



# BAD MEDICINE AT WORK

## IN AUSTRALIAN HOSPITALS & CLINICS

BY DR ANDREW GUNN

*“Never take a person's dignity: it is worth everything to them, and nothing to you.” Frank Barron*

Santino knows when visitors will arrive. He doesn't like visitors, so he hoards rocks to throw at them. These must be kept hidden, otherwise the guards remove them.

Santino, a chimpanzee in a Swedish zoo, learns from the past and imagines the future. Humans do this too. Among other things, this means we know our lives will include pain, injury, disease, and disability and we know we will eventually die.

Perhaps for this reason, we have a natural tendency to respect healers and spiritual leaders. This generally works well for doctors — even if my colleagues sometimes observe that physicians were more respected when medicine had little to offer.

Humans tend to have reciprocal feelings. If you respect someone, they will probably respect you. If you don't, they won't. I think this underlies a problem many people have with the medical profession.

Complaints about disrespectful doctors are common. Over the years, I've worked with several arrogant and patronising doctors. I think most were insecure and secretly doubted their own competency.

“ People often behave badly outside their comfort zone. Unfortunately this is exactly where treating patients with disabilities puts most medical practitioners. ”

People often behave badly outside their comfort zone. Unfortunately this is exactly where treating patients with disabilities puts most medical practitioners. Even with goodwill, we often don't have the time or knowledge to adequately deal with complex problems.

In addition, a proportion of the population, and that includes doctors of course, maintain almost prehistoric tendencies to be hard on those they perceive as helpless.

How then, can things be improved? Widespread use of the treatment for Santino's problematic behaviour is perhaps unrealistic. He got castrated. 🌀

**Second-class care: In the August issue of Link, Sue Corrigan examines discrimination in Australian hospitals and clinics towards people with disabilities and the elderly.**