

Catherine Calderwood

Quick witted, optimistic, driven



PETER LOCKE

CATHERINE CALDERWOOD has been chief medical officer for Scotland since March 2015. She is a consultant obstetrician and gynaecologist who trained at Cambridge and Glasgow and served as national clinical director of maternity and women's health at NHS England, where she championed the extension of the friends and family test to maternity services. She rejoices in the variety her post provides ("no two days are the same") and still works part time as a consultant to NHS Lothian. Her research includes thromboembolic disease in pregnancy, and she has been instrumental in reducing stillbirths and neonatal deaths in Scotland.

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

"The voice of women and families in obstetric care. We've led the way in obstetrics by talking through care with our patients—most of whom are not ill, of course—and we work very well with our midwifery colleagues as a team"

What was your earliest ambition?

I always wanted to be a doctor. After one particularly bad viral illness I told my parents that I was going to find the cure for flu.

Who has been your biggest inspiration?

My parents are both doctors—father an orthopaedic surgeon, mother a psychiatrist, which is an interesting combination and made for fascinating dinnertime discussions. They were both so interested in their jobs that I couldn't imagine having a career in anything else or a role I'd enjoy more. My first consultant at Glasgow Royal Infirmary was Ross Lorimer, who taught me how to speak to patients. He took an interest in everyone, from the alcoholic from the east end to the businessman from Bearsden, and he let them know that they were important to him.

What was the worst mistake in your career?

I should have taken a year off from medical school to row for the Cambridge women's lightweight boat crew. At the time an extra year seemed a lot, but I was going to be doing medicine for the rest of my life, and it would have been a tremendous experience.

What was your best career move?

Moving into Scottish government, as a medical adviser working for Harry Burns, and then working for Bruce Keogh as national clinical director for maternity and women's health at NHS England. Medical leadership at all levels is needed in these challenging times, and the clinical voice should always be influential in our NHS.

Who is the person you would most like to thank, and why?
Ian Donald, the Scottish obstetrician who pioneered the use of diagnostic ultrasound in medicine.

To whom would you most like to apologise?

My children—for always being late and not being able to come to sports day/concerts/prize giving.

If you were given £1m what would you spend it on?

Educating people about how important their health is and how to preserve and prioritise it. We often don't realise how precious good health is until it's gone. My own life was transformed by a hip replacement two years ago: it's given me a different perspective and a great deal of sympathy for people who live in pain.

Where are or were you happiest?

On the beach in Scotland on a sunny day, with my children.

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What book should every doctor read?

I'm reading *The Narrow Road to the Deep North* by Richard Flanagan, which is about a surgeon in a prisoner of war camp on the Burma death railway. Conditions were bleak and survival very unlikely, yet he kept fighting for the prisoners' lives.

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

Afterglow (author unknown).

What is your guiltiest pleasure?

I love fish and chips—preferably on the harbour side, where the fishing boats brought the fish to shore.

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

I'd listen to conversations to find out what people really think of me and the decisions I make.

What television programmes do you like?

Period dramas: I enjoyed the scenery in *Poldark* very much.

What is your most treasured possession?

My children.

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

I generally prefer to travel by train rather than fly.

What personal ambition do you still have?

I still have many more years to work before I retire, so who knows what the post after chief medical officer will be?

Summarise your personality in three words

Quick witted, optimistic, driven.

What is your pet hate?

People complaining about their lot and expecting others to fix it.

What would be on the menu for your last supper?

Roast chicken.

Do you have any regrets about becoming a doctor?

None at all—it's a privilege to work in a profession that makes a difference and allows an insight into life in the way that it does.

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

I'd be enjoying my job as an obstetrician in Edinburgh, seeing pregnant women in my maternal medicine clinic.

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