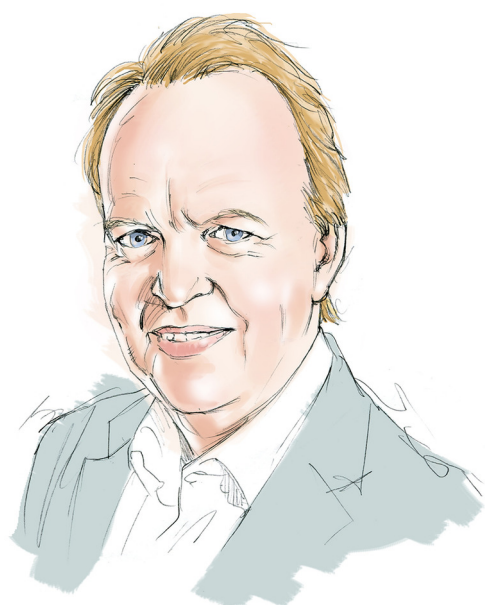




# OBSERVATIONS

## BMJ CONFIDENTIAL

### John Dean: Committed to quality improvement



#### What was your earliest ambition?

To own a red Triumph convertible. I achieved this when I graduated. I've had a yellow and a blue one since, and I hope to have a green one when I retire.

#### What was your best career move?

Becoming a consultant physician at Bolton. This created every opportunity I've had since. I worked with leaders who gave me freedom to innovate and lead. A great place to be a physician, and I have many good friends who were colleagues there.

#### What was the worst mistake in your career?

Not challenging poor or dangerous medical practice I observed earlier in my career. If I had done I might have prevented physical and psychological harm to many patients and some staff.

#### How is your work-life balance?

I'm a workaholic, but my family are the most important part of my life. I enjoy my work, treasure the time with my family, and know when I need to relax and switch off.

#### How do you keep fit and healthy?

Swimming and sailing, and my wife helps me control my diet. But I'm not as fit or healthy as I'd like to be.

#### What single change would you like to see made to the NHS?

Scrap the commissioner-provider split and payment by results, as it's divisive and creates the wrong incentives and behaviours among staff. It's also a huge waste of time and energy—I've been a commissioning leader and provider leader.

#### What do you wish that you had known when you were younger?

That you'll never achieve all you want to, but that the influence you have on others and what they do as a result is more important and longer lasting.

#### Do doctors get paid enough?

Yes. We get so many rewards other than money, too. I think that we're privileged to do the work we do, with the people we meet.

#### To whom would you most like to apologise?

All of the patients whose concerns, when I've been tired or distracted, I haven't listened to or given enough time.

#### What do you usually wear to work?

Open necked shirt with rolled-up sleeves, and blue suit—no jacket when clinical. And hopefully a smile, much of the time.

**Biography**

John Dean, 57, is clinical director for quality improvement and patient safety at the Royal College of Physicians. In leadership roles in northwest England and elsewhere, his focus has been on improving care for long term conditions, integrated care, and whole system quality improvement. He was a consultant in diabetes and general medicine at Bolton, a placement that included five years as medical director of NHS Bolton, until joining the East Lancashire Hospitals NHS Trust in 2011, where he is a deputy medical director. A Health Foundation/IHI fellow, he has long been an advocate for more patient and family involvement in care.

**Which living doctor do you most admire, and why?**

Don Berwick. He has inspired so many people in healthcare and beyond, and yet he's so humble, approachable, and down to earth.

**What is the worst job you have done?**

Bottle washer at Schweppes in Birmingham as a student. It was a great education, however, on the working lives of others.

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

Patient self monitoring. It has the potential to change the paradigm of healthcare, of who is really in charge. Sadly it hasn't often done so yet, but, as it broadens, it will.

**What new technology or development are you most looking forward to?**

Primary care and specialists working as one team for local people, with patients truly owning their personal health and care record.

**What book should every doctor read?**

*Being Mortal* by Atul Gawande. It's a very important message for these times.

**What is your guiltiest pleasure?**

Good quality coffee, lots of it.

**Where are or when were you happiest?**

With my family at home or on holiday, having dinner together and sharing stories.

**What television programmes do you like?**

Crime drama serials and international cricket highlights.

**What personal ambition do you still have?**

To sail a big boat and to be competent at it.

**Summarise your personality in three words**

Committed, passionate, curious.

**What is your pet hate?**

Long fingernails.

**What would be on the menu for your last supper?**

Pepper steak with plenty of vegetables, a glass of merlot, lemon meringue pie (home made by my wife—no other comes close), and a double espresso.

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

The hymn "I cannot tell how He, whom angels worship," sung to the Londonderry Air. I don't have the Christian faith I once had, but the sense of hope, certainty, and belief in what's possible is beautifully set by the music and words. I also want people to have a hearty sing.

**Is the thought of retirement a dream or a nightmare?**

I think that the concept is outmoded. If we're lucky enough to spend each part of our lives doing a mix of what we enjoy, what rewards us, and what we're best placed to do, then we should. How this mix changes for me over the coming years, I look forward to finding out.

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

A jobbing diabetologist and acute physician. I always enjoy clinical practice; I can't imagine not being a doctor.