



INNOVATIVE THINKING FOR A HEALTHIER WORLD

The Right Honourable Professor Lord Darzi of Denham is one of the world's leading surgeons and a trailblazer in healthcare reform. The Executive Chair of the World Innovation Summit for Health (WISH) explains why health systems around the globe must change.

Q You are renowned as an international advocate for healthcare improvement, most notably due to your former roles as British Government Minister and reformer of the UK's National Health Service. How does your role with WISH fit into this work?

A Innovation is the key to change. That is the belief around which I have based my entire career, and it is also the central idea of WISH.

The fact is, radical innovation is necessary to meet the global health challenges that are entrenching themselves even now. Issues like mental health and obesity – the immensely complicated issues that every country struggles with in different ways, so the only realistic way to address them is for different governments, businesses, non-governmental organizations, innovators and other groups to come together and actually commit to changing things in new ways.

In December, Qatar Foundation (QF) will launch the first WISH at the Qatar National Convention Centre, building on the Global Health Policy Summit held in London in August last year. Her Highness Sheikha Moza bint Nasser, the Chairperson of QF, has been the real driving force behind WISH. Her passion for health and innovation has led to a project on the scale of what we currently see – a summit with a genuine aspiration to become the Davos of healthcare. We will host more than 500 senior health policy-makers and reformers, including heads of state, government ministers, academics, and representatives of non-government organizations.

I became involved after a discussion with Her Highness about how to deliver innovative solutions to global health issues. We shared a concern that although excellent research was being done, it took too long for innovation to actually take place in ways that benefited normal people. This was very much in line with the aspirations of the organization I founded, The Institute for Global Health Innovation, at Imperial College London.

It helps that Qatar's leaders have put such an emphasis on good healthcare. The National Cancer Strategy and National Primary Health Care Strategy, both of which I have had the privilege of working on, are two examples of their leadership and commitment.

Q Your career as a surgeon and researcher has led to important new techniques and technologies in the fields of minimally invasive (keyhole) surgery and robot-assisted surgery. How do you see these fields developing in the near future?

A I have been interested in innovation since I was at medical school in Dublin. At first, in the 1990s, I

worked on the development of keyhole surgery, and then in the early 2000s I began exploring the possibilities of robotic surgery.

I always believed that healthcare had the potential to become smaller, less cumbersome, and more accessible.

For example, we are currently working on a smart knife that can sense when it comes into contact with cancerous tissue. It will allow surgeons to make sure that they remove entire tumors when they operate, rather than run the risk of leaving behind cancerous cells which then regrow. It is an excellent example of the potential of innovation because it will save lives, save money, and is easily possible to roll out to other operating theatres in different hospitals and countries.

Q Returning to the topic of your involvement with WISH and healthcare reform, what changes do you see ahead for patient care in the next decade?

A Given the current economic climate, the drivers of change in the next 10 years will center on what we need to do to improve quality of care, what we need to do to improve access to care, and how we can make care more cost-effective.

These are the three very important principles that are dictating change.

We need to find innovative solutions that are low cost and high impact.

In the 20th century, we were accustomed to healthcare systems designed to cope with the big burden of infectious disease – big hospitals which separated patients into different wings.

Now, in the 21st century, we need to look at models that are better designed to cope with the burden of chronic, or non-communicable diseases, using ideas such as 'hospital at home' services.

Q Considering how much you have accomplished in your career, can you give an insight into what sparks your thought processes?

A I always wake up in the morning excited about the opportunities that may arise from science and research.

I never lose hope that there could be a discovery or innovation that will deal with our four major problems – health, energy, climate, and security.

It is very difficult to guess what lies ahead, but the only lesson I have learned is to make sure to keep your eyes open, because there is always something around the corner.