Not unexpectedly the ‘fee’ has doubled since the first stab by
the BHC. Bet that it will double again.

J P Driver-Jowitt
3 Norfolk Road
Newlands
7700

Stretching the journey

To the Editor: A forty-six-year-old woman, mother of six
children, was referred to me with a gynaecological problem.
She was from an up-country town, approximately 5 hours’
drive away. I met her sitting on the steps outside my rooms
when I unlocked at 07h30 in the morning. She said she was
only booked for an appointment at 12h00, but that the
ambulance had dropped her off shortly before. She said that
the ambulance driver had other business to attend to in town.
We fitted in her consultation in the early part of the morning.
During the consultation she told me that she had left home the
previous afternoon at 15h00. She said the ambulance had also
transported several other people, not all of them patients, and
that the driver had decided they would sleep over at another
country town approximately half way. They all ‘booked in’ at
the local hospital, where they were ‘allowed’ to sleep on the
floor in the corridor in the casualty department. They resumed
their journey at 04h00 in the morning, the morning of her
consultation. No ‘dinner, bed or breakfast’ was provided, or
even morning coffee. The patient said that she preferred to ‘use
the bushes’ at a mid-morning stop next to the road — because
the toilet at the hospital where they slept was badly neglected
and also because the door couldn’t lock. It became clear that
her husband was unemployed and she held a job as cleaner at
the school hostel, and therefore had the benefit of a medical
aid. She could therefore afford the luxury of using the
ambulance service. She had no money on her as she had
expected the said ambulance service to provide the basics. The
patient had therefore been without food or beverage since the
previous afternoon at 15h00. It was now 17 hours later. We
were happy to provide some basic sustenance, which was
greatly appreciated. She was picked up again at 13h00, after
spending the whole morning watching the comings and goings
in my waiting room.

This unlikely but true story is reported to remind medical
colleagues, especially in the rural areas, what may happen to
their patients when they are entrusted to the mercy of some
ambulance services. I presume the patient’s medical aid was
expected to pay for her excursion to the specialist and back.

J du T Zaaijman
PO Box 10155
George
6530