



opinion & debate

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Jury service: a personal view

Traditionally doctors have been excused from jury service, as I was on a couple of previous occasions when I received a jury summons. However, changes to the Criminal Justice Act 2003 came into force in April 2004, with the effect that doctors would normally not be excused from jury service.

I received a jury summons dated 7 June 2005, instructing me to attend the local Crown Court from 1 August 2005. I applied to be excused but my application was denied. I therefore checked that my covering partner would be available during August and I cancelled my clinics and other commitments for a fortnight, and minimised my commitments for the following week in case my services as a juror were required for longer than the normal 10 working days.

On 28 July 2005, I was informed by post that my jury service would not start on 1 August but that I would now be required to attend on 24 October instead. I telephoned to explain that I had made the necessary arrangements to start on 1 August and that I was due to go on holiday on 29 October! The powers that be generously allowed me to defer my jury service until 3 April 2006. I therefore again checked that my covering partner would be available during April, cancelled my clinics and other commitments for a fortnight and minimised my commitments for the following week.

I am not allowed to discuss any of the trials, but this is hardly a problem, as I did not serve as a juror on any trial. On a few occasions there were rumours that our services might be required, but by the Tuesday of the second week it was clear that the courts were winding down for Easter and I was not surprised to be 'discharged' when I contacted the court's answer machine that evening for my instructions. At least I did not face the considerable risk of being 'challenged' as a juror by virtue of being known by a defendant, the police or a legal representative.

From a personal point of view, my experience of attending for jury service was a very rewarding one. My experience of attending court as a professional or expert witness had prepared me to expect a certain amount of waiting around, although 7 days was a new experience for me. In order to avoid the onset of insidious brain death, I armed myself daily with *The Times* crossword and sudokus, along with other reading material, and took the opportunity to practise relaxation and meditation, and to reflect on the twin virtues of acceptance and patience. In

order to prevent physical decay as a result of enforced inertia (and the nightmare of city centre parking), I decided to walk the 3 miles to the court and 4 miles back, taking in the seafront. I thus had plenty of opportunity to reflect on the realisation that I enjoy a considerable amount of autonomy when working as a doctor, even in a demand-led service, and to be grateful for the chance to have been exposed to the antithesis of this when sitting in the jurors' area waiting eagerly for the next bulletin regarding the progress of a trial, or lack of it.

The court presumably gained something from my attendance, although I would probably find it hard to convince the evidence-based brigade that this is the case, unless they are prepared to concede that there may be parallel universes in which I did indeed serve on a jury, and that this is acceptable evidence!

My employing trust has taken a very supportive approach to my enforced absence from duty, and on my return a number of colleagues asked me whether I had enjoyed a good holiday, given that I looked somewhat more bronzed and fit than previously.

The main losers have been my patients. I was able to rebook a few of my out-patients and to book in a few urgent appointments last August when my jury service was postponed. In April 2006 my clinics were cancelled for 2 weeks and those patients will have had to wait. I hope that the impact has not been too serious and that those patients who needed to be seen quickly will have found access to our service through one of the ever-increasing number of gateways that do not require the immediate presence of a doctor.

On balance I feel that it is right that doctors are now eligible for jury service, with the proviso that excusal should be granted where there is a good reason. In my opinion being a doctor *per se* does not provide sufficient grounds for excusal. In any case, performing jury service makes a valuable contribution to continuing professional development, provided that I choose to experience it that way!

Declaration of interest

None.

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