Alastair Henderson
Charming theatre enthusiast

What single unheralded change has made the most difference in your field in your lifetime?
“It’s not exactly unheralded, but I suppose electronic communication in all of its forms—email, internet, mobiles, social media, etc. It has entirely changed what we do, how we do it, and the pace at which we do it.”

What was your earliest ambition?
I never could have been a train driver, as I am colour blind. Aside from running the National Theatre (which is unlikely), I’ve been a lot more about serendipity than planned ambition.

Who has been your biggest inspiration?
My parents, partner, children, and Bob Dylan.

What was your best career move?
I’m not sure that I’ve ever really had a career as such, but to carry on interesting work and travel a lot more—my collection of theatre programmes from the past three years or so.

What was the worst mistake in your career?
Career: ditto. Mistakes: lots, but nothing too horrendous that I can think of.

Bevan or Lansley? Who has been the best and the worst health secretary in your lifetime?
There is a case for Alan Milburn in both categories—content good, culture bad.

Who is the person you would most like to thank and why?
My parents, partner, children, and Bob Dylan.

What book should every doctor read?

What poem, song, or passage of prose would you like mourners at your funeral to hear?
Tangled up in Blue by Bob Dylan, and the third movement of Beethoven’s string quartet no 15 (Op 132).

What is your guilty pleasure?
Cheese and onion crisps.

Where does alcohol fit into your life?
Not as much as I would like.

What personal ambition do you still have?
To carry on interesting work and travel a lot more—specifically, to Argentina and Namibia.

To whom would you most like to apologise?
Probably my dad again (although I wasn’t particularly awful, I don’t think). The boy I bit on the arm at my preschool. And my children, for whatever it is this time.

If you were given £1m what would you spend it on?
My children, I imagine—it seems to be what happens to any money I do have—but particularly on lots of expensive holidays.

Where are or were you happiest?
Various times on holidays, in the UK and abroad with my family over the years.

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Do you support doctor assisted suicide?
Yes.

What is your pet hate?
Inane celebrity culture linked to reality TV. Automated response phone systems. Tottenham Hotspur.

What would be on the menu for your last supper?
Scallops, Thai main course and veg, the best New York cheesecake in the world with ginger ice cream, an amazing Stilton and French cheese board, and a packet of cheese and onion crisps.

Do you have any regrets about becoming a health policy expert?
No. Working in healthcare has always been, and continues to be, fascinating and motivating.

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