

Case Study: Isabella

Brian is the husband of Isabella, a 68 year old patient of a GP, in an inner suburban city general practice. They are retired public servants, living in a comfortable terrace house and are financially secure. They were university sweethearts and have been married for 45 years. He is distressed.

Isabella has attended the practice for 30 years, when they first consulted the practice because of infertility. Brian attended with Isabella at the time, and they were mutually supportive, though unfortunately investigations and IVF proved fruitless. No cause was found for the infertility. Isabella sees the GP for well-controlled Hypertension and mild Rheumatoid Arthritis about once every three months. She takes few medications and seems well and happy with the GP's care.

Brian states that unless things change he is going to leave Isabella and go to live with his widowed sister. Isabella, he says, is impossible to live with. She has been collecting magazines for years, particularly the Australian Women's Weekly and American Home Knitting, but also numerous other craft and publications for homemakers such as cookery books. She knits rarely and he does most of the cooking, as she says both endeavours aggravate her sore wrists.

They have had arguments over the years, about the clutter. She refuses to discard any magazines. On occasions he has taken some bundles to the tip, but stopped as she became too upset. She has regular subscriptions to the magazines, and visits second hand bookshops on weekends to pick up editions she may have missed from years ago.

In desperation, he bought her an iPad for Christmas, and paid for apps to her favourite publications. She has not used it, saying it is too difficult, and she can't find articles she needs in the archives.

He sleeps in another room as the bedroom is taken up with magazines and books. Things came to a head last week, when Isabella was ill with a tummy bug, and he could not open the bedroom door because of the clutter.

She has not fully recovered from the tummy bug, and he asks you to do a home visit. He thinks her tummy problems may be due to the number of cockroaches in the house, which in spite of a visit from the Flick man, still crawl from underneath the mountain of magazines in her bedroom, the passages and corridors and the front room of their house.

The Flick man says Isabella needs to see a counsellor. The GP practises in a multidisciplinary practice with a Mental Health Nurse, Psychologist, Social Worker and Occupational Therapist on Staff. The GP is unable to see her until later that evening as the weekly practice Multidisciplinary Case Discussion Meeting is at 5pm, at which a difficult case is discussed. It is the GP's turn to present.

The GP promises to visit Isabella at 7.30pm that night.