



OBSERVATIONS

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Jonty Heaversedge: Conscientious and a little narcissistic



What was your earliest ambition?

I've never really had any long term goals. We moved around a fair amount when I was young, and most of my focus was just on fitting in. So I wish I could say that I always had a burning ambition to expand the frontiers of medical science or alleviate the suffering of my fellow man, but in reality medicine was a vehicle to gain status and acceptance. As luck would have it, I later discovered that it's also a career I love.

Who has been your biggest inspiration?

Inspiration, my dad; motivation, my mum. They both sacrificed a huge amount so that I wouldn't have to. Their generosity continues to inspire me.

What was the worst mistake in your career?

It's been suggested that appearing on the *Jeremy Kyle Show* was a mistake, but I remain secretly quite proud! I do believe that, as medical professionals, we have to extend ourselves much further than we currently do to engage with the reality of people's lives, even if it takes us out of our comfort zone.

What was your best career move?

Joining the vocational training scheme at Guy's and St Thomas' at a time when general practice really felt like a vocation rather than an occupation. I was immediately immersed in the challenges of the inner city, working with the most vulnerable and deprived people in our society. It's influenced everything I've done subsequently.

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

I'd like to say Bevan, even though he died before I was born. I still try to fulfil his aspirations for the NHS. Importantly, this doesn't mean simply ensuring equal access to medical treatment—it has to mean an equality of outcomes. It also means nurturing a workforce that feels valued: the NHS will stand or fall on the compassion and care provided by the incredibly dedicated people who work within it. We undervalue this at our peril.

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

My GP trainer, David Poole. He understood the art of medicine—the difference between healing and providing treatment. My understanding of his advice continues to deepen to this day.

To whom would you most like to apologise?

My partner, Tye. Like many in our profession, I'm not as present as I should be at home. He's astonishingly supportive and generous, and there's absolutely no way that I could've achieved everything I have without him.

Where are or were you happiest?

On a meditation retreat in Limoges, France; I was also at my saddest, angriest, and most in love. Learning how to practise being more open to my current experience, and not to try to manipulate it, continues to be difficult for me. While I can't change how I feel, I do try to modify how I respond. Occasionally, I'm successful.

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

I've been a GP for just over 15 years and watched as health services have become increasingly focused on doing things to people that are driven by payment mechanisms and performance

Biography

Jonty Heaversedge, 44, is a GP in southeast London who sees patients, is a writer and broadcaster, and chairs the Southwark clinical commissioning group—a combination that should keep him busy. His television work includes programmes on smoking, organ donation, and healthy lifestyles, and he has a strong interest in mental health, backed by a degree in psychology and a masters in mental health. His book, *The Mindful Manifesto*, co-written with Ed Halliwell, brought the concept of mindfulness to a wider public and gained many endorsements from grateful readers. The *Guardian* found it “mercifully gibberish-free.”

metrics rewarding activity over outcomes. The current shift towards shared responsibility for delivering outcomes that matter to people will help to reconnect services, enhance quality, and ensure that we optimise value for the populations we serve.

Do you support doctor assisted suicide?

No. But I do think that everyone should be routinely invited to complete an advance directive.

What book should every doctor read?

A Fortunate Man: the Story of a Country Doctor, by John Berger and Jean Mohr. At a time when the transformation of primary care services is inevitable and necessary, this book is a timely reminder of the unique nature of general practice in the United Kingdom—and of what we must not lose through the changes we make.

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

“Our revels now are ended . . .”—the speech from Shakespeare’s *The Tempest*, Act 4, Scene 1, which ends, “We are such stuff as dreams are made on, and our little life is rounded with a sleep.”

What is your guiltiest pleasure?

A thick cut slice of fresh baked bread with butter so thickly spread you can see the imprint of your teeth in it.

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

Worry that no one was noticing me.

What television programmes do you like?

Currently, *Homeland*; *You, Me and the Apocalypse*; and *Veep*.

What is your most treasured possession?

A T shirt that we got printed when I rowed from Oxford to London as a medical student at the Royal Free. It’s over 20 years old and is worn so thin that it’s almost transparent in places.

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

I cycle to and from work most days. It helps me stay fit and clears my head.

What personal ambition do you still have?

I genuinely don’t have an explicit goal. I hope that I can continue to be inquisitive, allow new experiences to arise, and participate fully in every opportunity that comes my way.

Summarise your personality in three words

Conscientious, a tad controlling, and a little narcissistic.

Where does alcohol fit into your life?

I probably have a drink more often than I should and less often than I’d like.

What is your pet hate?

Cyclists wearing headphones: it leaves them literally senseless, and we need our wits about us on the roads. Voluntarily removing one of our most important senses is a disaster waiting to happen.

What would be on the menu for your last supper?

Steak and chips, with a glass of Californian Zinfandel.

Do you have any regrets about becoming a doctor?

None; I feel like the luckiest man alive. I’ve had experiences that I would never have thought possible, I learn something new every single day, and I’ve met some of the most interesting and inspiring people you can imagine, whether patients or colleagues.

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

I have no idea. I’d certainly still be seeing patients, and perhaps I would’ve invested more time in my media work or further developed my interest in mindfulness and mental wellbeing. We pay inadequate attention to our minds, and yet, in their distress, they drive much of the poor mental and physical health that we’re experiencing as a society.

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