

SINFORMATION ABOUT THE CHARACTER THE ACTOR IS TO PLAY

Character Brief

Name	Paula Meeking
Age and sex	39 Must be female
Job	Cleaner
Emotional state	Anxious and increasingly worn down by both the illness and the situation at home

Character sketch and clinical background:

You live with your three children aged 10 to 15 in a council house in a fairly poor area of town – your husband left you three years ago and money is tight. You work as a cleaner to several private houses near-by. Over the last four weeks you have had bleeding from your back passage and now realise that you have been increasingly tired over the last few months and have lost weight. Your father died of cancer in his liver, miserably in the local hospice 2 years ago

Paula Meeking's HISTORY

Presenting complaint

Blood in the toilet for four weeks

History

- Four weeks ago, you passed bright red blood in your motion which you noticed on the loo paper – when you looked in the pan, there seemed quite a lot of blood but a little goes a long way, you know that. Since then, you have noticed blood on most occasions in the water in the toilet
- Your motions have changed. They used to be bitty, like rabbit droppings but now they are distinctly looser and less formed. You have always gone several times a day and it might be slightly more now but not much.
- You have also developed a new intermittent pain. It is in the lower left side of your abdomen and is different from what you have had before with your irritable bowel syndrome. It is not really severe, but crampy and mostly accompanies your motions and makes you feel you need to go to the toilet even after you have just been.
- You have developed soreness around your anus.

Paula Meeking's HISTORY

SYSTEMIC ENQUIRY

Cardiovascular system

Chest pain	None
Palpitations (awareness of your heart beating)	None
Faints or blackouts	None
Ankle swelling	None
Claudication (leg pain after walking relieved by rest)	None

Respiratory system

Shortness of breath	None
Wheezing	None
Cough	Mild smoker's cough
Sputum	Minimal
Exercise capacity	Normal and unchanged

Alimentary system

Appetite	Reduced
Change in weight	Half a stone loss
Indigestion	None
Dysphagia(difficulty in swallowing)	None
Nausea	None
Vomiting	None
Abdominal pain	<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. New pain - lower left side of abdomen, not severe, crampy and accompanies motions; associated tenesmus.2. Long-standing - irritable bowel syndrome pain -wind, generalised abdominal pain and distension
Bowels	Used to be rabbit droppings but now looser and less formed. Rectal bleeding as above
Mucus	Intermittent clear
Anal symptoms	Soreness

Paula Meeking's HISTORY

Uro-genital system

Urinary frequency (How often you pass water)	Normal
Nocturia (passing water at night)	None
Haematuria (blood in your water)	None
Stream	Good
Periods	Regular

Nervous system

Sleep	Satisfactory
Headache	None
Eyesight /vision	Satisfactory and unchanged
Speech	No problems
Any fits	Never
Parasthesia(tingling in you arms or legs)	None
Weakness	None
Hearing	No problems
Any loss of consciousness	Never

General symptoms

Tiredness	Increasing over several months
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Past Medical History

Operations (where and when)	Several Bartholin's abscesses in twenties Appendicitis aged 17
Tuberculosis	No
Sugar diabetes	No
Jaundice (yellow colouration of the skin due to liver problems)	No
DVT /PE (blood clot in the leg or lung)	No
Other past medical history	Irritable bowel syndrome

Family History

Mother	Alive, hypertension, maturity onset diabetes
Father	Died 'cancer in liver' two years ago
Brother(s)	2 alive and well, one with cerebral palsy
Sister(s)	None
Spouse	Divorced, now unemployed
Children	3 aged 10, 12, 15 – all well
Any familial disorders	None that you are aware of

Medication History

	Medication
1	Fybogel sachets bd
2	Paracetamol

	Allergies
	None

Social History

Smoking	20 a day
Alcohol	Little
Work	Cleaner to several private houses
Accommodation	A council house
Sexuality	Heterosexual
Other factors	Money tight, husband does not support, children a strain

Things the actor should say

- If the doctor starts by asking you “can you tell me what problems brought you to the hospital today”, answer first with a broad statement: “well I’ve noticed blood in the toilet. I went to see my GP and he sent me up here to get it checked out and see what it was”.
- If the doctor instead starts by saying that the letter mentions that you have been having rectal bleeding, start with “yes that’s right, that was 4 weeks ago so I went to see my GP and he sent me up here to get it checked out and see what it was”

Things the actor should communicate non-verbally

- Anxiety re cancer and upset re her father’s distressing terminal illness

To help with the characterisation, the information that has been presented above in a tabular form has been rearranged for the actor.

Name : Paula Meeking

Age: 39

Setting

You are waiting in an out-patient clinic consulting room at St Vincent's Hospital, Pintown to see a specialist. It is a weekday morning and you've been waiting fifteen minutes. This is your first appointment with the specialist. It has been a three week wait for this appointment since your doctor wrote off to the hospital for you. You are waiting patiently.

Clinical details

You are normally reasonably fit and well although pretty stressed. You get chest infections in the winter and always have a mild cough – you smoke too much. You have a many years' history of irritable bowel syndrome, investigated by barium enema in the past – gives you a lot of wind, generalised abdominal pain and distension from time to time. You have learnt to live with it but it does get in the way: you try to avoid certain foods and coffee. The doctors haven't been very helpful really.

Four weeks ago, you passed bright red blood in your motion which you noticed on the loo paper – when you looked in the pan, there seemed quite a lot of blood but a little goes a long way, you know that. Since then, you have noticed blood on most occasions in the water in the toilet and your motions have changed. They used to be bitty, like rabbit droppings but now they are distinctly looser and less formed. Sometimes there is a clear jelly like stuff. You have always gone several times a day and it might be slightly more now but not much. You have also definitely developed a new intermittent pain. It is in the lower left side of your abdomen and is different from what you have had before. It is not really severe, but crampy and mostly accompanies your motions and makes you feel you need to go to the toilet even after you have just been. You have developed soreness around your anus.

You realise now that you have got increasingly tired over the last few months and feel you're not coping well with the kids who are difficult teenagers. You feel worn out. You are less hungry and think you have lost half a stone. You have not felt sick.

You went to the doctor three weeks ago who examined you and did a rectal examination and said that as things had changed, you ought to get it checked out. He didn't say what he thought it was.

Past medical history

Any previous operations: several abscesses drained from near the vagina in your twenties; appendicitis aged 17

Any previous illnesses:

see above re irritable bowel syndrome and chest infections

Medication

Any medication taken for this: no

Are you on any prescribed drugs such as the pill: Fybogel sachets for your bowel twice a day, a lot of paracetamol when necessary,

Family history

Any family history of

heart disease: mother has high blood pressure you think

chest disease: no

cancer: father died of cancer in his liver, (please note that if the doctor asks where it came from, you do not know if it started in his liver or elsewhere) miserable end to his life with a lot of pain, died in Arthur Rank House 2 years ago

serious illness: mother diabetic in later life, one brother with cerebral palsy

Smoking: 20 a day

Alcohol: not a lot, can't afford it

Social history

You were married, husband left you three years ago

Children: three children, aged 15, 12, 10

Occupation: work as a cleaner (private) to several houses

Spouse's occupation: recently lost job and does not help you out so money very tight

Where do you live: in Cambridge, near the Arbury

Type of housing: council house,

Social class: working class

Temperament

Anxious and increasingly worn down by both the illness and the situation at home – getting stressed out with money problems piling up. Not depressed but really worn down by it all.

Patient's framework

• ideas and thoughts

what did you think might have caused your problem: you wonder if you have piles but are concerned that you might have Crohn's disease which you have heard about. Of course you are really worried about cancer but aren't you too young for that?

what have they told you so far: your GP didn't really say anything – 'better look into it to be on the safe side'

• concerns

what are you concerned about: being ill and then who would look after the kids; your mum isn't well enough and you don't want to ask your former husband

have you any underlying fears: cancer especially after your father's horrible illness

any practical problems: loads

• expectations

what are you hoping for: you expect you will need a barium enema but what you want is to know today what it is – would be disappointed to leave without an answer

• feelings

how are you feeling about it all: anxious about the future

Presenting symptom(s) or problem(s)

If the doctor asks you “can you tell me what problems brought you to the hospital today”, answer first with a broad statement: “well I’ve noticed blood in the toilet. I went to see my GP and he sent me up here to get it checked out and see what it was”.

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Please answer

- good open questions or
- a request for the narrative or
- screens for other symptoms or problems

with a good history of the problem and some of your concerns. The doctor would have to give you several good open questions etc to get all of the story – give it out in reasonable chunks. If asked closed questions, answer the questions accurately and predominantly with yes or no answers and with not much other information.

However, please do not mention the following symptoms at all unless specifically asked:

- appetite
- weight loss
- jelly or mucus

Please communicate non-verbally

Anxiety re cancer and upset re your father’s distressing terminal illne