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extra

Insights into humanity

Suhanthini Farrell

As a core trainee in old age psychiatry, I always look forward to the part of the Mini-Mental State Examination (MMSE) when I turn over the piece of paper, hand over my pen, and invite the patient to ‘write a sentence – anything you like, whatever comes into your mind’. Most are initially flummoxed by this – it is not often, after all, that we are asked to put the everyday thoughts floating around in our heads into words – but then produce something that gives me a startling insight into their personal world. It provides a valuable reminder that no matter how cognitively impaired the person in front of me may be, they have the same feelings, anxieties and thoughts as anyone else. From all the MMSEs I have done, I have compiled a list of my personal favourites.

From the mundane:

‘We are having fish and chips for tea.’
 ‘My cat’s full name is Mr Boo Stinkweed Tinkerbell.’
 ‘I have put a blue sock in the white wash oh no oh no.’

to the poignant:

‘I loved my husband very much.’
 ‘I miss my daughter Janie every day.’
 ‘Please don’t take me away.’

From the sublime:

‘Rough winds do shake the darling buds of May
 And summer’s lease hath all too short a date.’

to the less so:

‘I need a poo.’

From the complimentary:

‘You have beautiful hair doctor.’
 ‘You smell very nice.’

to my all-time favourite, from the sweetest-looking 92-year-old lady:

‘What the f***ing hell are you looking at?’

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