

James Cave

Torn to shreds by Sister Harvey



PETER LOCKE

JAMES CAVE, 54, is editor in chief of the *Drug and Therapeutics Bulletin*, published by BMJ Publishing Group. He has been a partner at the Downland Practice in Berkshire for 20 years. Under his editorship the *DTB* has campaigned for the abolition of prescription charges, which he describes as a poorly conceived and manifestly unfair tax in need of reform. England is the only UK country to retain the charges. He likes cars but distrusts single disease charities.

What was the worst mistake in your career?

"During my house jobs I set up a nitrate infusion on a man in the coronary care unit. Despite having to go down to the night pharmacy and use up the whole hospital supply of the drug, the penny didn't drop that my infusion was 100 times more concentrated than it should have been. Thankfully, the patient came to no harm (and spent a night with no chest pain)"

What was your earliest ambition?

As corny as it may sound, I've always wanted to be a GP. My father was a GP, and I loved the relationship he had with his patients.

Who has been your biggest inspiration?

My granny: a strong Welsh woman who remained young and interested in life right up to her 99th year. She always saw the best in people, and I loved dropping in to have tea with her when I was working on a Kent fruit farm.

What was the worst mistake in your career?

During my house jobs I set up a nitrate infusion on a man in the coronary care unit. Despite having to go down to the night pharmacy and use up the whole hospital supply of the drug, the penny didn't drop that my infusion was 100 times more concentrated than it should have been. Thankfully, the patient came to no harm (and spent a night with no chest pain). Sister Harvey pinned me up against the wall in the sluice room and tore me to shreds the following morning: a far more educational experience than a significant event analysis.

What was your best career move?

Was it doing my surgery with Tom Bates in Ashford, Kent—a surgeon practising evidence based medicine in the 1980s? Or managing to get onto the Stoke Mandeville GP vocational scheme? At that time the jobs were a brilliant mix for general practice.

Do you support doctor assisted suicide?

The law is always a blunt instrument, and this is no place for blunt instruments.

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

They come and go, but I'm not that sure any of them have understood primary care and the essential characteristics that make it work. The current model for the NHS, with a here-today-gone-tomorrow politician at its head, is wrong for the 21st century.

Where are or were you happiest?

Probably now. My children seem to have grown up into pretty rounded people despite me, and I love my work—in the practice, with BMJ Publishing, and at Red Whale (www.gp-update.co.uk/Red-Whale).

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

Information technology has transformed general practice. It's sometimes forgotten that it was GPs who drove the IT agenda in its early days. Having to sit at the dining room table every night writing out repeat prescriptions for his patients was a pain my father could have done without, and he jumped at the chance of letting a computer do it for him.

What book should every doctor read?

The Citadel by AJ Cronin.

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

A passage in Justine Picardie's novel *Daphne*, which talks of a peaceful death and happy life. It reminds us that to really live life to the full is better than to live life dead to the world.

What is your guiltiest pleasure?

Civ III, the computer game. I fire up my old laptop from time to time and then spend hours trying to dominate the world.

Clarkson or Clark? Would you rather watch *Top Gear* or *Civilisation*? What television programmes do you like?

Top Gear, every time. I think that there must be a *Top Gear* gene (probably on the Y chromosome) and that, if you have it, you are powerless to find those programmes anything other than brilliant.

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

I shower only a few times a week, and I wear a jumper in the house rather than have the heating on.

What personal ambition do you still have?

I feel as if I've hardly started. I'd love to develop the *DTB* further; it's such a strong and important publication. Very few truly independent publications are available to clinicians these days.

Summarise your personality in three words

My wife says that I'm intense, amusing, and an arse; my daughter says that I'm funny, paranoid, and nice; my son says, "a leader among men"; a friend suggests, "intense, pompous (in an endearing way), and supportive." Take your pick!

Where does alcohol fit into your life?

I love a beer, and I'll have a drink most evenings.

What is your pet hate?

Single disease charities. They all play the "My disease is more important than anything else" card and usually denigrate general practice. It's too easy to be an expert in one thing.

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