

A celebration of change-making

BHMA conference 2024

David Peters, Editor in chief, JHH

This conference, organised by a body focused on holistic medicine, lived up to that ideal. It featured discussions on an impressive range of topics but always with the focus on human beings, humanising healthcare, understanding the multiple contributions to our health and searching for new and innovative ways to create health, ease suffering and tackle disease. The participants were mostly doctors from different backgrounds and generations who shared their ideas and experiences generously. It was a healthy antidote to the increasing segmentation and industrialisation of healthcare in the formal health systems of the world and pointed to several very important approaches to health that need to be at the heart of future developments. Several participants were innovative leaders in professional education.

Lord Crisp

Our conference was a celebration of the BHMA's 40th anniversary and its central theme was *Health Creation*. BHMA founders, current innovators and an incoming generation of change agents on the NHS frontline met in a spirit of co-creative collaboration to re-imagine what healthcare might look like if it were good not just for people, but also for practitioners and the planet.



Our one-day community of mind-body-spirit creatives set out to:

- appreciate 40 years of holistic developments in healthcare
- share concerns about current problems and the challenges ahead
- see the opportunities for creative change in our turbulent times
- consider how – personally and with others – we may act for 'deep adaptation'.

40 years of the BHMA!

In the heady days of 1983-4, while the Greenham Common Women's Camp was being born, a group of idealistic doctors founded the British Holistic Medical Association. They wanted to halt mainstream healthcare's slide into industrialised monoculture. They wanted to explore all that supports health creation and healing of body, mind and spirit. They wanted to free medicine from the grip of old institutions, from over-reliance on drugs and to be open to the

potential of other therapies. They wanted practitioners to nurture their own wellbeing, to flourish in the arduous work of caring for others.

In 1984 we laid out five key principles for developing holistic healthcare and setting out on that journey in practice:

- concern for the patient as a being of body, mind spirit seen in historical, social and political contexts
- the patient as a potential self-healing agent
- encouraging appropriate power sharing between doctor and patient
- being able to offer a wide range of interventions
- 'self-gardening' – doctors' responsibility for their own self-care and inner development.

It is no longer customary (in the UK at least) for newly qualifying doctors to routinely take the Hippocratic oath. If the oath needed a 21st century update, the five core commitments would be a firm foundation. The five seem less radical now than they were in 1984, yet on overstretched NHS frontlines in hospitals and GP centres can they be put into practice? If not what would have to change? The BHMA exists to ask the question, promote these values, and support those who are finding ways forward.

The future

Knowing that health, social justice and climate justice are intertwined, a more sustainable and compassionate health and social care is possible. But first we need to tell new stories. Because everywhere industrial medical systems face the same entwining crises of cash, care, cure and commitment; that 'business as usual' isn't working. Medicine is a child of its time and it reflects the culture it grew up in. It will change direction as we *all* begin to understand Big Health – that the health of humankind, the health of the plant and animal worlds and the health of Gaia's planetary systems are forever interwoven.

Next steps for the BHMA:

- curate and grow our network
- create spaces for active participation, connection and practice - events, webinars, communities of enquiry.
- tell the story, identifying influencers to help us amplify it#
- build our networks and develop the field, through linking, sharing, learning, researching.

Key areas to explore together:

- promoting the causes of health + patient-partnered care
- creating healthy and humane doctors through their medical education
- building intimacy with the self and other and relational rigour, to build back trust in each other and the healthcare system
- healthcare as a practice not a profession, and how we move away from doctors alone driving it
- the role of community in the future of healthcare, responding to the Darzi report
- how we influence system design – education, service provision, community health creation.

Dr Hugo Jobst, Professor Trevor Thompson and Professor Louise Younie discussed what's missing from medical education and why we need creative curriculum change.

In the session on the future of mental health Dr James Hawkins presented the potential of psychedelics. Dr Elizabeth Thompson suggested that integrating mind and body approaches could boost mental health. Dr Chris Johnstone proposed ways for sustaining health, hope and happiness in the climate crisis.

In these turbulent times there are opportunities to re-imagine new ways forward for creating health for working together as citizens and change agents. Round table discussions then considered:

- what's missing from medical education?
- why are so many medical students 'burned out'? How could creative curriculum change help new doctors not drop-out?
- the future of mental health and the place of psychedelics, would more integrated approaches boost mental health?
- can we sustain health, hope and happiness in the climate crisis?
- how to create health by working together?
- community-oriented integrated practice (COIP) which weaves a network of 'safe spaces' where participants can share different insights into life's complexities and take meaningful, coordinated next steps.

Finally, two wise elders steeped in organisational development, **Keith Humphrey and Lord Nigel Crisp**, offered feedback and suggestions for BHMA's next 40 years.

There has been a breakdown of trust because what's being delivered is not been great...we have to build intimacy with the self and the other.

Keith Humphrey, founder of Core Context Consultancy

A healthy community of younger and older generations. The theme of the day was people and relationships. I came away reinforced in my view that future health professionals need to be exposed to this wide range of ideas and approaches as part of their education so they can be true professionals and understand these wider aspects of health, healthcare, disease prevention and health creation even if they will ultimately practice only in some of these areas. We need to build our networks and develop the field, through linking, sharing, learning, researching and telling stories.

Lord Crisp, All-Party Parliamentary Group on Global Health co-chair

The BHMA Fellowship Awards were made to:

- **William House** much-loved Somerset GP and playwright who breathed enthusiasm into the BHMA as chairman from 2013 to 2020.
- **Elizabeth Thompson** integrative physician who founded the National Centre for Integrative Medicine in Bristol and a longtime supporter of BHMA's vision.
- **Trevor Thompson** one of medical education's leading creatives whose inspirational whole person care courses at Bristol University.

- **David Zigmond** urban GP and founding member of the BHMA who writes powerfully about healing relationships at the heart of holistic primary care.
- **Chris Johnstone** one of the BHMA's first student group, co-author of the Active Hope with th Joanna Macy. His College of Wellbeing is online <https://collegeofwellbeing.com>.
- **David Reilly** an originator of integrative medicine and a celebrated researcher who established Glasgow's Centre for Integrated Care – one of the field's finest teachers.
- **Catherine Zollman** one of the BHMA's first medical student group who was a long-serving trustee alongside her partner Jerome Ungoed-Thomas. Their commitment helped BHMA through challenging times.
- **Sarah Egger** psychiatrist, and founding member of BHMA, As Chair in the 1990s her steadiness and depth kept BHMA's leadership afloat in times when the Association's survival was in doubt.

Conference feedback and appreciation

BHMA is like the Kew Gardens of the medical world. Collecting and caring for seeds that are in danger of becoming extinct so at some point they will flourish. The current soil is eroded, dried out, but we at the BHMA are keeping the seeds.

David Zigmond

Inspiring conference, fabulous speakers and a wonderful merge of likeminded attendees, change-makers and innovators. A real privilege to attend.

Karla Hamlet Founder of NURSE Collective UK©+ Innovation Hub 💡

I loved this year's BHMA conference. It reminded me of the pivotal role the BHMA has played in shaping my development as a doctor and a person over the last 40 years. I saw again trusted mentors, colleagues in shared purpose and dear friends, reconnecting with an inspiring community I'm so pleased to be part of. I take away renewal in fellowship and my flow.

Chris Johnstone

Author/trainer/coach for Thrutopian Wellbeing

Great talks and presentations, interesting and important topics, brilliant people doing amazing things... and so lovely to reconnect and catch up with old friends too. All very special and inspirational – a wonderful gathering of the tribe and a huge honouring of everything BHMA has created and contributed over the last 40 years... a message ever-more needed in these troubled times.

Tania Dolley

Counselling psychologist

Special thank you's to

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Gail Davidson

The BHMA trustees

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- Vayika Gupta
- Inaya Sultana

whose posters will be published in the spring 2025 issue of JHH.