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link to The Hippocratic Post article [1]



That cricketing and clinical concepts collide has become apparent to me as a nurse spectator sitting next to the sight screens at numerous cricket matches. I've noticed many cricketing terms and ideas that wouldn't be out of place in a ward environment when discussing diagnosis, disease and death. As I look at Father Time removing the bails from the wicket above Lord's cricket ground, the scythe over his shoulder, I am caused to consider the brevity of life. Cricketing terms are used interchangeably to mark life's passage – 'a good innings', for example, being used after someone's death to talk about a satisfactory length and quality of life preceding it (though it seems an inadequate way to address a bereavement); the 'century' is celebrated both on the cricket pitch and in the nursing home, whilst ashes are cremated remains or one of cricket's best-known contests.

Diagnosis

I've seen batsmen called to the crease, for examination by the bowler, and thought of patients called to the doctor's room for diagnosis. A 'good delivery' is celebrated in cricket; Kate Grainger recognised that medical information also needed delivering well – and that a simple "#hellomynameis" helps the delivery of compassionate care.

Cricketers play with a straight bat when they need to increase the chance of hitting the ball; doctors have been known to play a straight bat when delivering news without answering patients' questions or giving the information they want. The patient can be left reeling, feeling stumped or as if they have been bowled a googly.

Light is critical in cricket – and in diagnosis. Dr Yun [2], from the Centre for Photomedicine in Massachusetts explains that "the standard white-light endoscope is one of the most basic yet essential optical instruments used by physicians to examine the inner organs of patients, such as the gastrointestinal and respiratory tracts". (Light is also used as a therapeutic tool in phototherapy (used to treat hyperbilirubinemia in infants) and in laser surgery (such as laser lithotripsy for gallstones)).

When diagnosing the extent of head injury, the Glasgow Coma Scale is used. Scoring a 4 on this scale in terms of eye function is the best you can get; scoring a 6 in the motor exam suggests that you can obey commands to move

parts of your body without a problem. Fours and sixes are cherished in cricket too.

Disease and disorder

Sticky wicket and square leg sound like painful medical conditions; stroke is both a clinical and cricketing term, whilst grafting is not only something done to blocked coronary arteries – it also refers to a cricketer who plays on by batting defensively.

Working in a care home, the term “nervous nineties” struck a particular chord with me. In cricket, it refers to the anxious period when a batsman is approaching a century; in nursing, I am acutely aware of the prevalence of anxiety in the older population – thought to be twice as common as dementia. Frailty, loss, medication and illness are possible triggers of this so-called “silent geriatric giant [3]”.

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Death

Cricketers talk of a dead ball, a dead bat, the death bowler and the death rattle (the sound of a batsman’s wicket being broken when he is bowled) and there is often a dead sparrow on display in the MCC museum at Lord’s. When cricketers lose an early wicket, it’s a blow to the team; when a young person is diagnosed with a terminal illness whilst in the prime of his life, it’s devastating.

Names of cricketing grounds, meanwhile, can also find their parallels in end of life discussions. Take, for example, the Rose Bowl cricket ground (or the Rose Garden at Lord’s) – and the use of the euphemism “Rose cottage” for the hospital mortuary. Or Lord’s cricket ground – and Lourdes the place of pilgrimage, often for those nearing the end of life. I once knew a terminally ill patient who chose a day trip to Lord’s, though he had to keep explaining that he was not seeking a cure at Lourdes.

A constructive collision?

The pairing of cricketing and clinical concepts can be very positive. Middlesex County Cricket Club have sported a pink kit, representing their partnership with Breakthrough Breast Cancer; awareness and funds have been raised for research. The Sydney Cricket Ground turns pink once a year, on what is known as “Jane McGrath Day”, to fundraise for breast care nurses and education.

Less positive, however, are the recognised mental health problems amongst cricketers. Marcus Trescothick, Graeme Fowler, Andrew Flintoff and Monty Panesar are just some of the high profile players who have admitted mental health battles. However, in response the Professional Cricketers’ Association established a “Mind Matters” programme, where current, ex- and youth players can discuss problems such as depression or alcoholism, receiving counselling, tutorials and access to a benevolent fund. In 2016, 79 current and past players rang the helpline.

Cricket is a beautiful game – especially if it can be a catalyst for conversation about physical and mental health.

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