The lady of the house

From the outside, the house was part of a typical Brighton late-Victorian terrace, similar to many in the town. The hall-way seemed to have many more doors than usual. They were ajar and gave one the uncomfortable feeling of being watched by unseen eyes.

Upstairs in the small back room lay the patient. She was untidy, neglected and bedfast. I arranged urgent admission. After 2 days' rehydration and good nutrition, she recovered strength and was ready to sit out and be mobilized. Her visitors were all young women, one of whom was asked to bring in her day clothes. We were surprised to find that she brought a close-fitting long black silk dress with a rolled collar and the largest cameo brooch we had ever seen. Thus attired, she began physiotherapy and her mobility improved. However, we felt that she required continuing care. Despite the excellent qualities of her domestic co-habitees, insufficient home care was available. She gave the telephone number of her accountants in London who, when they had been told of the situation and were asked what she could afford, gave the startling reply ‘You can put her in the Hilton, Ritz or Savoy hotel. She has no money problems. She and her husband used to run a profitable business in Paris’. A place in a local nursing home was arranged.

In retrospect, I realised that I had in all innocence made a pre-admission visit to a local bordello and that the patient was the Madame of this institution. She had previously made a fortune in the vice business in France.

She remained a memorable case. If I had known these facts at the time, I would have held my doctor’s bag high in the air to make it clear that I was a visiting doctor and not a client!

ANTHONY (TONY) N. G. CLARK

Consultant Physician (retired),
Brighton, UK