

CITATION FOR THE DEGREE OF DOCTOR OF CIVIL
LAW AWARDED TO PROFESSOR DAME SALLY DAVIES



Mr Chancellor,

I know that you have always been an avid reader of regional newspapers. Do you recall the front-page spread of the Evening News in 1972, when the police had to break up an anti-apartheid protest in Manchester? The local press managed to capture all of the details, including the extraction of a final year medical student, caught on camera from a very, well shall I say, unusual angle. This would have passed unnoticed, were it not for the fact that the very next day she was being interviewed for her first medical house job. She clearly hoped that the panel only had time for the Telegraph when not perusing the Lancet.

The day did not go smoothly. Running late, she cut across a roundabout outside the hospital, hoping to park nearby. Unfortunately her open-topped MG-B did not have sufficient clearance, and she had to leap out of the vehicle, which was left “beached” on the central reservation just outside the entrance. During the interview her sense of anxiety increased. Out of the corner of her eye, she could see her marooned car through the window behind the interview panel. It was surrounded by irate hospital porters. And as the interview progressed, it slowly became apparent that one senior consultant recognised her face.....from somewhere.

When called back at the end she was convinced that her maverick behavior had let the side down. The stern professor looked her squarely in the eye: “Dr Davies, we would like to offer you the job, providing this is the last time you appear in the Manchester Evening News”. Well, Mr Chancellor, clearly he had no insight, given the fame she was set to achieve – with regular quotes in the national dailies over recent years. I wonder if he would have addressed her differently, had he known that the future Chief Medical Officer for England, Chief Medical Advisor to the UK Government, and Chief Scientific Advisor to the Department of Health.....was joining his hospital firm as its most junior member.

Brought up in the midlands, Sally Davies grew up in an academic home. With a mathematical mother and a theological father, she had all the bases covered from a very early age...from this world to the next. Her personal drive was apparent from a very early age, underpinned by the domestic philosophy of “delivering something of value to society through hard work”. Clearly her parents were influential, shaping her future career decisions.

A talented viola player, performing regularly with the Birmingham Youth Orchestra, Sally Davies left Birmingham High School to begin her medical studies in Manchester. Following her house jobs, she trained in paediatrics, general medicine and haematology in London. Her research interests included the blood cell cancer, lymphoma, and the inherited red blood cell disorder “sickle cell disease”, where she made her scientific mark. Publishing over 150 scientific papers on the topic, she was eventually appointed Professor of Haemoglobinopathies at the

Postgraduate Medical School, subsequently becoming Imperial College School of Medicine.

For 15 years she worked closely with the “sickle” charity as an NHS Consultant Haematologist, delivering research advances from a District General Hospital setting, where she became Medical Director of the Thames referral laboratory for haemoglobinopathies. Talking to her patients, some of whom she is still in contact with, there is no doubt that Sally Davies was an excellent clinician, who clearly loved her job. However, her interest in policy grew through her involvement in the Central Middlesex Hospital Research Committee. From there, she became increasingly involved in shaping research strategy in North West London. She then moved on to become Regional Director of Research and Development for north London, then the whole of London, before becoming national Deputy Director in 1997, and finally Director General for NHS R&D in 2004.

Faced with a dramatic upheaval in funding as part of the Cooksey Review, Professor Davies saw the opportunity to build a research infrastructure from afresh. She realised that, if this were done correctly, embedded within a genuinely National Health Service, that this would be the envy of the world. With Russell Hamilton at her side, she established the National Institute for Health Research (or NIHR) from scratch, securing a staggering £1 billion of funding for research focused on the needs of patients.

NIHR instantly became an equal partner with the Medical Research Council and the Wellcome Trust. And, if that were not enough, whilst in the midst of the current global economic crises, her sharp intellect and persuasive powers ensured that the Government maintained NIHR funding levels during the 2011 Comprehensive Spending Review, and once again in the review just a few weeks ago. This remarkable feat has, quite simply, revolutionised the UK medical research landscape, and consolidated NIHR as part of the research fabric. It is now difficult to imagine what it was like before NIHR, which draws the brightest minds towards issues relevant to patients, and drives innovation *within* the NHS: from experimental medicine in our hospitals through to health care delivery in the community. When I talk to colleagues in Europe and the United States, it is clear that NIHR is undoubtedly now the envy of the world.

So, Mr Chancellor, what underpinned her success? Undoubtedly it is based on exceptional hard work, a resolute commitment to the public sector, and the ability to learn rapidly “on the job”, constantly changing gear. Talking to close colleagues, she seems to “change up” with every new role she takes on, from 5th, to 6th...and beyond. Clearly she has learnt from her early MG-B experience, because she no longer runs aground.

Sally Davies thrives by adapting to a changing world, and not just in the United Kingdom. For over a decade she has been a key figure in the World Health Organisation, developing and implementing the first WHO research strategy. She has supported Commonwealth Chief Medical

Officers and their local Universities to ensure alignment of their agendas, she has advised the Singapore Permanent Secretary, and the influential Far East group “A Star” on clinical and translational research.

Throughout her career, Mr Chancellor, I observe two additional common threads. First, a commitment to build capacity through the personal development of others. Initially this related to her own research team, but it now extends nationally through training and development programmes that she has personally nurtured through NIHR, and as Governor of the Ashridge Business School. Secondly, she continues to be a tireless advocate for women in science and medicine. This point she argues with characteristic clarity. It is not driven by (in her words) “women’s lib”- but is based on the simple fact that women have an equal contribution to make, and failing to capture this is a massive lost opportunity. Where would we be without Sally Davies’ contribution, as a shining example?

Mr Chancellor, with the announcement of your retirement as Chief Medical Officer in 2011, Sally Davies was the obvious successor. But how could she juggle the £1billion NIHR budget at the same time? Would she step down from this role at a critical time in the organisation’s development? Remarkably, she accepted the CMO position and continues to be the charismatic inspirational leader of NIHR. This is possible because she supported and nurtured a strong team around her. And, of course, her strategy is completely coherent: in holding both roles she will ensure that health research retains its prominent position on the

Prime Minister's agenda, whilst she gives advice to the UK Government based on solid scientific evidence generated by NIHR.

Dame of the British Empire in the 2009 New Year's Honours list, Sally Davies is a Fellow of the Academy of Medical Sciences, and of the Colleges of Physicians, Child Health, and Pathologists. According to BBC Radio 4 Woman's Hour, she is the sixth most powerful woman in the UK in 2013....., positioned well above Victoria Beckham I hasten to add. She has two daughters to whom she is devoted, and opera remains her passion, with occasional trips to Glyndebourne. Fortunately, her current role as CMO allows her to indulge a passion for foreign travel and unusual food. Perhaps this is why she accepted the invitation to come to Newcastle today?

Mr Chancellor, Professor Dame Sally Davies has transformed the landscape of biomedical research in the UK. As a result, the NHS is delivering better health for patients, and is underpinning economic growth through pro-active engagement with the life sciences industry. She has huge passion and dedication to public service, thinks with crystal clarity, and her charisma "infects" those who work with her and for her. She is a real champion for patients, and a real champion of women. I, therefore, ask that you award her the degree of Doctor of Civil Law, *honoris causa*.

Patrick Chinnery, 15th July 2013

