

Doctor Dog



Illustration by Laura Aitken

I was doing triage that night, a quiet night
when he walked in the ED,
a muscular man in a paisley shirt and jeans,
dog on a leash—
a big dog. I didn't recognize the breed.

"Service dog?"

"Not really."

"Then no dogs allowed here."

"You'll want this one.

Say a guy comes in with abdominal pain,
give Hunter the command 'diagnose!'
He'll bark once for acute appendicitis,
twice if it's ruptured. A growl for cholecystitis,
a howl, it's diverticulitis."

"Hard to believe!"

"Not really." He handed me his card.

Larry Lawrence, MD, Breeder

"I was a surgeon,
but that's another story.
You in charge?"

"Tonight I am. How does Hunter do it?"

"It's in the sweat, each illness a different smell.
I took skin swabs from my patients
while still in practice. Stored them,
correlated smells with CT scans, discharge diagnoses.
You've seen dogs sniffing for drugs at airports.
Hunter takes things one step further."

"He doesn't make mistakes?"

"Take a look at this positive predictive value!
I'll leave him with you tonight.
No charge, you can't go wrong.
I'll be back in the morning."

Richard Bronson, MD

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