A true family doctor: the general practitioner

The general practitioner talks to Kathy Oxtoby about his love of being a “cradle to grave” family doctor and how his commitment to serving his community drew him back from retirement.

Kathy Oxtoby

Biplab Das is a family doctor in the truest sense of the word. His family in India, where he was born and grew up, is “full of doctors,” he says. For many years his wife was also his GP practice partner and he named his Liverpool practice, Benim Medical Centre, after his father, who inspired him to become a doctor.

Das is also drawn to the ethos of the traditional family practice, delivering care from cradle to grave. “I like the continuity of care that general practice brings. It gives me the opportunity to look after patients from birth until their last day,” he says.

Over the years he has enjoyed looking after his patients’ children, and their children’s children. His patients send him birthday and Christmas cards, and their relatives ask him to give readings at their funerals because he knew them so well. “I see myself as a family GP. I enjoy that caring bond with my patients. So many people have no one they can talk to. My patients can talk to me.”

This sense of family extends to his general practice colleagues who describe him as “a doctor like no other.” Recognition from his peers includes the Royal College of General Practitioners’ lifetime achievement award, which he received in 2019.

His first choice of career was engineering but his father was determined he would pursue medicine, so after two months at engineering college he left to pursue his father’s dream—a decision he has not regretted.

After graduating from Calcutta Medical College in 1976, he worked at hospitals in the city before he headed for Britain in 1980. He did locum work before taking up a post as a registrar at Aintree Hospital, Liverpool, in 1986, where a consultant advised him to become a general practitioner. “I took his advice, and we keep in touch to this day,” says Das.

In 1990, the day he finished his GP training in Liverpool, he became a partner. “A GP who had seen me at clinical meetings, and liked the fact I asked a lot of questions, came to my house and asked me to join his practice.” When that GP retired in 2000, Das took over the practice in partnership with his GP wife, naming the surgery after his role model—his father.

Over the years Das himself has become a role model to many, including his medical students. “I learn from them too,” he says. “Many of my students have gone on to become consultants. Some are still working in Liverpool and we keep in touch.”

Das is a member of Liverpool Local Medical Committee—“I’m heavily involved in medical politics”—and of the British International Doctors Association, where he’s involved in looking after the interests of ethnic minority doctors.

After retirement, he relished the opportunity to go for long walks, enjoy cricket—he supports England (except when they’re playing India)—and to go to football matches (he’s a Liverpool fan). But after just two months, a GP partner at local practice Fairfield Medical Centre asked for his help, and Das was back doing what he loves most—seeing patients.

For the past two years Das has continued to help at the practice, despite having a serious covid-19 infection himself. “It was the right decision, coming back to work. I don’t want to do anything else,” he says.

Now the staff at his practice don’t want him to leave. “All my colleagues—the GPs, the staff on reception—say I’m not allowed to retire.”

“Choosing to serve people as a doctor—as my father inspired me to—was the best decision I’ve ever made. And I feel very blessed.”

Nominated by Fatin Karam

“I’ve had the pleasure of knowing Biplab Das for the past 17 years and he’s a shining example of patient centred care and professionalism. He always goes above and beyond in supporting staff and in ensuring his patients are well cared for.

“His vast knowledge and expertise have been a boon to all who’ve worked with him, including me, and I am grateful for his guidance throughout the years.

“His calm and confident demeanour is reassuring to patients and staff, and he never fails to cheer people up if they’re having a rough day.

“His career is one full of achievement and excellence, and his place as a role model for all the staff is firmly cemented. Thank you Dr Das for all you have done, and continue to do, for us.”

Fatin Karam is a GP Partner, Fairfield Medical Centre, Liverpool