



London, UK

Cite this as: *BMJ* 2021;372:n336<http://dx.doi.org/10.1136/bmj.n336>

Published: 08 February 2021

Taking the helm during a pandemic: dermatologist Tanya Bleiker

Consultant dermatologist Tanya Bleiker talks to **Helen Jones** about how she has developed her career by seizing every opportunity that has come her way

Helen Jones

“There’s nothing to get bored about in dermatology,” Tanya Bleiker says. “Every day’s different and every patient has a different need. It could be a common disease that presents a challenge, or a rare disease that I haven’t seen before.”

Bleiker was elected president of the British Association of Dermatologists for 2020 to 2022. “I’m still a full time consultant, but my trust and colleagues are extremely supportive and I am grateful for this,” she says. “A lot of it is in my own time late at night and early in the morning, and yet I still find time to walk the dog and go to our local book club.”

Being president during the covid-19 pandemic hasn’t been an easy ride. Alongside the usual workload, the association has produced huge amounts of documents to support its members, all in the context of learning new ways of virtual working.

“During the first wave there was a sort of ‘Dunkirk spirit’ with everyone in it together,” Bleiker says. “This wave is different.” People are exhausted and the NHS is on its knees, she says. “A report from the Royal College of Physicians shows that one in four doctors has sought mental health support, which is staggering, and we are definitely seeing that in dermatology.”

Bleiker adds, “The redeployment of staff to areas they aren’t familiar with has caused a lot of anxiety. Currently I’m looking at how we can support the wellbeing of our members. This is really important; we need to support our NHS staff in the best way possible so that they can, in turn, support their patients in the best way possible.”

Bleiker decided that she wanted to specialise in dermatology while a student at Nottingham Medical School. In 1995 she was appointed as a dermatology registrar in Leicester where she worked with two inspirational consultants: Robin Graham-Brown and Tony Burns. “I saw how dermatology offered a wide range of opportunities,” she said.

In 2001 she moved to Derby as a consultant. “I had trained as a junior doctor in Derby and the supportive, collaborative, and family ethos of the hospital team was the reason I wanted to return.”

Through her role as clinical lead she started to liaise with the British Association of Dermatologists. She held various roles within the association before being elected president for 2020-22.

She says that, alongside the variety, the most satisfying part of being a dermatologist is making a difference to patients’ quality of life. “I saw a patient with severe eczema in a children’s clinic recently.

The family were exhausted, the child was fed up, and everybody had had enough.

“Two weeks after putting a clear treatment plan in place they were a different family—relaxed, happy, and rested. It is the ultimate job satisfaction to make someone’s life so much better in a short space of time, and it can be quite emotional.”

Bleiker says she would like to acknowledge some of the amazing work being done by her dermatology colleagues up and down the country in the face of the pandemic, as well as colleagues in the wider NHS.

Nominated by Padma Mohandas

“What I admire most about Tanya is her work ethic and determination to make sure patients are looked after with the best care and compassion. She has many stellar qualities which make her a brilliant role model.

“Everyone who works with her will know she doesn’t cut corners, is thorough and conscientious, and is always happy to help and support colleagues. She has worked tirelessly to improve processes, systems, and services for both adults and children in the region and nationally, while working full time and with a family—a major feat in itself.

“Tanya brims with enthusiasm and has an energy that is infectious, always ready to take things on with a smile and wry sense of humour. I’ve been inspired by her fortitude and tenacity in reaching the top of her profession, not driven by personal ambition but for the benefit of the people she works for and with. At the same time, she’s approachable and down to earth, ready to help out when required, and not afraid of getting her hands dirty—qualities of a proper Yorkshire lass, she may well say.”

Padma Mohandas is a consultant dermatologist at Barts Health NHS Trust, London