

Just why was Jane lurking with intent in Mongolia?

Jane Feinmann shares a meal with medics in a 'ger', the traditional tent of the Mongolian nomads. Find out why on page 3



NHS prejudice may be failing the obese

Leading medics call for more bariatric surgery to cure Type 2 Diabetes

Prejudice and misguided cost cutting are preventing access to bariatric surgery for adults with Type 2 Diabetes, despite the National Institute for Health and Care Excellence (NICE) backing early intervention, writes **Janette Marshall**.

The result is poorer quality and shorter life expectancy and ultimately higher costs to the NHS treating medical complications of T2D and obesity.

This was the message from

Professors Rachel Batterham and Franco Rubio, speakers at *Surgery: The Cure for Type 2 Diabetes?* The joint event for Guild and MJA members was organised by Medtronics and held at The Wellcome Collection, London.

Both speakers urged journalists to help educate public and health professionals about the success of bariatric surgery at treating and, in many cases, curing T2D. Opposing medical views were not represented.

Prof Batterham, NIHR Research Professor at the UCLH Bariatric Centre

for Weight Management and Metabolic Surgery, London, said that better access to bariatric surgery – including gastric bypass, gastric banding, and sleeve gastrectomy – would see a 45 per cent decrease in medications related to obesity, a return to normal blood glucose levels and no further need for insulin in most patients.

Prejudice against the obese (and therefore people with T2D) is often

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25 SEPTEMBER 2017

Is personalised cancer medicine the future?

Finding the right treatment for the right patient at the right time – is that the key to beating cancer? Leading experts will be talking about the cutting edge interventions and treatments being used as the quest for more personalised cancer medicine gathers pace.

Understand the rise of 'omics', and learn about biotechnological advances, vaccines and more. You will have a chance to put questions to the panel including:

- Prof Mark Caulfield, chief scientist at Genomics England
- Prof Nigel Bundred, professor of surgical oncology,

University Hospital of South Manchester NHS Trust.

■ Prof Simon Leedham, director, Centre for Personalised Medicine, the Wellcome Trust Centre for Human Genetics, Oxford

● **Date:** Monday, 25 September, 2017

● **Time:** 6.30-9pm

● **Venue:** The King's Fund, 11-13 Cavendish Square, London, W1G 0AN

This event is sponsored by **Genomic Health**



Is NHS prejudice failing obese patients?

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based on the mistaken belief that it is easy to lose weight if a person wants to, said Prof Batterham.

“Despite Einstein’s first law of thermodynamics indicating that if you eat less you will lose body fat, the multiple systems of biology controlling food intake, including the brain’s reward system, mean it is not that simple.”

In fact, most people eat because they see food or because food is present, not because of hunger, she said.

Additionally, once we become obese our biology changes permanently to keep us at our highest body weight by increasing interest in food and reducing energy expenditure.

However, said Prof Francesco Rubino, chair of Bariatric and Metabolic Surgery, King’s College London, bariatric surgery re-sets the body and brain hormone systems so that weight is kept off.

Fifty organisations worldwide have endorsed gastrointestinal surgery for T2D, said Prof Rubino, making it one of the most well-supported procedures in medicine. In America it is the standard treatment for T2D and Diabetes UK has endorsed it, along with obesity organisations, yet it is still inaccessible to 99 per cent of patients in the UK. He agreed with Prof Batterham that part of the problem stems from the conventional view of how the body controls weight.

“The idea that eating too much and exercising too little is to blame for an inability to lose excess weight is outdated,” he said. Similarly, he added, the conventional view of T2D is that if people lose weight and lose body fat their diabetes can be reversed.



● Above: Prof Rubio makes his presentation



Left: Susan Aldridge and Michele Simmons discussing the event

However, there must be other mechanisms at play because T2D goes into remission on the day after bariatric surgery – suggesting that diabetes is a disease of the gut.

For example, shortening the intestine stops food and nutrients triggering neural circuits from the gut to the brain, resulting in lower glucose production. Gut microbial colonies also alter as a result of surgery, producing a higher metabolic rate and better glucose control.

Yet despite the success of bariatric surgery for T2D, there were fewer than 6,000 operations last year – possibly

because funding has now passed to the newly-formed Clinical Commissioning Groups (CCGs) which are categorising it along with breast reduction and cosmetic varicose vein treatments.

Prof Batterham said the CCGs’ resistance to pay for bariatric surgery for people who have had T2D for 10 years or less was a false economy because long-term medical complications will end up costing seven to 10 times as much. It also discriminated against obese people.

“What they don’t realise,” she added, “is that this surgery can give these patients their lives back.”

What does it take to succeed as a freelance health writer today?

How Guild member Jane won top award

Guild member Jane Feinmann has been named Freelance of the Year for a portfolio of work published by *Mosaic*, the *Daily Mail* and the *BMJ*. The judges said Jane’s “engaging journalism” illustrated the ability and skills needed to adapt to very different audiences.

We asked her how she did it. This is what she said:

“The Freelance of the Year award – given by the Medical Journalists’ Association – required entrants to demonstrate the ability ‘to adapt to different audiences’. It could have been designed for me, that is, someone who has built up commissioning editor contacts over the years and still hungry enough, I guess, to make the effort to pin down the story and sell it in.

Three examples of work had to be submitted. My *BMJ* piece was a report on the Guild’s November 2016 ‘Diabetes and Diet’ meeting.

Former co-chair, Michele Simmons had invited me to help organise the meeting after my blog* on the subject was shortlisted for last year’s awards.

I chaired the meeting but at the last minute also took notes to ensure coverage of the high-quality panel of speakers debating this crucial issue. With a GP nose, the story walked into the *BMJ* news pages, a section I’ve written for over several years.

The *Daily Mail* spread** was one of a number of pieces I’m proud to have contributed to the paper’s Good Health section. The desk commissioned the piece, supplying the hook for a subject I’ve been interested in for years.

My job was to meet a tight deadline while fitting in a face-to-face interview



● Above from left: Kaye McIntosh, editor/writer and judge, Jane Feinmann, and Sian Williams, broadcaster and 2017 awards host



Left: Jane in front of the legendary Genghis Khan in Mongolia

with a recently bereaved widower and attending a lecture on ‘soul midwifery’ at St James’s Piccadilly.

What won the prize, I think, was the long-form article about healthcare in Mongolia published by *Mosaic****.

I’d been encouraged to pitch ideas to the online open access magazine by a former commissioning editor who had moved to *Mosaic* on the closure of *The Indy* in March 2016.

Around June, she was given responsibility for a group of pieces, commissioned by the Gates Foundation, to test the impact of long-form journalism in spreading innovation in low and middle income countries.

During the summer, I kept an eye out for suitable ideas – including discussing possible pitches for *Mosaic* with Sarah Kessler, director of communications at Lifebox, a charity promoting safe global anaesthesia.

The story gelled only in early September when Sarah attended the World Congress of Anaesthesiologists in Hong Kong and saw a presentation by the Mongolian anaesthetist and academic, Dr Ganbold Lundeg.

One of his slides was a picture of a Caesarean section, carried out by torchlight in a ‘ger’ in remotest Mongolia where the use of a Lifebox

pulse oximeter contributed to saving the life of the nomad mother and baby.

Mosaic accepted a pitch based around this extraordinary home visit. Within the month, I staggered off the plane at Ulaanbaatar airport conscious that, as that nomad mother and child could not be tracked down, my priority on a week’s trip was to persuade busy Mongolian anaesthetists to help me find a named case study.

Oh and it had to be someone whose life was saved by emergency surgery, lived in the remote Steppes and, of course, had a fab back story. I needn’t have worried. Mongolian culture mixes a sense of adventure with limitless empathy and generosity. I had all the help I needed and more. ”

* healthinsightuk.org/2015/09/29/time-for-diabetes-uk-to-unplug-ears-and-respond-to-chorus-of-disapproval-demanding-u-turn/

** dailymail.co.uk/health/article-431088/soul-midwives

*** mosaicscience.com/story/safer-surgery-pulse-oximeter-mongolia

MEMBERS' NEWS



Health award for Jo

JO WATERS has been named Health Journalist of the Year 2017 by the Health Food Manufacturers' Association (HFMA). The award recognizes the best of journalism covering the natural health industry.

Robert Taylor, HFMA chair, (above with Jo) said: "Jo's wealth of knowledge and dedication to natural health reporting makes her an inspiring story-teller and advocate for our industry. She is not afraid to challenge conventional wisdom when needed, and to offer her advice and expertise on prevention and natural solutions."

Jo said: "I'm honoured to receive this award and feel extremely privileged to have been able to earn a living for so long writing about a subject I'm still totally fascinated by."

Where to find therapy to help troubled teens

PARENTS worried about their children's mental health can find a suitable therapist thanks to a new adolescent questionnaire which has been set up on welldoing.org, the independent therapy directory and information resource founded by **LOUISE CHUNN**.

She says: "With teens, the route to wellness does not seem clear, whether you're dealing with OCD or depression, eating disorders or gender dysphoria.



And for some teens, the search may simply be for a therapist who will help them feel heard and understood.

"We believe our questionnaire will be sensitive to their needs, and – most importantly – useful in finding the right therapist for them."

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IN BRIEF

■ **IF YOU** don't already pay your annual membership fees by standing order, it would be helpful to the Guild if you set one up. It's easy enough to do if you have online banking – you just need to contact the office at admin@healthwriters.com for your renewal date and the Guild's bank details. Use your name as the reference when filling in the bank's online form. Once you've set up a standing order you won't have to worry about forgetting to

pay and you can cancel or amend it at any time.

■ **WANT TO** sound off about something that's made you mad or highlight something that's piqued your interest? Just post on our Facebook page. You can also flag up a forthcoming feature or simply share a fascinating fact. So sign up if you haven't already and join the conversation. You can log in via the Guild website and

click on the Facebook icon at the top of the page.

■ **HAVE YOU** remembered to include all your commercial interests in your Guild Directory entry? To check, log on to our website, healthwriters.com, then go to the members' area and click on Edit Profile which can be found in the list on the left-hand side of the page.

The GUILD OF HEALTH WRITERS Guild of Health Writers

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Members are very welcome to send in contributions to Health Writer and to submit ideas for events and workshops. Copy to Editor, Lee Rodwell at mail@leerodwell.com

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Ethical vitamins with an organic heart

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For further information on Members' News and forthcoming events visit: www.healthwriters.com