

Helo

Diolch am wrando.

Fy enw I yw Nesta McCluskey a rwyf eisiau annog I chi feddwl am yr iath yr ydym yn ei ddefnyddio a sut mae cleifion yn dygymod pan nad ydym yn eu trin yn ei mamiaith, neu'n ei trin mewn iaith sy'n estron iddynt. Rwyf am rannu 2 stori I ddisgrifio sefyllfaoedd hollol wahanol – un da ac un drwg.

How did that feel?

For those of you who don't speak and understand Welsh, how does it feel not to understand?

Now imagine how that would feel in a healthcare setting where you might be anxious for yourself or someone else?

I'm going to tell you 2 stories

Picture 1 – the boys and I The story of Mabon – my fabulous youngest son, and the story of Deri, my fabulous oldest son. Both stories have much in common – they took place with me present, in health care settings and involved the Welsh language. There is one stark difference – one was stressful and difficult, one was calm and patient.

My boys are bilingual, they've been brought up speaking Welsh and English interchangeably – Welsh with me, English with their Irish father, both languages with their wider family, friends and in school. Important to note is that their natural language with me – their mother tongue – is Welsh. I'm sure if my husband had been with them the stories would have been different.

Picture 2&3 Mabon in Beavers uniform Imagine the scene, a sunny evening and a cute little 7 year old boy is in his Beavers uniform running around the garden. Mabon had fallen on a camping trip the weekend before, and, sods

law, tripped and landed on the same knee directly onto a rock. When you know, you know – there was no way the cut on his knee was just going to need a plaster and a kiss – he needed a minor injuries unit for some attention – luckily there is one just up the road.

Mabs was quite anxious as a 7 year old – so by the time we arrive we are both well covered in snot, blood and tears.

Being a Monday evening there wasn't much of a queue and so we were pretty much straight into the treatment room where I explained the evening's events.

Speaking to the nurse in English, reassuring and explaining to Mabs in Welsh.

“What's' that gobbledygook you're speaking” asked the nurse, “is it Welsh?”

I become very British – I apologise and explain, yes, it's Welsh, I explain that Mabon does speak English but that he and I speak Welsh to each other.

We continue

AS the nurse approaches Mabon's bloodied knee with a pair of scissors to cut off the skin flap – no explanations given – Mabs panicked. Again, I reassured him – but bilingually now – he replied to me in Welsh.

“It's not fair on me” said the nurse “I don't know what you're saying”. By now she has fallen to the very bottom of my Christmas card list.

Soon enough, steri strips and a dressing in place and clutching his new red teddy that the nurse gave him for being brave, Mabon was merrily chatting away to the nurse in English.

Stress over, normal language skills restored

My blood pressure through the roof. Mabon was fine – I was fuming. Instead of being able to focus on the needs of my distressed child I had had to manage the needs of the nurse, somehow she perceived herself to be vulnerable within this encounter. Her clinical care was faultless, but her manner made me feel guilty for speaking to my child in our natural language. I wonder what it was that made her feel vulnerable.

A poor experience.

Next, the story of Deri.

Picture 4 This happened when he was 16, Deri, a bright, intelligent student, bilingual from birth had developed awful acne. It broke my heart when he told me he sometimes couldn't sleep, partly because of the pain on his face and partly how he looked.

He tried all the over the counter remedies, restricted his diet and eventually we went to the GP. The GP was great, started him on antibiotics and referred him to dermatology.

Deri, 6'2", LOOKED A BIT OUT OF PLACE IN THE PAEDIATRIC OUT PATIENT DEPARTMENT – HE HAD TO DODGE THE EASTER DECORATIONS HANGING FROM THE CEILING.

In the consultation, Dr Yesudian took a detailed history, looked at Deri's skin and proposed a treatment regime. The treatment regime had risks – isotretinoin has side effects for the liver, joints and mood. Dr Yesudian asked Deri – in English – what he wanted to do.

At this point, Deri lost his English. What happened next was a 3 way conversation – Doctor speaking to Deri in English, Deri speaking to me in Welsh, me speaking to the Doctor in English.

At no point was a comment made about this, the consultation flowed and the treatment plan was developed and Deri was fully involved. Dr Yesudian was patient, compassionate and understanding. As a Mum I was reassured, I didn't

feel the need to explain anything about our language, I could focus on Deri's needs as he absorbed the information.

As we left, Deri thanked Dr Yesudian in English and on the way home in the car turned to me and said in Welsh "well, clearly I can't speak English when I'm stressed!"

The other photos of Deri's skin improving

A great experience.

Picture of NHS road Whilst preparing this talk, Anna, a colleague on the Climb cohort shared with me that she had worked in a field hospital during Covid – can you imagine a more stressful environment to be in as a patient? She told me about an elderly patient who lost their English due to stress, Anna doesn't speak Welsh, but knew that the domestic did. Anna made the link and the patient gained their voice, their stress was reduced, they could speak again.

Picture of stroke brain Some conditions can result in sudden changes in language skills – post stroke, previously fluent bilingual people may revert to their mother tongue. As a newly qualified physio I recall a patient being labelled as confused who had actually lost her English and reverted to Welsh in the aftermath of her stroke.

Why am I telling you this? DO I want you all to learn Welsh?

No.

And, it's not actually just about the Welsh language.

Beth amdanoch chi – y Cymru Cymraeg sydd a'r gallu I siarad iaith y nefoedd yn ogystal a Saesneg?

Sut aeth hi y tro diwethaf I glaf dod atoch nad oedd yn medru cymraeg na saesneg? A wnaethoch pob dim y amyneddgar – tydw I heb fod yn digon amyneddgar pob tro. Ni da lle ellir gwell.

After the Welsh is spoken the English translation slide

About 7% of school aged children in Wales have English as an additional language, their language skills will vary from no English language skills to acquiring English language skills. 7%, about 26,000 children.

8% of adults in England and Wales reported in 2011 that English was not their main language – again ranging from some to no English skills. 8% - over 4 million people – more than the population of Wales!

All I ask is that you consider language especially in a stressful situation. What resources do you have available? Do you know?

As my boys show, fluent English speakers can lose their English language when stressed.

What I ask is that you be more Dr Yesudian and less the nurse in MIU.

Patience and the use of resources available can make a huge difference to well-being and patient outcomes. Don't assume that someone does or does not understand – as my stories show, Deri could understand but not communicate back in English. Parents (even stressed ones) language line, translators, a colleague or just time, patience and smiles can make a difference.

And not just with patients – what about our colleagues with English as an additional language – they too may struggle with their language skills when stressed – in an interview perhaps, or after a stressful day, or simply because the words just won't come.

Caroline Hill writes about the big 10 ideas that fuel oppression; Idea number 7 on the list is that English speakers with dominant culture accents are more intelligent than non-english speakers or those with different accents. She writes that these ideas fuel oppression by making it easy for us to create physical, emotional, and spiritual distance from each other.

Thousands of people in our work and home communities speak great English as an additional language –I'm simply asking for some compassion for them when the words sometimes get lost.

So, to close the loop.

Pictures of Mabon and Deri Mabon, soon to be 16, has a great collection of scars from his multiple adventures, Deri, soon to be 18 has lovely clear skin and has regular follow ups with Dr Yesudian where they speak to each other in English.

I know how fluent my boys are in English, I know first-hand what happened under stress – I'm certain you will encounter people, colleagues or patients, who have English as an additional language, and hope that my stories will help you reflect upon how your response and ability to be compassionate will make a huge difference.

Diolch am wrando.