

ROLE MODEL

Tim Littlewood

Anne Gulland speaks to Tim Littlewood, a consultant haematologist and associate director of clinical studies at Oxford University Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust



BRITISH SOCIETY FOR HAEMATOLOGY

NOMINATED BY RACHEL CLARKE

“Tim Littlewood is an exceptional example of how to be a kind, compassionate, thoughtful, and gentle practitioner at the bedside. In haematology you have to have the most difficult conversations with patients imaginable, and there is no one I know who holds them with more skill. He is also an outstandingly good teacher of clinical medicine—someone who always takes time to teach students and juniors, no matter how busy he is himself.”

Rachel Clarke is a specialty trainee in palliative medicine, Oxford

Tim Littlewood was on the way to becoming a respiratory specialist when he met a consultant haematologist who invited him to observe his work.

At the beginning of the day Littlewood accompanied him as he examined patients and took samples of blood or bone marrow. He would then go back to the laboratory to look at the results and return to the patient to discuss the results and the treatment. “This, to me, was being a complete doctor,” says Littlewood, who was inspired both by this consultant’s skills and his enthusiasm for the specialty.

“I tell young doctors that they will choose their career based on a number of factors. You have to be fascinated by the subject matter but if you see people working in the specialty who are inspired and enthused by what they’re doing that sends a very strong message,” he says. This is something he has tried to impart to all junior colleagues throughout his career.

Littlewood, a Lancastrian, decided to study medicine after realising that a career as a professional footballer was unlikely to work out. He studied at Cardiff University and did house officer jobs in London and the south-east before being appointed a consultant at the John Radcliffe Hospital in Oxford in his early 30s.

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His mentor gave him some advice as he took up the post, which Littlewood has in turn given to younger colleagues. “He told me to write down all the things I wanted to achieve during my first five to six years as a consultant. He said I should spend about six months wandering round the department and then discuss my ideas with colleagues. Assuming they’re supportive I could then start to implement the changes,” he says.

Littlewood followed this advice to the letter and after six months set up a bone marrow transplantation service. “It’s not something you do on your own as you need good facilities and support from other colleagues. That was my number one target when I arrived,” he says.

Coming from a family of teachers, Littlewood has a passion for education. At Oxford he set up a teaching programme for the junior doctors, medical students, and laboratory staff in his department. “This was a relatively quick win but what I’m so proud of is that I still run all these teaching events,” he says.

He broadened that interest in education when he joined, and later became president of, the committee of the British Society for Haematology by setting up an education committee.

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NOMINATE A ROLE MODEL

Tim Littlewood is the first person to be featured in *The BMJ*'s new role model page. To nominate someone who has been a role model during your medical career, send their name, job title, and the reason for your nomination to arimmer@bmj.com



Ray Dolan is the Mary Kinross professor of neuropsychiatry at University College London, where he studies the brain's decision making, including its neurochemical control. This year he shared the €1m Brain Prize, awarded annually by the Lundbeck Foundation for outstanding contributions to neuroscience by European scientists. Born in 1954 in Ireland, he qualified in medicine and moved to England for his psychiatric training. He was elected a fellow of the Royal Society (FRS) in 2010. His research on the brain's reward system helps explain how we learn, including learning about other people's preferences, and why drugs for Parkinson's disease, which amplify the chemical dopamine, can lead to pathological gambling as users strive to repeat rewarding experiences.

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Ray Dolan Blues on the brain

What was your earliest ambition?

To sing and play in a blues band.

Who has been your biggest inspiration?

Van Morrison, for staying true to his muse for 50 years.

What was the worst mistake in your career?

Not pursuing mathematics at secondary school, when it was my best subject.

What was your best career move?

Staying up all night crouched over a typewriter, armed with Tipp-Ex, to write a Wellcome Trust clinical training fellowship.

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

My wife, for her support, playfulness, and being a great mother to our children while maintaining her own successful professional career.

To whom would you most like to apologise?

My children, for dragging them on long hikes, not realising that their likes didn't align with mine.

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

Exposing fake news and outright propaganda in relation to health funding, particularly mental health funding.

What change has made the most difference in your field?

The ability to measure brain activity non-invasively in health and disease, using fMRI (functional magnetic resonance imaging).

What book should every doctor read?

The Doctor's Dilemma, by George Bernard Shaw.

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

Bloom's meditation on things infinitely large, in the "Ithaca" chapter of James Joyce's *Ulysses*.

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

I've recently bought a hybrid car, I try to say no to meetings involving air travel, and I don't eat meat.

What personal ambition do you still have?

To spend an entire summer walking through the Alps.

Summarise your personality in three words

Demanding, perfectionist, hedonistic.

Where does alcohol fit into your life?

Comfortably.

What is your pet hate?

People who are envious or vain—or, worse still, both.

Do you have any regrets about becoming an academic?

None. I've had great freedom as an academic, and it's helped me avoid having to answer to unimaginative managerial types, who seem to flourish in today's NHS.

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

Playing music, hopefully to a high level.

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