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The Velpeau Law: "The Duality of Rare Events"

An emergency-room anecdote that gives a playful name to the duality of rare events

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Received for publication in December 2003 · Section: Article · Language: English

ABSTRACT

This text is a brief anecdote from medical tradition that explains, in a humorous tone, the popularization of the so-called Velpeau Law among on-call physicians. The author recounts that, on a single night, a resident on duty in the Emergency Room of the Hospital das Clínicas attended to two unusual cases of voluntary castration: the first patient claimed religious motives and arrived in a state of shock during the early hours; the second, occurring two hours later, claimed to have slipped in the shower and caught his genitals in the faucet. From that coincidence onward, among the physicians who were on duty there, every rare event that repeats itself twice in succession came to be remembered under the name of the Velpeau-Fadul Law. It is a short, humorous record of hospital folklore, illustrating the maxim of the duality of rare events.

KEYWORDS: *medical humor; hospital folklore; emergency room; velpeau law; anecdote; on-call duty*

This law became popular in our circles when a resident on duty at the Emergency Room of the HC (Hospital das Clínicas), on a single night, attended to two cases of voluntary castration. The first patient, claiming that he could not use that organ because he was religious, took this action and arrived in shock at the Emergency Room during the early hours.

The second case, occurring two hours later, involved a young man who claimed to have slipped while showering and that his genitals had become caught in the faucet.

From that occasion onward, anything that happens twice, in succession and being rare, is remembered among the physicians who were on duty at the Emergency Room at that time under the name of the Velpeau-Fadul Law.