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WHAT HAVE WE GAINED?

At a gathering of retired doctors the talk soon turned to their days in practice ...

"In our day," recalled a physician "we were first and foremost consultants for patients in our hospitals. We were not into service management! That was left to our medical superintendent and his approachable staff. And our hospitals were ably ruled by their own boards, which had their fair share of doctors."

And someone said, "All this has gone."

A surgeon continued, "We had the respect of society and people called the hospital their own. We had doctors' car parks and dining rooms. We were valued as staff and we valued our hospital."

And someone said, "All this has gone."

A GP joined in: "Life was not easy. We had to dress up in those white uniforms, cover our patients 24 hours a day one day in three, and work more than 80 hours a week. But we were proud to serve and learn."

And again was heard, "All this has gone."

"What do we have now?", a radiologist asked. "Medical staff are marginalised and medical superintendents have been displaced by managers who slavishly comply with edicts from distant departments of health. Individual hospital boards have been swallowed by area health boards on which doctors cannot serve — conflict of interest, you know."

Continued the surgeon, "Doctors no longer identify with their hospitals and nor do local people. Who would blame them?! They have long and anxious waits in emergency departments or on waiting lists." And a pathologist added, "Junior doctors no longer live in and work in shifts. Worse still, doctors are now pawns in the bureaucrats' battles with the bottom line."

And came the remark, "What have we gained? ..."



Martin B Van Der Weyden

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The Dr Ross Ingram Memorial Essay Competition

**Are you an Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander
with something to say about Indigenous health?**

Tell us your story

The Dr Ross Ingram Memorial Essay Competition is open to any Indigenous person who is working, researching or training in a health-related field. Essays should be no more than 2000 words long, and must be submitted by Monday, 9 January 2006.

For more details on the competition and the prize, see MJA 2004; 180 (10): 492.
<http://www.mja.com.au/public/issues/180_10_170504/arm10277_fm.html>.

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