

Ten Minutes with Professor Andrew Rowland, Lead Employer Medical Director of St Helens and Knowlsey Teaching Hospitals NHS Trust, Honorary Professor at the University of Salford, Chair of SickKids children's charity, Non-Executive Director of M'Lop Tapang and Consultant in Children's Emergency Medicine

Joseph Home^{1,2}, Andrew Rowland^{1,2,3}

1 The Pennine Acute Hospitals NHS Trust, Delaunays Road, Manchester, M8 5RB

2 School of Health and Society, The University of Salford, Frederick Road, Salford, M6 6PU

3 Lead Employer Service, St Helens and Knowsley Teaching Hospitals NHS Trust, Floor 3, The Court, Alexandra Business Park, St Helens, Merseyside, WA10 3TP

Author Biographies

1st author

Dr Joseph Home is a Junior Doctor working in a medium sized District General Hospital in the United Kingdom. He has an interest in healthcare leadership and policy, having previously studied a post-graduate degree in medical law. He is also currently an Honorary Research Fellow at the University of Salford.

2nd author

Professor Rowland is a Consultant in Children's Emergency Medicine, Honorary Professor (Paediatrics), Non-Executive Director of M'Lop Tapang (a non-governmental organisation in Cambodia), Lead Employer Medical Director at St

Helens and Knowsley Teaching Hospitals NHS Trust and Chairman of the Board of Trustees of the SickKids charity (registered with the Charity Commission for England and Wales, 1164131). He has 17 years of national leadership, and ten years of international leadership, experience and expertise. This includes seven years in non-executive board-level director roles in multi-million Euro and multi-million Dollar organisations. Professor Rowland has specific interests in child rights law, children's advocacy and safeguarding vulnerable children.

As the Lead Employer Medical Director at St Helens and Knowsley Teaching Hospitals NHS Trust, the largest single employer of doctors in the National Health Service in England, he has a direct responsibility for over 10000 doctors and dentists in training and public health specialty trainees.

Professor Rowland was previously appointed the Head of the UK delegation to the Union Européenne des Médecins Spécialistes (UEMS). This included successfully negotiating the continued full membership of the UK within UEMS, regardless of the outcome of the Brexit negotiations between the UK government and the remaining EU27 States. Professor Rowland has been awarded the Association Medal of the British Medical Association and the Gold Decoration of Honour by the UEMS.

Correspondence:

Correspondence to Dr Joseph Home, Trust Headquarters, The Pennine Acute Hospitals NHS Trust, North Manchester General Hospital, Delaunays Road, Manchester, M8 5RB; joseph.home@pat.nhs.uk

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Abstract

Professor Rowland has several leadership roles spanning academic, NHS and charitable organisations. This short interview discusses the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic and how his approach to leadership has changed to cope with many challenges faced across his different roles.

Article

1. What are the key leadership messages you want to get out to the BMJ Leader readership?

My top three messages are:

1. **Do everything you can to ensure the organisation you work in has compassionate leadership embedded at its core. That starts with you and the influence you can have over other people**
2. **It is vital that each organisation has a just culture as one of its key values. How do you ensure that as a leader you are just, fair and transparent?**

3. Ensure you know what your values are and do everything in your power to ensure you stay true to these in your working life

2. Tell us a little bit about your leadership role and how it is changing as a result of the pandemic?

I'm in the lucky position of having a number of leadership roles: Lead Employer Medical Director for over 9500 doctors and dentists, and non-medically qualified public health trainees, in training in England; Honorary Professor (Paediatrics) at the University of Salford with research leadership roles in individual research studies; Consultant in Children's Emergency Medicine with the senior leadership activities that this entails; Non-Executive member of the Board of Directors of M'Lop Tapang; and chair of a children's charity (SicKids – 1164131). The COVID-19 pandemic has meant we have had to rapidly change our methods of working to remote (home) working for all of my roles. This means holding remote board meetings for the M'Lop Tapang Board and the Board of SicKids (as well as using our communication channel: Yammer), setting up my University office at home in my dining room, rapidly creating telephone and video conference calls with each of the HEE regions we cover around the country as Lead Employer, and ensuring I've had full availability to give remote advice to clinicians working in the Emergency Department, both about individual patients and from a governance, guidelines and strategy point of view.

3. What events in your past experience are most informing your leadership in this pandemic?

I've worked clinically in Cambodia since 2014 and have been a non-Executive Director of M'Lop Tapang (a non-governmental organisation in Cambodia) since 2015. Much of this work has been done remotely with monthly telemedicine clinics and educational discussions, lots of use of Skype (and other platforms) and significant e-mail contact. To some extent, the way we have had to rapidly change our communications in the UK during the COVID-19 pandemic have not been too dissimilar from the way I have worked in Cambodia since 2015. In addition, my humanitarian clinical work has given me significant clinical and leadership skills of being able to rapidly adapt to changing circumstances in a low-resource environment. These have made me much better able to deal with changing priorities in the NHS and rapidly-developing clinical circumstances during the pandemic.

4. What are you finding the biggest challenges?

There are so many guidelines, the situation has been so rapidly changing, there have been multiple new processes to get used to and having my office based at home has meant it can be difficult to switch-off and have some time away from work. I've pretty much worked flat-out since 9 March 2020 with very few days completely away from work. However, that very acute phase appears to now be drawing to a close.

5. Any particular surprises?

I've been surprised about how exhausting it is continually working from home and not being able to get fully away from work for the past four months. For the future there are three strategies that I think will be helpful. First, turn off the work telephone when not on-duty and there is no requirement to be contactable. Second, book some days off work (either as leave or time off in lieu) regularly – and have proper days away from work, even if this just involves a walk, a TV day, a socially-distant catch up from family or friends (when the rules permit) or some time doing something one enjoys such as a hobby. Make sure these are protected. Third, book some annual leave to look forward to. I know that the days off, where I will be completely away from work and definitely will be turning off my telephone, in July and August are days I've been looking forward to since March.

6. Are you seeing any behaviours from colleagues that encourage or inspire you?

I'm inspired by people who have been standing up for the rights of other people, particularly vulnerable people, during this pandemic. People who are ensuring that, for example, children are not forgotten and their rights are protected; people who are ensuring colleagues are supported and wellbeing is at the forefront of their minds; and my academic colleagues who have gone above and beyond to respond to the urgent research needs during this pandemic.

7. How are you maintaining kindness and compassion?

I think it is always important to remember that every day everyone is facing some kind of battle that you know nothing about. That may not be something that might seem significant to you and it might not be something you would consider to be life changing, but it is important to the other person. People who are working at home through this pandemic are doing so in difficult circumstances – often having to juggle complex domestic arrangements at the same time as delivering high quality patient care. Colleagues who cannot work at home have been involved in clinical situations that they may never have predicted would occur in their careers and members of the community are facing the effects of huge numbers of deaths, both in our country and around the world. This has got to have long-term effects on society and the people within it. Treating everyone as an individual, not setting unrealistic expectations and encouraging people to have as much flexibility as they need in their work-life-balance are all crucial.

8. Are there any ideas or readings that you find helpful, for inspiration and support, which you would recommend to others?

Since 2014 I've been proud to be a Fellow of the Winston Churchill Memorial Trust and I try to lead my life (both at home and at work) with one of Sir Winston's quotes at the forefront of everything I do:

“What is the use of living, if it be not to strive for noble causes and to make this muddled world a better place for those who will live in it after we are gone?”.

Whilst looking back into history for inspiration might be problematic for a number of reasons, that quote is something, regardless of one's political views or opinions of Churchill as a person, that could bring a better society in the future if more people live by those principles (not forgetting, of course, the present).

For those of you who are James Bond fans and remember M's speech in Skyfall (or for the literary purists, those who read Tennyson), I think you'll see why this powerful piece really fits with the pandemic we now find ourselves in:

“though much is taken, much abides; and though we are not now that strength which in old days moved earth and heaven, that which we are, we are; one equal temper of heroic hearts, made weak by time and fate, but strong in will; to strive, to seek, to find, and not to yield”.

I'm a paediatrician by background and other things that I think suit the position we are in at the moment are:

“No matter what people tell you, words and ideas can change the world”, Robin Williams. It might just be one idea you have, but it is the collective amalgamation of a myriad of good ideas that will make our world a better place to live in.

“You can't stay in your corner of the Forest waiting for others to come to you. You have to go to them sometimes”, A.A.Milne, Winnie-the-Pooh.

The benefits of learning from other organisations, other communities and other countries cannot be underestimated. I know that my work in Cambodia brings as much back to the NHS and the University as is given to Cambodia when I visit and learning from low-resource environments brings skills back to the NHS, and academia in the UK, which are crucial.

9. What are you looking for from your leaders?

1. **Do everything you can to ensure the organisation you work in has compassionate leadership embedded at its core. That starts with you and the influence you can have over other people**
2. **It is vital that each organisation has a just culture as one of its key values. How can you ensure as a leader you are just, fair and transparent?**
3. **Ensure you know what your values are and do everything in your power to ensure you stay true to these in your working life.**