

FORUM

Innocence revisited – 31

Heroin has had its uses in the past ... some less well known than others, as Dr Brian Gaynor relates

Before it became a dirty six-letter word, heroin was a wonderful drug. The linctus could stop any cough, and pin-point-pupilled patients regularly queued up for more. It had use, but probably little value, as a liniment; however, as a painkiller it had no equal, albeit a few problems. For postoperative pain I was given heroin by injection and, but for a passing nurse who noted that I was not only not breathing but also deeply cyanosed, I would not be writing this article today.

As a fluffy cheeked first-year resident in a northern city, I believed I knew everything. Alas, I didn't.

A day at the races

The ward sister invited me to join her at a local race meeting. Her uncle was a horse trainer and had several runners at the meeting.

'Glad to meet you', said the uncle when he shook my hand warmly. 'As my niece's guest, you're also mine. So I'll make your visit worthwhile.' And with that, he suggested I put my money on Honey Bee. The horse had never won a race, but it was sure to win. With such a recommendation, I hardly hesitated putting 10 shillings each way. Honey Bee won by 10 lengths.

'Have a good win?' asked the trainer.

'Yes, thanks very much', I beamed.

'Well, don't put on any more bets until I tell you.'

I waited and waited. It wasn't until the last race that the trainer reappeared.

'I've got a good horse in this race', he said. 'Kim's Choice... like Honey Bee, it hasn't won before, but it's a fantastic filly and I'm sure it'll win today. Watch the jockey when the horse enters the ring. If the jockey rubs his right ear, it means he's going to pull it up. If he doesn't rub his ear, put your money on the horse straight away.'

He didn't pull his ear, Kim's Choice won by four lengths, and I won handsomely too.

I've done my bit ...

After collecting my winnings, the trainer sidled up. 'Well doc', he said, 'you seem to have had a pretty good day', for which I thanked him effusively. 'These horses need a bit of help now and again', he continued. 'It takes a good grain of heroin to make horses run like that.'

He looked me straight in the eyes. 'Now I've done my bit for you, I reckon it's your turn to do a bit for me. My niece says you have access to the drug cupboard back at the hospital. Do you think you might get me a couple of grains of heroin for the next meeting?'

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Dr Gaynor, FRACP, FRACGP, MRCP(UK), DCH(RCP&S), is a Family Physician in Pymble, NSW. This series is being extended by popular demand. Please send your favourite anecdotes to Medicine Today, PO Box 1473, Neutral Bay NSW 2089, for consideration.