

Dr Hilary Jones

Breakfast TV's favourite medic shares his views on the Benenden Hospital redevelopment and the changing face of healthcare

How is life as a GP these days?

I have been a GP since 1982. I'm part time – many GPs are saying they can't take the strain. For me, though, working part time means you've got time to spend with your patients and to try to counteract the conveyor-belt system the NHS has become. It's become much more bureaucratic and micro-managed. I am trying to compensate for that [by being part time and] by learning new techniques, whether it's acupuncture or manipulation. It's important to keep learning new skills, to stay curious and to never stop learning.

What improvements to healthcare have you seen since you qualified?

Diagnosis is more efficient and quicker these days. We have wonderful technology that allows us to see inside the body, but it is extremely expensive.

How can patients help themselves?

Patients need to take more responsibility for their own health and understand that the NHS has limitations. I would far rather prescribe regular exercise than any medication. I believe exercise is what our bodies are designed for. It shocks me how unfit young people are, and how they have no idea of what proper fitness is. This is why we have an epidemic of heart failure and obesity. Having healthier lifestyles, starting in childhood, would prevent so much. Getting people to partake of exercise and enjoy it, in social groups, would do so much for the mental and physical health of the nation. The government also needs to stop allowing school playing fields to be sold off and to pay teachers to set up after-school sports clubs. We need to get our kids running again and enjoying sports.



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DOCTOR'S NOTES

Dr Hilary Jones grew up in west London and studied for an arts degree before training and qualifying as a doctor in 1976. He has been a doctor in Tristan de Cunha in the South Atlantic, Shetland and Hampshire, where he is still a part-time GP. He

began making educational medical TV programmes in 1986 and joined erstwhile breakfast television station TVAM in 1989. A regular TV presenter ever since, he is currently the health editor for ITV's *Good Morning Britain*.

What else would make us healthier?

We are at the mercy of the food and drinks industry, with its advertising of sugary drinks and food. We're all addicted to TV and see images of unhealthy food, and it makes us want that food. Unless the government takes the issue seriously and bans advertising of unhealthy food and drink, so that we eat when we need to rather than when we want to, I don't see it changing.

What do you think of the Benenden Hospital redevelopment?

I'm very impressed – it's a fantastic resource for private patients, Benenden Health members and a great relief for those NHS patients who can use the facilities [Benenden takes around 15% of its patients for elective surgery and treatment from the NHS by arrangement] and equipment, which it has invested heavily in. It's helping patients in providing a first-class service, so it is to be welcomed. The setting and facilities are second to none, and I am totally on board with the concept of the healing environment. Having a view, fresh air, walking and decent food are all very important, so I applaud what Benenden Hospital offers.

What do you think of healthcare organisations such as Benenden Health?

Benenden Health's mutual status is laudable, and shows people are willing to make a modest investment in taking control of their health. I don't buy the argument that you shouldn't need to make provision outside the NHS. Why not? We have control in every other aspect of our lives.