



Case Study

Identifying and treating panic disorder

October 2023

The Emergency Room cubicle curtain slid back and a woman's face appeared in Kim's field of view. He squinted into the bright fluorescent glare. She looked intent yet distracted, dressed in indeterminate surgical scrubs.

"Hello again! How do you feel?" she said.

Lying on the hospital trolley, festooned with tubes and wires, Kim mainly felt embarrassed. Being wheeled out of a job interview by a MICA ambulance crew with a possible heart attack did not exactly instil confidence. And he'd been the one conducting the interview! He was only 28. And as fit as a bull despite being tied to his desk as a HR Manager.

The woman consulted some papers. "Let's see. Central chest pain ... Palpitations ... Shortness of breath ... You certainly gave your colleagues a scare. But everything checks out. No ECG changes, no enzyme rise. If you're feeling OK, we can get you home and you can see your GP in the morning."

Kim knew there was no chance of getting a GP appointment the next day, but he just wanted to get out of the hospital and into his own bed, so he smiled and started plucking at the wires on his chest.

"I'll get those" said the doctor or nurse or whoever she was. "You'd better call someone to pick you up".

Kim slumped back on the pillows. He hadn't known who to call when he'd first arrived at the hospital. He'd been single and living alone for the last five years and didn't want to worry his parents at nearly midnight. His brother, Lee, was his best bet, although he lived over an hour away.

Lee was predictably abrupt on the phone, clearly unimpressed at being woken by a brother who

had been told he was "just anxious". But he was on his way.

"One thing about hospitals is there's plenty of time to ponder things," Kim thought while sipping water from the waiting room's vending machine. These physical symptoms had come completely out of the blue. One minute he was conducting an interview just like he'd done a hundred times before, and then suddenly he'd felt clammy, his heart was racing, and he couldn't catch his breath. It was the sharp, stabbing pain under his ribs that had really frightened him, given his dad had begun having angina just last year.

But Kim had never smoked, his cholesterol was normal and was able to run a half marathon with relative ease. Dad was the opposite and now had diabetes as well.

Kim didn't consider himself to be an anxious person. Sure, he'd had butterflies before exams but then so did all Uni students. And he hated speaking to large groups. Public speaking was definitely not his thing. He'd enjoyed playing the violin at school but had given it away when he'd found concerts and recitals to be too stressful. Music was meant to be relaxing after all.

He did remember a few times over the past year when he'd found himself getting worked up over little things. Waiting for the starting gun for the City to Surf. Worrying about missing his connecting flight in Singapore. And that dreadful blind date his friends had organised. He'd put his racing heart and sweaty hands down to the excessive amounts of coffee he'd been drinking since they installed a pod machine in the office to lure people back from home.

But today's symptoms were something else again. He really needed to talk his way into an early appointment with the GP.