



# OBSERVATIONS

## BMJ CONFIDENTIAL

### Carrie MacEwen: Champions vision and visibility



#### What was your earliest ambition?

To be a dancer—until I realised that having two left feet was a disadvantage. I decided to be a surgeon, where manual skills are more important.

#### Who has been your biggest inspiration?

My father has been a wonderful role model all of my life: his enthusiasm for life and his work, in particular, were infectious. A very innovative surgeon, always keen to train and nurture young ophthalmological talent in Scotland.

#### What was the worst mistake in your career?

Never taking a break! While I have enjoyed a happy and fulfilling professional life, it would have been good to pause to smell the roses en route and see some different aspects of life. Today there is much more emphasis on work-life balance, and many doctors are taking opportunities to travel and develop in different ways despite run-through training.

#### What was your best career move?

To become an ophthalmologist. This must be the most satisfying job in the world: restoring and improving vision is a real thrill. Making such an immediate and huge difference to people's lives is so rewarding.

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

Each of the four UK nations has a health secretary and devolved healthcare. The Scottish health secretaries and government have

had the good sense to avoid the purchaser-provider split and competition that have caused so much fragmentation of the NHS and risk to the sustainability of healthcare in many areas of England.

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

It's a challenge for any medical professional to create a work-life balance, so my husband and three children deserve my thanks for having supported me and kept me firmly grounded, as I was often at work when they would have benefited from me being at home.

#### To whom would you most like to apologise?

My schoolteachers, to whom I was constantly challenging and troublesome.

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

Holidays, parties, good wines, shoes, and clothes—the rest, I would just fritter away.

#### Where are or were you happiest?

On the island of Arran, off the west coast of Scotland: a unique place where I've enjoyed family holidays for more than 50 years. It's the perfect place for different generations of a family to holiday together to enjoy walking, cycling, golfing, sailing, and relaxing.

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

The development of the intraocular lens transformed cataract surgery into a truly life enhancing event: more than 350 000 people benefited from it last year in the UK. More recently, the advent of anti-VEGF injections has preserved vision for those with wet age related macular degeneration—preventing blindness, and thus maintaining independence for so many elderly people.

**Biography**

Carrie MacEwen, president of the Royal College of Ophthalmologists, is a consultant at Ninewells Hospital in Dundee and honorary professor of ophthalmology at the University of Dundee. She stuck her neck out in a *BMJ* editorial (with Andrew Lotery) by saying that the use of bevacizumab (Avastin) for macular degeneration by the NHS was being held up by "bureaucratic hurdles." She runs a tertiary referral service for eye movement disorders, is ophthalmology adviser to the Scottish government, and was a founding council member of the Faculty of Sport and Exercise Medicine. She recently tweeted that she loves The Beatles—"a sign of my age, I suppose."

**Do you support doctor assisted suicide?**

Yes—the final act of patient autonomy. But it's important to ensure that the need for this becomes a thing of the past by enhancing the care and understanding of people's needs in the final stage of their life and to help them maintain quality of life to the end, where possible.

**What book should every doctor read?**

*Macleod's Clinical Examination*, because the ability to elicit a history and examine a patient is key to everything a doctor does.

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

"Praise, My Soul, the King of Heaven." A rousing hymn, which is always a good thing at a funeral, and verse four is particularly apt: "Frail as summer's flower we perish, blows the wind and it is gone . . ." I like the hymn so much, it was also sung at my wedding.

**What is your guiltiest pleasure?**

Chocolate.

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

One of my main objectives as college president, and in all walks of life, is to be as visible, open, and transparent as possible, so the idea of being invisible is a bit alien to me.

**What television programmes do you like?**

Television can be an excellent source of information and also a great way to wind down. I enjoy a good drama as pure entertainment: I'm a *Downton* fan.

**What is your most treasured possession?**

I inherited my baby grand piano from my grandfather, and each time I've moved house since then the big decision has been where to put the piano. I rarely have time to play it now, but music fills the house when all three children come home and play it.

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

I cycle to work whenever I can (usually between March and October). And we have a full array of solar panels on the roof of the house.

**What personal ambition do you still have?**

To continue to make a valuable contribution at home and abroad for as long as I can.

**Summarise your personality in three words**

Dedicated, organised, fun.

**Where does alcohol fit into your life?**

Socially, with good food and good company.

**What is your pet hate?**

The break-up of the "vertical" medical team, which has impacted heavily on the morale of young doctors and reduced their ability to learn from personal experience and patient follow-up.

**What would be on the menu for your last supper?**

Good quality steak, chocolate tart, and a big glass of a full bodied red—preferably enjoyed in the company of good friends and family over a relaxed and very prolonged period of time.

**Do you have any regrets about becoming a doctor?**

Never.

**If you weren't in your present position what would you be doing instead?**

No idea—I've had neither the time nor the inclination to consider an alternative.

**thebmj.com** Editorial: What is stopping the NHS from using bevacizumab for macular degeneration and other retinal disorders? (*BMJ* 2014;349:g6887, doi:10.1136/bmj.g6887)

Cite this as: *BMJ* 2015;351:h5701

© BMJ Publishing Group Ltd 2015