

Jane Dacre

Heavily indebted to Barty



PETER LOCKE

JANE DACRE, 59, was elected president of the Royal College of Physicians in April 2014 and took office three months later. She is director of University College London Medical School and a consultant in rheumatology at the Whittington Hospital in north London. She sees her mission as empowering physicians by restating the care values of the profession and encouraging positive leadership. She wants to bring more young people from minority backgrounds into medicine and fears that too much whingeing about how awful the job is may be putting them off. “It’s actually a brilliant profession,” she says.

What single unheralded change has made the most difference in your field in your lifetime?

“Biologic therapies for inflammatory conditions transform people’s lives: they get back to work, and they go on holiday for the first time in years”

What was your earliest ambition?

I decided to become a doctor at age 12 because I liked biology and people, and it seemed to fit. I was hugely influenced by my late father, who was an anaesthetist and was very wise.

Who has been your biggest inspiration?

The first women doctors, who were extraordinarily dedicated to medicine. We think that we struggle with our careers, but it pales into insignificance when we look at the steps these remarkable women took to become doctors . . . including pretending to be men. Also, the two previous female presidents of the Royal College of Physicians, Margaret Turner-Warwick and Carol Black.

What was the worst mistake in your career?

I like to follow Eleanor Roosevelt’s advice that nothing in life is wasted, even if it was a mistake—so I try to always learn when things have gone wrong. Several things could have gone better, and my biggest mistakes have been when I didn’t learn from past experience.

What was your best career move?

Being true to myself, deciding to focus my career on education and bringing on the next generation of doctors, even though it was considered risky at the time because it was an untested career track. I decided to do something a bit different, and I’ve never looked back.

Bevan or Lansley? Who has been the best and the worst health secretary in your lifetime?

I think that the jury’s out on this one. It would be difficult to beat Bevan for vision, but I hope that I have many years yet to judge the best and worst in my own lifetime.

Who is the person you would most like to thank and why?

My husband, Nigel, for coping with the ups and downs of my career and his own, over many years.

To whom would you most like to apologise?

The poor old dog, Barty, who never got enough walks and remained unstintingly loyal for 14 years.

If you were given £1m what would you spend it on?

I’d be tempted to give it to my three children, because it would help them establish their careers and lives in a time of unprecedented austerity—but my conscience would make me set up a foundation to support research in medical education.

Where are or were you happiest?

In the countryside, with my family, preferably in a place teeming with wildlife and blessed by sunny weather.

What single unheralded change has made the most difference in your field in your lifetime?

As a rheumatologist, it’s undoubtedly the introduction of biologic therapies for inflammatory conditions. It’s remarkable to see how these drugs transform people’s lives: they get back to work, and they go on holiday for the first time in years.

What book should every doctor read?

Atul Gawande’s *Being Mortal*: a wonderful and thought provoking read that makes you think about life, death, and doing the right thing in partnership with your patients.

What poem, song, or passage of prose would you like mourners at your funeral to hear?

Elgar’s *Nimrod*. A beautiful piece, which reminds me of my family, especially as my father’s youngest brother was a Nimrod pilot in the RAF. The music was played at the funeral of both of my parents.

What is your guiltiest pleasure?

Sneaking off to sit quietly, think, and listen to birds and other wildlife, when no one knows where I am.

If you could be invisible for a day what would you do?

I’d go and watch wildlife, without disturbing the animals, and get really close to them without scaring them off.

What television programmes do you like?

I don’t watch much telly, but I really like *Borgen* and the Nordic noir genre, especially the strong female role models.

What is your most treasured possession?

My Kindle Fire. I don’t go anywhere without it.

What, if anything, are you doing to reduce your carbon footprint?

I try to walk everywhere between meetings. From the Royal College of Physicians building (a beautiful Lasdun masterpiece) in Regent’s Park, you can get to most places in London, including stations, in around half an hour.

What personal ambition do you still have?

There’s still a lot to do to improve the service we provide for our patients and the training we provide for our doctors.

Summarise your personality in three words

Cheerful, conscientious, resilient.

Where does alcohol fit into your life?

Evenings only, and in moderation.

What is your pet hate?

Arrogance, in anyone.

Cite this as: *BMJ* 2015;351:h4862