



YORK MEDICAL SOCIETY

MINUTES OF MEETING OF YORK MEDICAL SOCIETY Friday 19th March 2021

1. President's welcome
2. Minutes of the previous meeting
3. Apologies: None
4. New members: Maya Rashid and Jana Heinz, both Medical Students
5. Guest Speaker: Dr Richard Smith

This meeting was all held virtually on Zoom, with Sarah Anderson co-ordinating the IT
BMJ Editor to global health influencer; a conversation with Dr Richard Smith CBE

This meeting was conducted as a conversation between Prof Jim Drife and Dr. Richard Smith
CBE, former editor of the British Medical Journal (BMJ).

The conversation covered Dr Smith's (RS) career from medical school in Edinburgh, despite
being a Londoner, to today. It was at Edinburgh medical school that the two first became
friends. It was during this period that RS first began to question some of the validity of
modern medicine, citing Ivan Illich's phrase "modern medicine is the biggest threat to the
modern world".

Once he qualified, he worked for a while in New Zealand and published his first article for the
BMJ in 1977/8, and on his return to the UK he became an assistant editor of the BMJ. He also
became the BBC's TV doctor in 1983, at which point he discovered the difficulties of trying to
be an expert in all aspects of medicine whilst also presenting material in a format that could be

understood by the general public, despite the difficulties of having on one occasion Dame Edna Everage in the studio.

Once RS became editor of the BMJ in 1991 he set about making many changes to the journal, which were not always enthusiastically accepted by all members of the British Medical Association. RS pointed out that the BMJ is in fact a large commercial organisation, publishing many journals and books, so at the age of 38 he attended Stanford business school, an experience which much to his surprise he gained a lot from and enjoyed.

On leaving the BMJ in 2004 he joined the United Health Group, and he admitted that many people saw this as selling out to big business. From this he developed the Oventions initiative to combat chronic disease in the developing world by funding centres in many poor countries. He then took a two-month sabbatical in Venice to write "The Trouble with Medical Journals" which was very critical appraisal of current scientific publishing. He continues to challenge orthodoxy in the health care industry.

He said that he had learnt from his brother, stand-up comedian Arthur Smith, when to stop before the last bad joke spoilt the evening.

Members thanked RS for a stimulating and entertaining evening.

6. Any other business:

7. Date of Next Meetings:

Friday 16th April – Dr Neil Metcalfe – *100 Notable Names from General Practice*

Friday 30th April – Dr Stuart Calder – Spring Wine Tasting

Friday 14th May – Annual General Meeting

Meeting attended by 50 to 60

Minutes taken by Mike Stower