

REFLECTIONS ON A RETREAT

Recently, the solitude of a bayside retreat was shattered by the arrival of a gaggle of academics, consultants and administrators from a distant teaching hospital. They had come to attend a weekend retreat dubbed "Meeting of Minds". Given both time and space for thinking and for talking, this meeting became a powerful experience in individual and institutional bonding, in recognising the achievements and aspirations of the hospital's clinical services, and in acclaiming its reputation in teaching and research.

But why has it become necessary to journey to a remote retreat to promote such participation and purpose?

Not so long ago, appointments to teaching hospitals were keenly contested and senior staff were generalists. The hospital's culture was one of collective purpose and pride in patient care, teaching and clinical research. Doctors were also involved in overseeing their hospital's future by serving on its board. Above all, there was time for thinking and talking.

Alas, this is no longer the case. A teaching hospital appointment is no longer critical for a clinical career. Specialisation has narrowed, technology has shifted the care of patients to the care of organs, clinical research is in decline, and the future of the hospital is in the hands of distant and detached Area Boards. Overriding all of this is the frenetic pace of today's workplace, which has all but destroyed time for thinking and talking.

Should we be troubled by this changing hospital landscape?

US academic and physician Paul Beeson recently observed that "To work well, a hospital must be a tight-knit community of people who respect one another and enjoy working together."

Maybe our salvation lies in retreats.

Martin B Van Der Weyden

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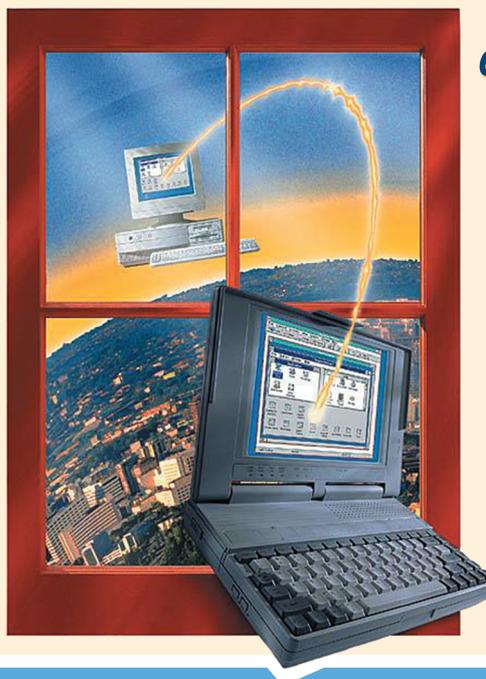
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