



## CAREERS

## Joanna Bircher: quality improvement evangelist

The Tameside and Glossop GP and clinical director talks to **Adrian O'Dowd** about how general practice can improve the care of communities

London, UK

### A born natural

I graduated in 1993 after studying at Queens' College Cambridge and the University of Manchester medical school. I can't remember wanting to do anything other than work in healthcare. At primary school I said to my Dad, "I'd like to be a nurse." He replied, "Why don't you be a doctor?" I didn't know girls could be doctors.

### Maintaining patient contact

Despite my leadership role as clinical director for the Greater Manchester GP Excellence Programme, I don't like to spend less than 3.5 days a week seeing patients. I love the contact and it helps me to stay in touch with the challenges we face in general practice so that I can understand why simple improvement solutions rarely work.

### Family business

I completed my training in 1999, after a rotation at Stepping Hill Hospital in Stockport. After I qualified, health became quite a big deal in our family because my Dad became chairman of a hospital trust and then later chair of the NHS Confederation.

### Why general practice?

When I began my career I wanted to be the doctor who looked after people through the highs and lows of their life. As I've progressed, I've recognised how important GPs are in influencing how care is arranged locally. We can promote the health of a population by neighbourhood working. GPs tend to "stick" in an area and can become an important part of that place based care.

### Appraiser and trainer

I see similarities between the roles of appraiser and trainer and dealing with patients in the consulting room. You help people to adapt and achieve their best, either for their health or their career. One of the joys about appraising is meeting fantastic doctors and finding out how deeply they think about all aspects of the care that they provide for their patients.

### Quality improvement

I've been clinical lead for quality improvement at Tameside and Glossop Clinical Commissioning Group since 2012. I've always been interested in optimising system performance—how can we do things better, slicker, and get better outcomes. I guess I have become a quality improvement evangelist.

### Centre stage

I've been an amateur actor and choreographer since my university days. I've performed in and produced revues and plays that were taken to the Edinburgh Fringe Festival in 1988, 1990, and 2008, and I currently help to run a community theatre.

### Life lessons

After 20 years in general practice, time has taught me not to think that it's the medicine that makes the difference. By all means, practise good medicine, but often what counts is how you support people to make choices about their own care.

#### Curriculum vitae:

**2017 to present:** Clinical director of Greater Manchester GP Excellence Programme (RCGP)

**2017 to present:** Member of the Academy of Medical Royal Colleges working group on quality improvement (QI)

**2016-2017:** RCGP clinical lead for quality improvement, building QI capability within GP practices

**2015-2016:** RCGP joint clinical lead for QI within the national diabetes audit

**2015:** MSc in leadership for quality improvement in healthcare, Ashridge Business School, as part of the generation Q programme, the Health Foundation

**2012 to present:** Clinical lead for QI at Tameside and Glossop primary care trust and Clinical Commissioning Group

**2011-14:** Appraisal lead initially for Tameside and Glossop primary care trust and then area team for NHS England

**2008-10:** GP mentor for strategic health authority

**2006:** GP trainer for Health Education England North West

**1999 to present:** GP principal and partner

**1993:** MB ChB (Hons) University of Manchester

**1990:** BA (Hons) Queens' College, University of Cambridge