# WIMIN - Where Q3 Doctors Promote Productivity in Healthcare

And Put Conferences on Skis

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Women in Medicine (& Me)

Probably one of the best conferences I've ever been to, and a whole new design for education. Two hours of lectures in the morning, two hours in the late afternoon. In between, skiing down glorious Italian Alps on blissfully empty slopes, and going up the lifts with an ever-changing gallery of the 22 brilliant doctors I was with, debriefing the lectures and the learning.

Each segment was three different speakers, with 20-minute TED-like presentations, ample time to ask questions and dig deeper, grouped by theme. All in a charming little hotel we had completely overtaken, which has been hosting this conference for the past five years, overseen by owner Francesca who proudly feeds and nurtures her brilliant charges. Oh yes, did I say they were all women?

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The January conference, which comes mid-way between the year of the larger Women in Medicine (WIMIN) conferences run each September, is the brain child of Drs. Kate Stannard and Helen Payne. “We paid a lot of money to go to conferences that weren't addressing our learning needs,” explains Stannard. Tired of the more mass, male-dominated conferences with very different cultures and much more siloed specialist exchanges, WIMIN aims to create a more human-scaled alternative, where women can connect across silos, disciplines and geographies. They did.

* * *

Here's a pic of the classic alternative, the Doctors Updates conference in Val d'Isère next week:

Instead, we had a quiet U-shaped room with surgeons, paediatricians, anaesthetists and dermatologists from across the UK, sharing experiences, success stories and ongoing challenges. When tongues loosen and the stories start to pour forth (they talk very, very fast), the image is of a life lived a bit like skiing, racing down a too-steep slope, slaloming for dear life. For non-medical folk like me, it's a glimpse into a high-pressure, life and death world that most normal humans have no idea of.

Post-Sauna, Dr Helen Payne Introducing My Talk (A First)

I felt incredibly privileged to be allowed in. It felt like a visit to the front lines of an ongoing crisis, with a group of super committed, super caring humans frustrated by a dysfunctional system they are holding up by sheer will (and not much sleep). Here's a tiny excerpt of some of the subjects that were discussed and the snippets I grabbed that might be of interest to ***elderberries*** readers. I'm not including presentations specifically about the state of the NHS or the UK, which were eye-opening but not necessarily of interest to all my (rather international) readers. You can check out the full conference agenda. Here's what one non-medical person left with:

* * *

## Cognitive Health - The Mind/ Body Connection

One in three people born in the UK today will develop dementia, and 2/3 of Alzheimer's patients are women. Yet less than 5% of dementia cases are genetic or inherited, said Dr Kirsten Macdonald, Consultant Intensivist & ED medicine. Usually, the disease begins 15-20 years before the symptoms manifest, and though not yet totally understood, seems due to inflammation which leaves deposits in the brain. It's thought to be caused by insulin resistance and so is often referred to as Type 3 diabetes. You can stimulate healthy brain growth into your 90s with a mix of solutions, including the usual recipes: diet, stress, sleep, healthy gut microbiomes (increasingly relevant), hormones and cognitive reserves.

Connecting Mind & Body

## What is Life Style Medicine?

The emerging field of life style medicine**,** aka behaviour change through person-centred techniques, may be gaining ground. Dr Julie Naylor, a Consultant Anaesthetist, said that half the UK population reported long-standing health problems in 2022, so finding new ways towards a more preventive approach to care sounds urgent. Lifestyle medicine covers a “bio-psycho-social approach” integrating education, access to health care, neighbourhoods and built environment contexts, social and community contexts and economic realities. And tries to build on the 6 pillars of good health:

- Sleep
- Physical activity
- Nutrition
- Wellbeing and mental health
- Social connectivity
- Avoidance of harmful substances

## Ultra-Processed Food - You Are What You Eat

The news on obesity and nutrition continues appalling, but the scale of it isn't always recognised, nor the determined pushing of unhealthy food from big corporates who have perfected marketing, packaging and motivational techniques that get us hooked. While a lot of attention right now is on the addictive dangers of social media, this presentation by Dr Emma Townsend Consultant ED medicine, really woke me up to the addictive dangers of something equally omnipresent - but required for life: food.

The first case in the Western world of an obese child who lost his sight from malnutrition has surfaced in the UK. And the mother wanted to blame the NHS. Children are becoming shorter due to their diets and lack of exercise. Some of the doctors shared horror stories of kids needing metal splints to support leg bones that couldn't carry their weight. And the challenge of too many doctors not having the courage to have the necessary conversations with parents and the dancing around the politically charged issues of fat-shaming.

The finger is being increasingly pointed at ultra-processed food or UPFs (now recognised and classified in NOVA Group 4 thanks to some Brazilian researchers). Read the book Ultra-Processed People by Chris Van Tulleken for more. The US and the UK are the worst. In the UK, fully 50% of household food purchases are UPFs, compared to 13-14% in France and Italy (where we ate amazingly - and healthily - all week).

A chilling outline of the different terms and techniques that food companies have perfected to make UPFs increasingly attractive and - perhaps - addictive (the latter a point central to the health debate):

> o **Vanishing calorific density** - food that requires no chewing, and literally melts in your mouth
>
> o **Sonic branding** - particular sounds, as in the pull on a can of pop – and how pleasingly familiar the melody of a click or a tear can become.
>
> o **Snackification** - encouraging people to eat between meals.
>
> **o Stomach share** - the battle over what gets ingested.

**More? Recommended Reading**

- Health Impacts of UPFs on the UK government website, by the Scientific Advisory Committee on Nutrition or SACN

## The Other Dangers of Obesity

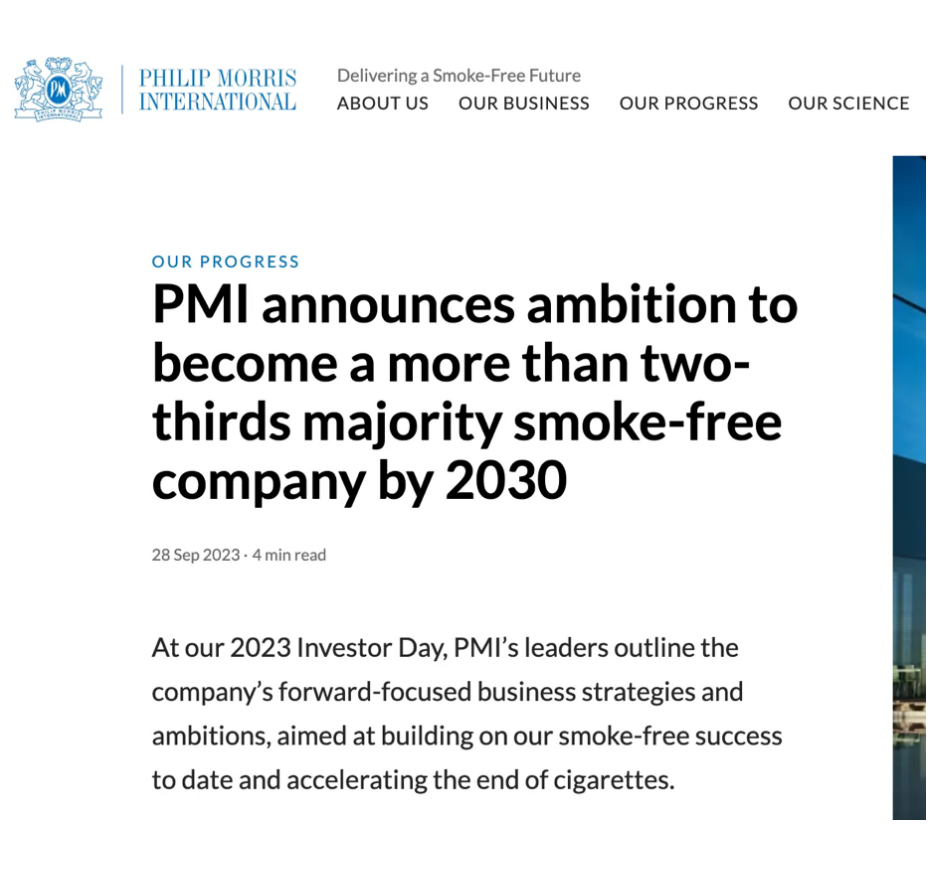
Dr Christina Schneider-Smith is an anesthetist specialised in difficult airways and allergies. She gave a rather terrifying presentation on the challenges in the operating theatre of actually having to get obese people treated properly. From fitting them onto operating tables not designed for their size, to getting access to airways to get drugs through, everything is vastly complicated by bodies not designed for BMIs that can hit 60 or 70.

The WHO has declared a global obesity epidemic, but the term itself is debated and differs from region to region. Just this week The Economist wrote about the latest agreed definitions in Is Obesity a Disease?. And again, doctors are dancing around the difficulty of actually addressing people's weight directly with the patients - before they are being operated on. Even if their weight dramatically increases the risks inherent in any operation.

“Up to 42% of adults live in ‘larger bodies,' says Scheider-Smith, “and have no idea how difficult and risky their situations are. No one tells them anything. Surgeons don't dare raise the issue beforehand - nor tell them to lose weight.” Yet they are particularly hard to anesthetise - and take far more time from the already time-stretched NHS to operate on. Time which is not usually factored in when bringing such patients in. The numbers keep increasing…

## Medical Effects of Vaping

Food companies may be replacing the tobacco companies as today's bad guys, but don't think the tobacco companies have disappeared. They've morphed into an absurd attempt at doing good by getting people off cigarettes… and into vaping. Check out the language on Philip Morris' (whose tag line is now ‘delivering a smoke-free future') website:



PHILIP MORRIS INTERNATIONAL

Delivering a Smoke-Free Future

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OUR PROGRESS

PMI announces ambition to become a more than two-thirds majority smoke-free company by 2030

28 Sep 2023 · 4 min read

At our 2023 Investor Day, PMI's leaders outline the company's forward-focused business strategies and ambitions, aimed at building on our smoke-free success to date and accelerating the end of cigarettes.

Dr Nicky Deary said that 20% of 11 to 17-year-old kids in the UK have tried vaping, and that sadly it seems to be a majority of girls. If you thought this was somehow getting them off nicotine, think again. The little 10ml cartridges that are sold with the liquid in them that gets heated up to create the vapour (and that you now find littering the streets instead of the newly-innocent old tobacco butt) are equivalent to the nicotine found in two packs of cigarettes.

> **The nicotine in one 10ml vaping cartridge = 2 packs of cigarettes**

Oh yes, and we should of course mention that the companies plugging this stuff have created a full range of colourful, candy-flavoured products aimed directly at kids. Thirty-three countries have started banning vaping, and the UK ban on single-use cartridges comes into effect this June.

Soul Sisters (Dr Aoife Hegarty)

## Skin Deep: Debunking Myths

Dermatologist Dr. Susannah Baron shared her top tips for skincare, which hilariously had 22 doctors on the edge of their seats. They are women after all. So, basically, you can throw out most of your skincare products says Baron. You just don't need that much, and most of what is being sold to you is more marketing bumpf. Like the vaping/tobacco companies, cosmetic companies are getting good at packaging products in colourful names and brands to get young girls hooked on regimes they don't need. Check out Drunk Elephant for an example.

Whether your skin ages as gracefully as the rest of you depends on factors well outside the realm of what you put on it. “It's all bollocks,” says Dr. Baron. Sun exposure is the No.1 hit to your skin health, especially for white people. Then check stress, sleep, smoking, pollution and your mom's skin (poor moms, another thing to blame on them).

So what can you do? OK, here's Dr. Baron's hit list:

- **NO SOAP**: don't wash your face with soap or toners or anything. Just use a gentle cleanser (Ceravie, Cetaphil) and wipe it off.
- **NO SUN:** Make sure your sun protection includes UVA + UVB + Visible Light - and wear it always. Then add hat and clothes. Basically, ban the sun from touching skin you care about.
- **Vitamin C in the morning:** antioxidant in the morning (Skinceuticals, Ordinary, La Roche Posay, Medik8)
- **Retinol in the evening:** The only thing that really works, she says, is retinol, which she recommends using at night, in gradually increasing doses of Tretinoin Cream, up to 0.1%
    - she recommends signing up to Klira.com, started by Dr Emma Craythorne, which sends you monthly creams in gradually increasing doses.
    - if you're interested, email me and Dr. Baron can sign you up.

I haven't used soap in decades, thanks to my ex-husband's use of Cetaphil, which I lazily adopted. And I also use their moisturiser. That's about it. I'm a huge sceptic on all companies and messages that target women's insecurities. But I'm a happy guinea pig on simple innovations that keep us healthy. And having seen my father-in-law struggle with frail skin, I know how much health *isn't* covered by the term ‘skin deep.' Skin is important! I've signed up to Klira and will let you know what I think. All the doctors were exchanging their purchases after her talk.

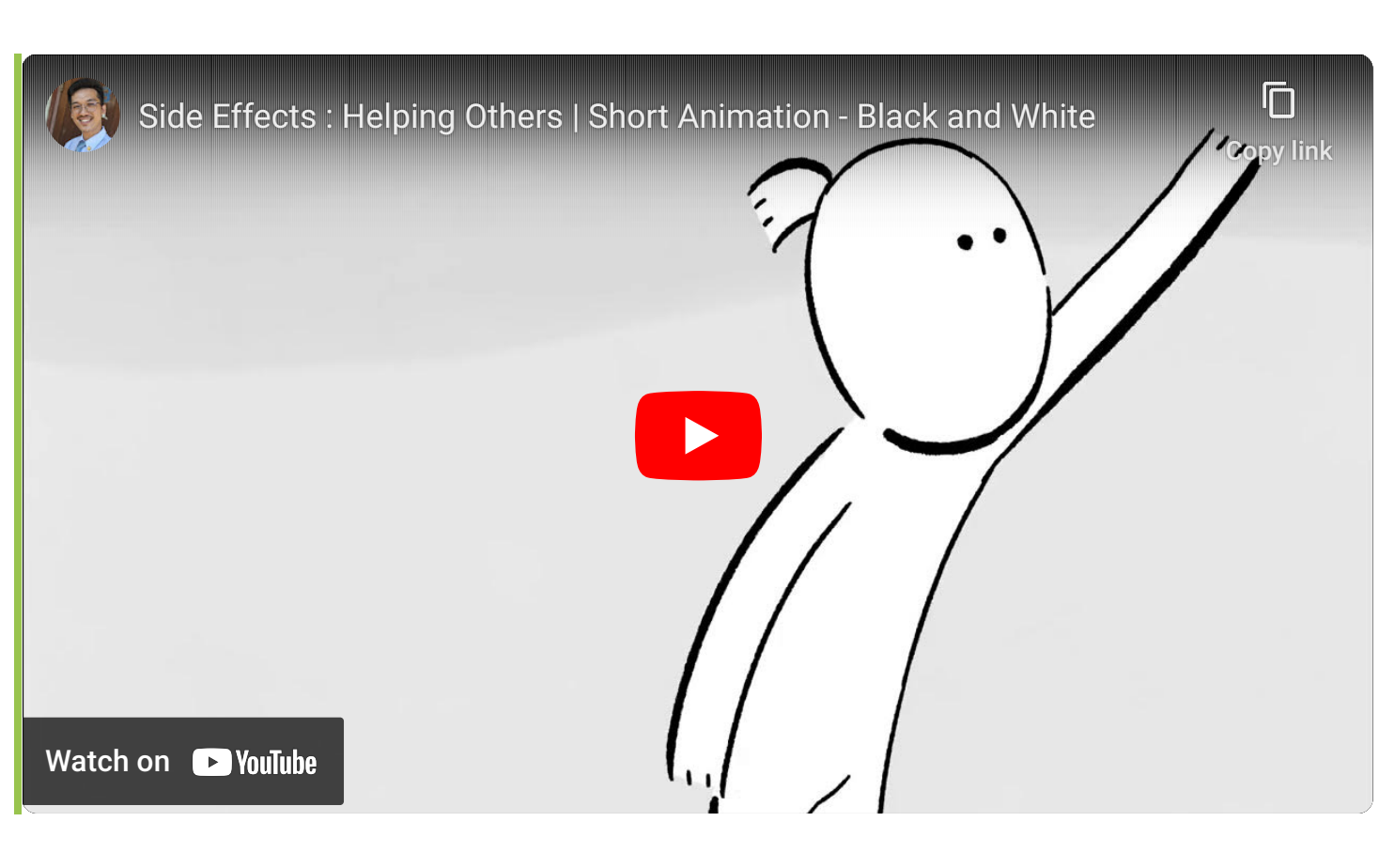
Blissful Bombardinos

## Vicarious Trauma – Who is Looking After Us?

Dr. Kate Stannard gave a powerful presentation on the toxic culture many women and doctors are facing in the NHS, which I wrote about in my FORBES column. After endless reports without adequate responses, sexual harassment, dysfunctional teams and overly hierarchical structures remain common.

Psychiatrist Dr Ivana Pristicova asked a powerful question: Who is looking after all the doctors who are looking after us? There is not much space or time carved out for doctors to express or exchange about the many traumatic, life-altering events they experience in a day. They often bury traumas deep down, and find they are triggered, often much later, in unexpected ways and circumstances.

Trauma comes from the Greek word for wound. And ‘vicarious trauma' refers to the cumulative effect of exposure to someone else's trauma. She recommended this TED talk, Drowning in Empathy, which explains the particular challenges of ‘compassion fatigue' and how it differs from burnout. It's literally about taking others' pain on. This simple animation illustrates the concept beautifully:



Side Effects : Helping Others | Short Animation - Black and White
Copy link
Watch on YouTube

* * *

I could easily imagine these caring, wonderful women falling prey to this sort of over-diligence. I've rarely enjoyed such a warm, generous, nurturing group of women - on and off the slopes. They were incredibly, joyously inclusive, and gifted me three things:

1. **The Joy of Skiing**: I haven't skied for well over a decade, mostly because my second husband doesn't ski and my kids grown and gone. At 63, I had imagined that my skiing days were behind me. My inner ageist was alive and kicking, unlike my inner ski-buff. But when Dr. Stannard invited me to ski-and-speak with her WIMIN's group, I couldn't resist. I used to adore skiing, and the temptation of revisiting the magic of the winter Alps was too great. How, I now wonder, could I have given it up so easily? And how much safer can you feel than skiing surrounded by two dozen medical doctors, including surgeons and emergency room experts?

2. **The Shock of Strength**: After a gentle start, I rediscovered the sheer delight of whizzing down wondrously beautiful (and largely empty) Italian slopes, slaloming surprisingly expertly. I couldn't believe the ease and strength that rose to meet my limited and cautious expectations. I was expecting feebleness, I was rewarded with joy. I blessed the trainers who made me pump all those damn weights these past two years. It works! I'm probably stronger at 63 than I ever was before. My legs weren't sore, I had no stiffness, and I kept up with the best of them (they were a pretty impressive group of speedy skiers).
3. **The Blessing of Care**: My son called up late in the week with a terrifying scare about my new little 3-month-old granddaughter. Some routine post-natal exam had identified an extremely rare, life-transforming metabolic disorder. My roommate overheard the conversation and immediately went and got our new friend, Dr. Miriam Fine-Goulden. She's a Consultant Paediatric Intensivist at Evelina Children's Hospital in London, a world leader. She sat on the edge of my bed at 11pm, talking and listening to my son and the diagnosis he had received in Senegal - from doctors who had never seen a case of this disease. She was dubious about the test's accuracy and connected me with a colleague who specialises in exactly this illness. The kids had a call with her the next day. She was dubious too. It seems there are a lot of false positives for this condition. Baby is being retested. And we are crossing our fingers and holding our breath.

   The synchronicity of being with the right people at just the right time for my faraway little grandkid kinda blows my mind. I'm in deep gratitude to Miriam, and all these doctors. For what they do, for how they care, and how they just barrel down slopes, over toxic cultures and through insufficient means with compassion, style and endless, caustic humour.

Apres-ski

I left more than ever convinced of the power of Q3 women, and why the world needs them. More than ever. More masculine cultures, Zuck? We all need more wise women. And I'm going to spend the next few years helping raise their voices. More on that anon.

For now, I'm in deep gratitude for the gifts this year has started with. May your year surprise you too with moments of joy, discover unexpected strengths within you, and reveal the kindness of new friends. When there is great darkness, the light shines most brightly.

Shine on.

* * *

## Recommended Read

The Vajenda

**The Shingles Vaccine is the Longevity Hack that Already Exists**

I finally had my second dose of the shingles vaccine last week. I'm a little late, as the vaccine is currently recommended here in the United States for everyone aged 50 and older (and for those aged 19 and older with a suppressed immune system). I am 58 years old…

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