

## Practice Without a License

On the Streets of London

**P**rior to beginning my fourth year of medical school in Cairo, Egypt, I took a year off in order to travel and work. While in London, I found a job as a waiter in a restaurant. One foggy evening in late spring, I was returning home to my apartment, still dressed in my waiter's uniform (a shiny, pink jacket with black lapels and cuffs). I noticed a frail, elderly woman walking her white, extremely well-groomed poodle. For no apparent reason, the dog pulled the woman toward me. She followed his lead, and the poodle jumped over and started sniffing my waiter's uniform.

As the woman attempted to apologize for her dog's unexpected behavior, I noticed that she was hyperventilating. Her face turned blue, she began to shake, and she appeared to be seizing. I removed my jacket, held her so that she did not fall on the concrete pavement, and used the garment to pillow her head. I made sure that her airway was open and monitored her pulse and respiratory rate. She lost consciousness and had a generalized tonic-clonic seizure. The poodle began licking me, and his drool added more fog to my eyeglasses. Unexpectedly, a young couple emerged from the fog. They noticed my situation and called for help.

A few long minutes passed before a police car appeared on the scene. A constable emerged from the vehicle and introduced himself. Then, he proceeded to ask me if I robbed the woman and then knocked her down! I was at a loss for words. The woman stopped seizing and regained consciousness. She

looked dazed and confused. Concerned about the poodle, she called out: "Laddie, Laddie, my precious boy! Where are you?"

The constable was about to place me in handcuffs. The young couple proceeded to explain what they witnessed. The foggy weather was clearing up. Laddie appeared from nowhere and jumped into the woman's arms. She explained to the constable that she takes seizure medications and probably forgot to take her afternoon dose because Laddie wanted a walk!

The constable took the handcuffs away and asked me if I was a doctor. I told him that I was a medical student and he seemed pleased. He then asked me where I attended medical school. When he heard it was Cairo University, his face turned red. In a loud and authoritarian manner, he said, "In this country, you cannot practice medicine without a licensure." He then added, "This is your only and last chance before you get arrested for practicing without a license." He left the scene, grumbling all the way back to his police car.

The woman thanked me for my intervention, and Laddie fetched my jacket and dropped it at my feet. The young couple apologized for the constable's behavior. From then on, I never left the restaurant where I worked wearing my uniform. To this day, I get nervous every time I see fog, an elderly woman with a poodle, or a young couple holding hands.

—**Hani Raoul Khouzam, MD, MPH**  
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