

IN CONVERSATION WITH

ONLINE
EXCLUSIVE

Jo Cresswell

We were delighted to catch up with **Jo Cresswell, Vice-President of BAUS**, about her career highlights and views on urology in general.

Can you tell us a little bit about what led you into the field of urology and what have been the highlights so far?

An opportunity to spend time in the operating theatre whilst a medical student made me realise that surgery was the career for me. I did not know anything about urology at that time. That came later as an SHO. Like so many trainees, it was the wonderful urologists I met who convinced me that this would be my vocation.

The highlights are too numerous to mention. The sense of achievement as a trainee performing my first TURP, nephrectomy, etc. My appointment as a Consultant Urologist. My time as Training Programme Director and tenure as Chair of the BAUS Section of Oncology stand out as particularly enjoyable.

The honour of representing the BAUS members as their President is by far and away the highlight of my career so far.

Who has inspired you in your career and why?

As a trainee in the North of England I was fortunate to work with inspiring urologists who shared their passion for the specialty. I worked with great surgeons, researchers and compassionate doctors. Rob Pickard, David Thomas, Janet Whiteway and David Neal were amongst those early role models. Between them they have inspired me in different ways, and I am very proud to take into my practice some of what they have taught me.

We all need re-energising from time to time, and I find increasingly I am inspired by the trainees I meet. The young doctors I work with at South Tees, and those I interact with through BAUS and other organisations, are dedicated and caring people from whom I have learned a lot.

What has been the best piece of advice that you have received in your career and what advice would you offer to those following in your footsteps?

A registrar in surgery, when I was a house officer, told us all that, "It's nice to be important, but it is more important to be nice". This has resonated throughout my career and my interpretation is that it's not about the title or role you take, it's about how you use that opportunity. Never forget to be kind.

My advice for others would be, "If it feels right, do it". By this I mean that if you enjoy aspects of your work, make the most of those opportunities. Don't worry too much about making strategic choices in your career, take the opportunities that appeal to you and make the most of them. You will be most successful at the things you enjoy, and others will enjoy working with you.

What one paper or book would you recommend every urologist should read?

I note that *First do no Harm* by Henry Marsh has already been mentioned in your In Conversation series. I would advocate every surgeon read this book!



The other book that I have recommended to professional colleagues and friends is *The Chimp Paradox* by Steve Peters. A fascinating insight into human nature and how we react to challenges. Whether you are performing a difficult operation, having a challenging conversation or negotiating an exposed mountain climb, remember to keep feeding the chimp a banana.

You are of course the current Vice-President of BAUS – what has been your experience of the role so far?

I became BAUS Vice-President in June 2020. Unsurprisingly, the transition into the role was overshadowed by other events in 2020. The incredible amount of work undertaken by the Trustees, Sections and Office team has surprised me, even as someone who has worked with BAUS for many years. The team are very supportive of each other, innovative in their response to challenge and very industrious.

I have thoroughly enjoyed the last few months and believe the opportunity for the Officers of BAUS (President, Secretary and Treasurer) to shadow the role for two years is vital.

I particularly want to congratulate Tim O'Brien on the positive and enthusiastic way he has embraced the challenge of the last year. His BAUS Presidency must be very different to how he had

imagined it. His drive and energy have been very important in capitalising on the opportunities presented by COVID and not dwelling on the negatives.

Next year you will become the first female President of BAUS. Do you think that urology has traditionally been a more male-dominated specialty, and if so, is that starting to change?

Clearly, urology, as for all surgical specialties, has traditionally been a specialty taken up by more men than women. For all of the reasons that surgery is supposedly a less attractive career for women, and in addition there is the perception of the nature of the work, with a predominance of male health issues.

There is no doubt that this is changing. Our specialty is innovative in every way – including technological advances, but also in embracing change in our working lives. I have received a lot of encouragement from fellow urologists (male and female) in taking on the BAUS Presidency which is testament to the typically open-minded approach of most urologists. The next natural development is just around the corner – when the characteristics of the President are unremarkable and we focus only on how to develop the specialty.

Do you think more needs to be done to make urology, and other surgical specialties, more inclusive?

A loaded question with only one answer – of course. It would be complacent to think otherwise. I am proud of BAUS and the strides made so far in becoming more inclusive. There is, however, clearly much more work required and I hope that I can influence this in a positive way over the next few years. Most of all we need to listen to each other and be empathetic to the challenges faced by everyone. Being inclusive means making BAUS an organisation for everyone passionate about urology. Single issue agendas will not be sustainable, we must be holistic so that everyone can feel the benefits of a more diverse and flexible specialty. Walking in

the shoes of another, will help us all understand what change needs to be nurtured and which values and traditions we should treasure and sustain.

What do you think have been the most exciting developments in urology in recent years?

My clinical interest has been focused on urological cancer. Throughout my career, minimally-invasive surgery has flourished with urology leading the way. I perform open, laparoscopic and robotic surgery and there is a place for each. The precision and views obtained using robotics are astonishing and I am sure I will see this surpassed again and again in the future.

The revolution for managing bladder cancer is being catalysed by many different groups and I look forward to participating in this pathway being transformed. There is so much we can adapt from the efficiency gains of the prostate cancer pathway to support patients with bladder cancer. I have had the opportunity to participate in webinars in many areas of urology over the last year, and I am particularly impressed by the innovative range of treatments available for BPH patients. I am looking forward to seeing the patient decision-making aids and waiting times catch up with the technology.

And finally, if you have any spare time, how do you like to relax?

For me it's not an "if". We all have to make space for ourselves, our families and friends. If this year has taught us nothing, it is that if we don't find a way to switch off, we can burn-out all too easily. I have always loved nature and the outdoors. Whenever I can I like to spend time in the hills of the UK or distant mountain ranges admiring the scenery. With recent restrictions, I have been lucky to be able to exercise other peoples' horses during lockdown and have loved learning the skills and art of horse-riding. A horse will tell you in no uncertain terms that you are not welcome if you are feeling agitated or stressed. Leave your baggage at work!

Many thanks for your time!