

The Times Letters Thursday January 8th 2004: Predictive Sexting, UR awful

My teenage son is named Stefan. When I enter “Stef” in SMS messaging (letters, January 7, etc), my phone declares he is “rude”. How does it know?

Mike Johnson

Predictive texting can work wonders for the sagging male ego. My anaesthetic colleague’s mobile phone reminds him that I am in reality “Mr Sex” each time he tries to call me.

David Rew, Consultant Surgeon, Southampton University Hospitals,

Background

In 2004, the predictive texting function on the early generation of Smart Phones was relatively unfamiliar, and it led to a series of entertaining letters in The Times.

When the software reached a word which it could not directly match, it defaulted by shifting one letter at a time to the nearest recognisable word in its dictionary.

The Times had recently carried a letter by a correspondent who had anecdotally texted his daughter to ask whether she was home in get, but though a typo the phone had reinterpreted the attempted “home” as “good”.

While anaesthetising a case for me that week, Dr Paddy Butler alerted me to the phenomenon in entering my name into his address book during a break between crosswords and Sudoku puzzles. The opportunity to alert the nation was too good to miss.

I am reliably informed by anaesthetic departmental insiders that my occupancy of the treasured bottom right slot on the Times Letters page the following day subsequently aroused such passions in their coffee room, that a photocopy of the letter was blown up and pinned to the notice board, where it was gratuitously defaced by unknown assailants.

Thus began my inauspicious career as an occasional Times Correspondent.