**The doctor’s office – Medically Unexplained Symptoms**

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….This picture illustrates Samantha’s story. It shows her on one of her various trips to the GP after he’s made a number of referrals and the investigations are all negative. The GP is at a loss. When he gets a nice clear result from a patient its easy; he can file that patient into one of the neat boxes on his shelves. A positive result for strep throat; excellent, that patient can be filed into infectious diseases and be given penicillin. Skip lesions and transmural inflammation found on histology after colonoscopy; a clear-cut case of Crohn’s.

That patient can neatly be filed into gastroenterology. Chest pain, a STEMI and a blocked coronary artery; straightforward and treatable. A broken bone; easy.

But Samantha doesn’t fit into any one of these boxes. Defeated she slumps back in her chair and starts to slip through the crack that has opened up on the floor. Tired, unsupported and heavy. The GP desperate to help puts his hands in the air, also defeated. Racing against the clock he thinks, “Why are so many patients I see like this?…this isn’t what I was taught in medical school.”

The rays of light in the picture edging towards the crack are symbolic of hope. In the past, after extensive fruitless investigation there was little more the doctor felt they could do. After the investigations for Samantha’s abdominal pain in her teenage years had come back clear, she had left the doctors office with no particular plan. Although she had been a frequent visitor up until that point she felt too embarrassed to go back. She felt like she wasn’t a ‘real’ patient. She learned to live with the ups and down of the pain.

This time was a little different. The doctor was more willing to discuss what could be done about the chronic headaches. Time was taken to assure her that her pain was very real and a follow up appointment was made to determine a treatment plan.

This picture is made in mosaic style from cut out pieces of magazine, to illustrate that this is a ‘messy’ subject to deal with.