

Hector is Dissatisfied

Once upon a time there was a young psychiatrist called Hector who was not very satisfied with himself.

Hector was not very satisfied with himself, even though he looked just like a real psychiatrist: he wore little round glasses that made him look intellectual; he knew how to listen to people sympathetically, saying 'mmm'; he even had a little moustache, which he twirled when he was thinking very hard.

Many people wanted to make an appointment with Hector, not just because he looked like a real psychiatrist, but because he had a gift that all good doctors have and that you can't simply learn at college: he really was interested in people.

The first time people go to a psychiatrist, they're often a bit embarrassed. They worry the psychiatrist will think they're mad even though they know he's used to it. Or else they worry that he won't think their case is serious enough and will tell them to take their troubles elsewhere. But since they've made the appointment and kept it, they decide to recount their odd little quirks, the strange thoughts they haven't told anyone about before but that make them unhappy, the great fears or deep sorrows that prevent them from living life to the full. They also worry that they won't express themselves properly and that they will be boring. And it must be said that sometimes psychiatrists do look bored, or tired. If you weren't used to it you might wonder if they really were listening to you.

But with Hector it was almost never like that. He looked at people as they told their story, he nodded in encouragement, made his little 'mmm-hmm' noises, twirled his moustache and sometimes he'd even say, 'Wait, explain that again. I didn't quite understand.' Except on days when he was very tired, people really felt that Hector was listening to what they had to say and finding it interesting.

He wasn't just successful because he knew how to listen to people. He also knew all the tricks of his trade.

First of all, he knew how to answer a question with another question. For example, when people asked him, 'Do you think I'm going to get better, Doctor?' he would reply: 'What does "getting better" mean to you?' In this way Hector helped people to think about their own case and find their own ways of getting better.

He also knew all about medication. In psychiatry that's quite simple since there are only four main types of medication that can be prescribed: pills to take when you're sad – anti-depressants; pills to take when you're scared – tranquillisers; pills to take when you have very strange thoughts and hear voices – anti-psychotics; and then pills to avoid highs that are too high or lows that are too low – mood stabilisers. Actually, it's a bit more complicated than that because for each type of medication there are at least ten different brands of pill, all with funny-sounding names. Pills are a bit like sweets: not everybody likes the same ones.

And when medication wasn't enough, or when people had no need for it, Hector had another way of helping them: psychotherapy. A complicated name for simply helping people by listening and talking to them.

And so, using the tricks of his trade – medication, psychotherapy and his gift of being genuinely interested in people – Hector was quite a good psychiatrist.

And yet Hector felt dissatisfied. He felt dissatisfied because he could see perfectly well that he couldn't make people happy.