

As most of my adult life has been spent in Saudi Arabia, I feel somewhat of an expert on this particular subject. Of course, the men go through the same medical but somehow it just *isn't* the same – know what I mean ladies? Still, no medical, no visa, no joining my husband who was already getting settled into Riyadh.

This medical experience I am going to share with you was, fair enough, back in 1992. My last one (in 2007) was definitely less traumatic.

So, back to 1992. My appointment was at 10am in London. I will not share the name of the very famous street where it all took place!

I lived in a place called The Wirral, so in order to get to London for 10am I had to take a taxi, 2 trains and another taxi. As it was November, British Rail – bless them – were unable to clear leaves from the tracks so my train to London was late. When it finally arrived, we all rushed on, ideally to get warm as the open platform was not the best place to be standing for an hour.

I got settled in my appointed seat and then off to the buffet. Visions of hot bacon sandwiches and steaming cups of tea sustained me while I fought to keep my balance on the swinging train. Ah good. No queues at the buffet – great. No, not great! I was informed by a woman who had plainly not had a good morning thus far, that there was no hot water, no sandwiches, no pies, no nothing really. Despondent, I opted for a very large Mars Bar. (this is actually all relevant to my medical experience)

Finally arrived in London and ran to join the very long queue at the taxi rank. By this time I was quite anxious that I might miss my allotted spot on the medical calendar and have to start all over again!

Not to worry, they did not seem to notice that I was 30 minutes late. I approached the reception desk and

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was unceremoniously handed a small disposable cup and asked to provide a urine sample. I politely asked where the toilet was and headed in that direction. Oh dear – there was a man coming out – he must have made a mistake. No, no mistake, it was a communal toilet. How very continental I thought. I soldiered on and managed to assume the position. You see it's different for a man. They just aim and fire! We ladies have to – well never mind!!

I left the toilet with a kleenex discreetly covering my little cup and was edging my way back to the reception when another guy came out behind me (my God, he must have come in while I was doing my impression of a Quasimodo!) In typical male fashion, he holds his cup aloft shouting “is this enough?”

I was then ushered into a small room with the usual bed and medical apparatus and told to wait for the doctor. A few minutes later, Dr. Patel (not his real name, but you get my drift) entered the room with a female nurse in tow. I removed my top, as requested, sporting the new bra I had bought especially for the occasion – well, people talk you know!

It was time to take the blood which would reveal any unknown, exotic, hard to pronounce, infectious diseases. He looked at my veins started tapping my arm, switching from one to the other and then advised me that I had collapsed veins! Horrors – is this the beginning of the end – why I hadn't I noticed they had collapsed! He then pushed straight on, hardly pausing for breath and said –“we'll take your blood pressure now, see if the nurse has better luck in finding a vein later.” Still in mental turmoil and visualising my arm withering away (how could blood flow through a collapsed vein?) When he strapped me into the blood



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