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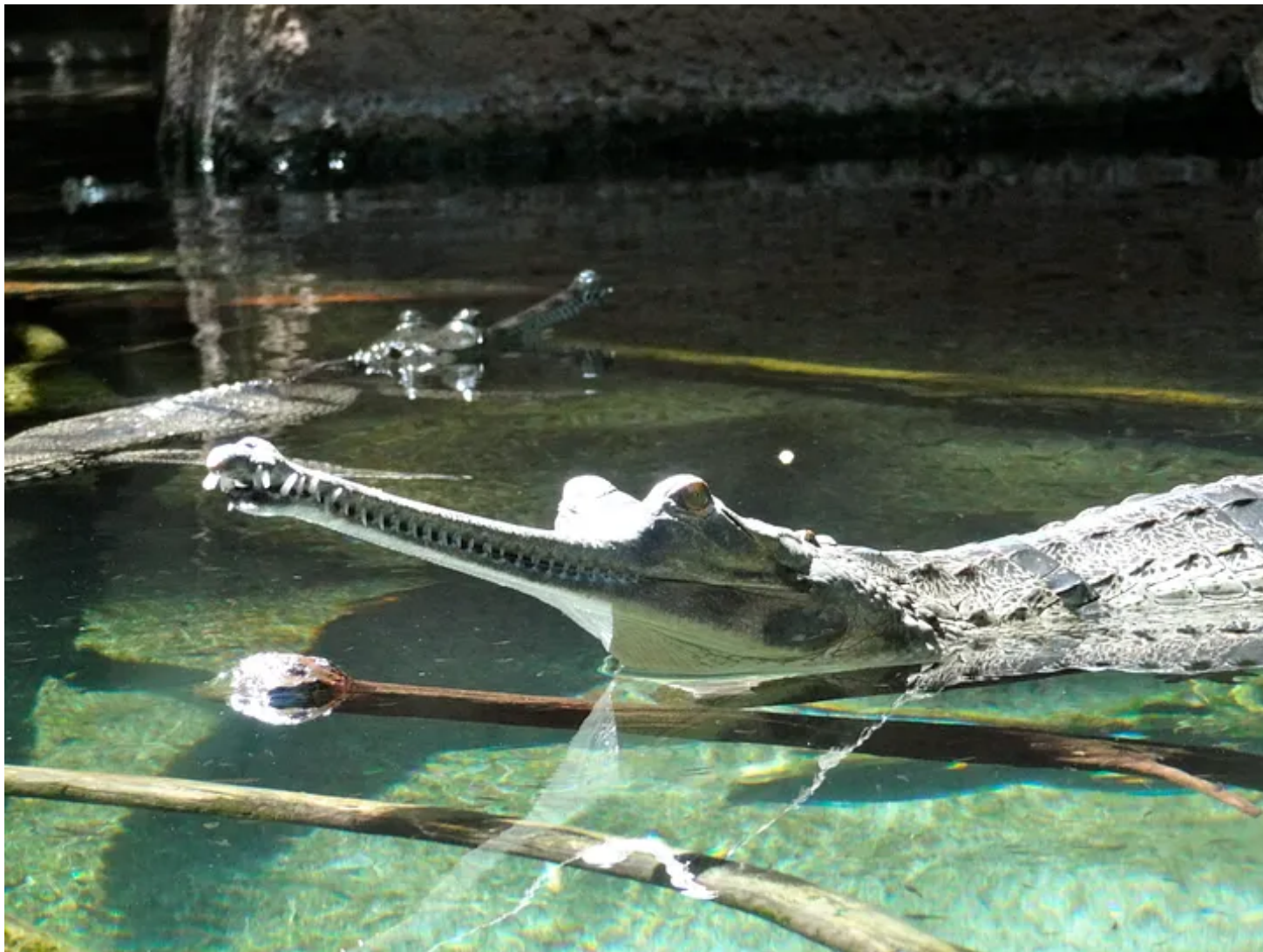
A Moving Experience: Tik-Tok Tech Talk



CFlisi

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by C.Flisi

Technology is supposed to simplify things. Simplify and speed up. I was all for that when I moved back to the U.S., because making a medical appointment in Italy often felt like an exercise in molasses-grade futility. For

some requests you had to call between 11:00 am and 12:45 pm on Tuesdays and Thursdays, except if there was a holiday the days might be Wednesday and Friday. Not at all in August of course.

By the time I left two years ago, some appointments could be made online. That was a huge time saver and it also lowered the risk of misunderstanding. When it worked.

INPS, the Italian equivalent of Social Security, had an online presence but our questions felt more complicated in the Italian language. We preferred to thrash them out by phone, but that was useless because no one seemed to answer. Fortunately, we lived in a place where INPS had an actual office. Before the pandemic, you could go there and put your questions to a real live person who — sometimes — was well-informed. The obstacle there was actually getting to the front of the line before the office closed for the day. You were gambling with your time when you chose that path. You know: Tik-tok. Tik-tok. The Peter Pan crocodile smiling at you from behind the empty counter.

A similar gamble had to be calculated when you wanted to see your *medico di base*, your primary care physician, who, in Italy, is the gateway to lab tests,

drug prescriptions, requests for specialist exams, pretty much everything. We were lucky here too, because our medico di base lived a block away and her office was two blocks away, as was our pharmacy. Pre-pandemic, we would drop off a request for a prescription renewal and pick up the RX a couple of days later, walk it to the pharmacy, and have it renewed on the spot. During the pandemic, we dropped off our medical requests in a mailbox posted outside her office, and they would be sent directly to the pharmacy, or sent to us by email (for specialist consultations and such).

Pre-pandemic, if we had a medical emergency during office hours, we could go directly to the office and hope for an opening. Or wait hours and not see the doctor at all. If we had a serious emergency outside of office hours (hello: my husband's life-threatening intestinal blockage at 4 am), we did what Americans have always done — go to the emergency room of the nearest hospital or medical facility and hope for the best.

{One HUGE difference: an Italian hospital doesn't grill you about your insurance policy before considering whether to admit you. They evaluate the emergency and not the coverage. ALL Italian citizens are covered for basic medical needs (with admittedly varying levels of quality and competence, depending on the hospital) so economic considerations are not of immediate

concern.}

When we moved to the U.S., we presumed that our budget for medical care would increase significantly (not because *we* expected to be sicker but because we knew *the system* was sick) and we steeled ourselves for that. We hoped that this added expense might be tempered by greater efficiency in healthcare management, prescription renewals, and Social Security delivery. The triumph of technology over touchy-feely. More tech, less tik-tok.

Sadly, no.

The technology for Social Security in the US is great, provided everything is correct. As soon as there's a problem, things fall apart. I have been trying to create online accounts for my husband and myself for ages, but there is always a glitch. Social Security quite reasonably wants to ensure that I am who I say I am, and therefore they request documentation. But something in the system won't accept the PDFs, screen shots, HEIC, whatever my format, it doesn't work.

So I write and ask for assistance. Classic Catch-22. "We can assist you once you have created your account." Not till then.

Okay, moving on: my current primary care physician is more responsive than the last two in that messages left on her answering service elicit a response more often than not. Of course, I never speak directly to HER, but her minions usually (“sometimes” is more accurate) convey the message and get back to me with an answer. Her practice, like all others around here, includes a portal that gives me access to my lab tests and clinical visits. The problem is that the portal doesn’t work for all patients, and I am one of the unfortunates. The doctor’s office is aware of this problem and has distributed instructions for how to gain access (since they are as clueless as anyone about its workings) but to no avail. At the same time, my phone calls and attempts to schedule appointments and make online inquiries are automatically redirected to the portal. The portal that doesn’t work. So unless I physically show up at the office, my ability to communicate with this doctor is severely limited. Come to think of it, showing up doesn’t necessarily work. I have tried that tactic three times in recent months, during hours when the office was supposed to be open (according to their website). But they weren’t.

Eventually I extracted the doctor’s email and wrote to her directly, and she responded immediately. But the precariousness of it all gnaws at me. Most of the time, doctors guard their emails with a vengeance. You are not supposed

to disturb THEM. The system should take care of things. But if the system doesn't work? Another Catch-22.

Meanwhile the clock on our health, not to mention our sanity, keeps going Tik-Tok. Tik-Tok. Time flies, but, unlike Peter Pan, we can't.

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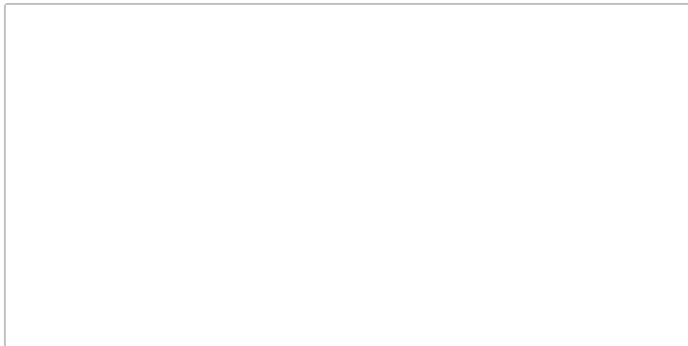
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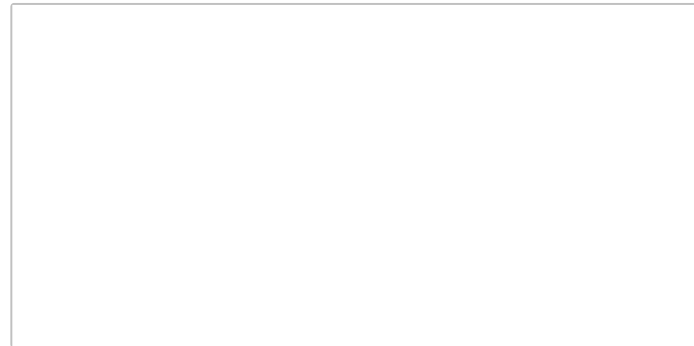
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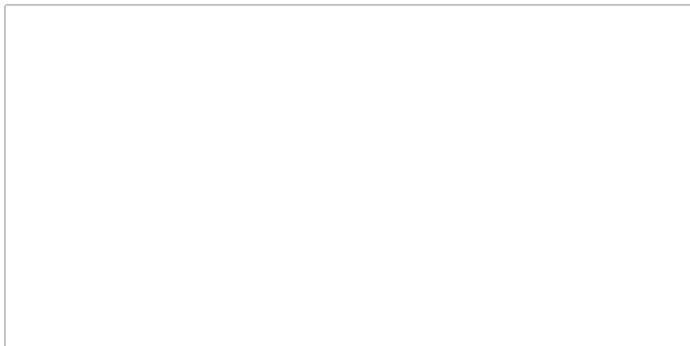
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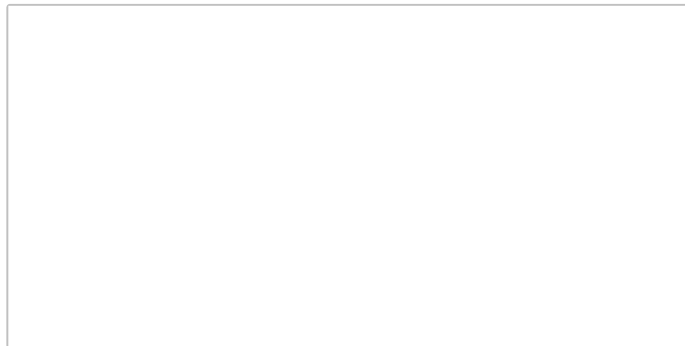
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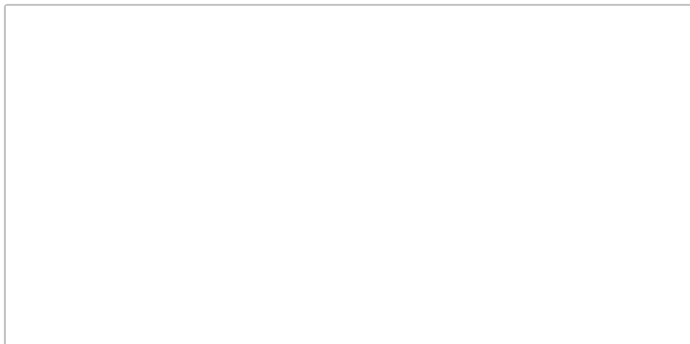


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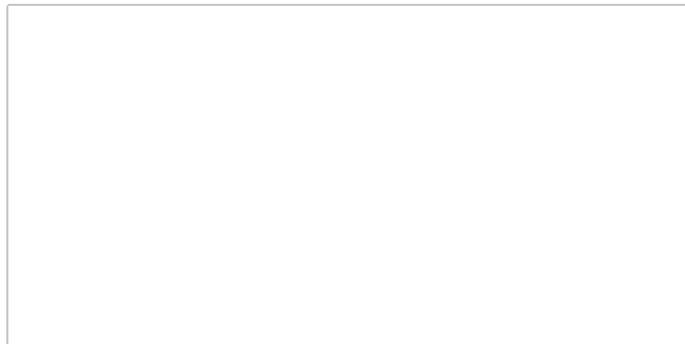
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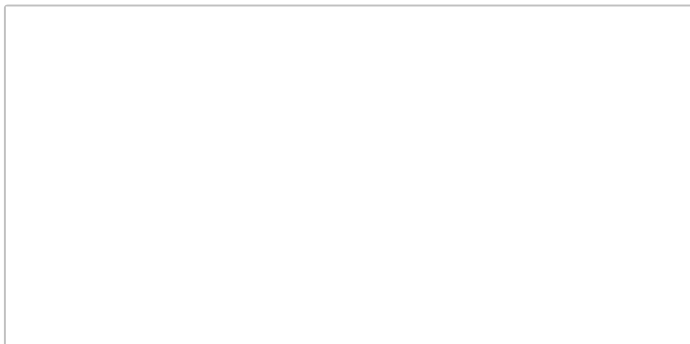
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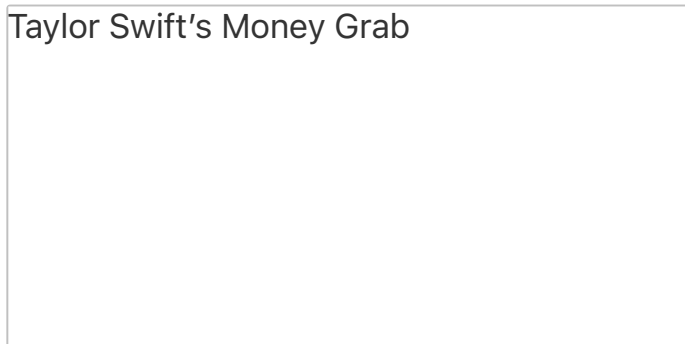
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