bounty hunting - how could medicine men who professed such high ideals be guilty of such selfishness?

Demonstrators wearing wigs marched on parliament chanting "Restore our sacs", and "Sack the bounty hunters," and, "Whatever happened to tender loving care?" The government was under mounting pressure to act. The leaders of the medicine men were invited to submit evidence in support of their contention that a mis-trial had taken place, or any other scientific evidence supporting the health policies of head shaving and cuniform sac removal for all Arcadian adults; but their response was unconvincing. Finally, in desperation, the



prime minister summoned medicine men from the fundamentalist fringe to advise him.

"Prime minister," they said, "we know of a land where these matters are organized differently. As in Arcadia, some things there are good and some things are bad. But we must learn from the good things. In that land the cost of treatment by medicine men is furnished by the public purse, but each citizen contributes to the purse according to his means. All the medicine men, from whichever guild, are paid equal salaries for comparable experience and skill. Medicine men are neither rich nor poor. Like us, they are frail and fallible. But the lure of the bounty does not intrude upon their decisions when a patient comes to them for help. Although we believe that there are many things which the people wish to improve in that land, citizens there live as long as Arcadians do, and they pay fewer gold pieces for treatment by medicine men. We believe Arcadia must follow this example." And the Prime Minister of Arcadia said, "Verily, you may be fundamentalist, but you are right. The Arcadian people will rejoice in these new arrangements and will call for bounty hunters to be outlawed."

So it was that a few bounty addicts among the medicine men left Arcadia to cull cuniform sacs and shave heads in distant lands where the citizenry was unaware of the dire consequences of bounty hunting by medicine men. But most of the Arcadian medicine men were content to stay in their native land and receive salaries of gold pieces according to the size of the public purse, for these salaries compared

favourably with the limited bounty available to them as a result of previous overculling. Meanwhile the confidence of the Arcadian people in their medicine men was restored, for although they recognized that medicine men were frail and fallible, the people were now reassured that bounty hunting would never again determine the treatments meted out to them. And there was much rejoicing as hair grew again in Arcadia.