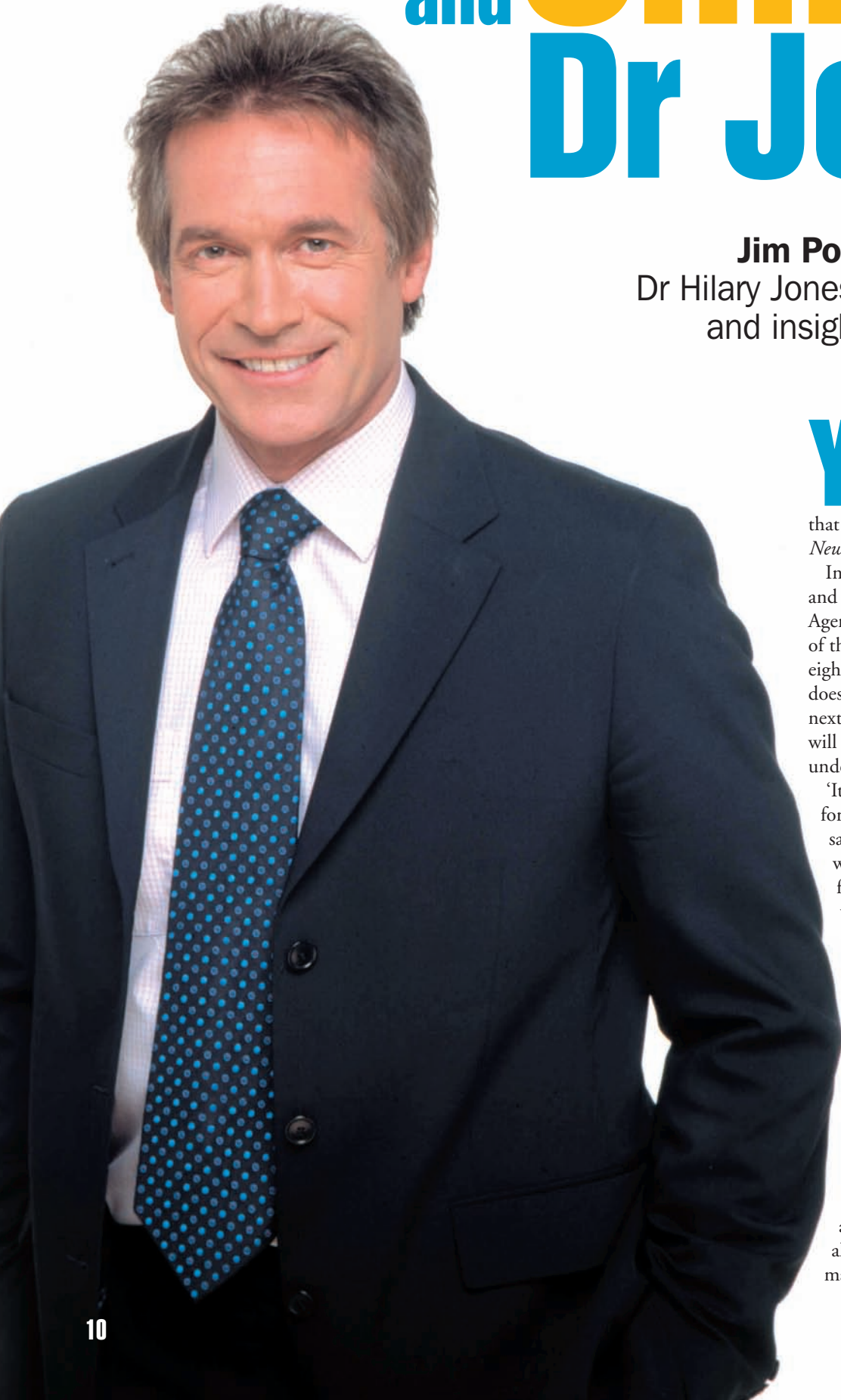


Rise and Shine with Dr Jones



Jim Pollard talks to *GMTV*'s Dr Hilary Jones – and finds passion and insight beneath his warm, professional manner

You probably know him as the mildest-mannered of television doctors, but, right now, Dr Hilary Jones is angry. The reason is one that will be well known to many *Arthritis News* readers.

In January of the last year, the Medicines and Healthcare products Regulatory Agency announced the phased withdrawal of the painkiller co-proxamol, and, eighteen months later, Dr Jones still doesn't understand why. From the end of next year, he, like all of the UK's doctors, will only be able to prescribe the drug under special rules.

'It's one of my number one prescriptions for arthritis and other causes of pain,' says Dr Jones. 'I can't understand it. The withdrawal seems to be the result of a few people using it for purposes for which it was never intended (including suicide), but you can say that about many drugs. A lot of my patients with arthritis are asking me what else they can use and I don't have an answer. They tell me that other painkillers make them sick. All I can do is encourage them to write to their MPs and to Arthritis Care and then prescribe them a large quantity to keep them going.'

Dr Jones argues that, used properly, co-proxamol is a safe, effective drug and one to which no obvious alternative exists. 'I've taken it myself in many circumstances,' he confesses with a

smile. 'In 30 years of medical practice, I can honestly say I've never seen an allergic reaction or encountered gastric bleeding with it. It's relatively free of side effects. Obviously, we need experts to monitor the drugs we use but this is a decision I just can't understand and I hope they review it.'

Hilary Jones is a doctor who knows about arthritis from both sides of the stethoscope. 'In my time, I've played a lot of sport, particularly rowing and squash and I've had a lot of joint problems as a result,' he says before recounting enough treatments to keep the entire England football squad happy. 'I've had cortisone injections, nerve blocks and had the cartilage removed from my knees to prolong my squash career. These interventions have all been very successful. I'm a great believer in cortisone jabs to remove the swelling in acute cases.'

He recognises that, in part, his joint problems may well be the result of inadequate preparation for sport when he was younger – even doctors can get it wrong. 'I knew that flexibility and warming-up were important but I did neglect them when I was very busy trying to fit in exercise with my medical training,' he admits. He stresses that it is important only to exercise when there is no inflammation.

Dr Jones, who recently hosted a fashion show for Arthritis Care, was also attracted to the charity by his interest in long-term conditions. His son was diagnosed with diabetes at the age of seven.

'It keeps your feet on the ground as a doctor when you're touched by a serious condition like diabetes,' he says. 'I think it has helped me empathise with my patients

1990 he concluded that 'there was a lot to teach the public about health and medicine and that I could help do that through television.'

He began at *TV-AM* on its Doc-Spot and has been with *GMTV* since 1993. 'I more or less rang *TV-AM* and said "Gissajob",' he recalls. 'They liked my ideas and we took it from there.'

He is now an experienced media doctor, a master of what is actually a rather difficult art. The challenge is that in trying to give advice to everyone, there is the risk that you give advice to no-one. If every question elicits the response 'I can't comment without examining you, you should see your GP,' viewers are likely to switch off in droves.

On the other hand, some docs let loose on the wrong side of the camera over enthusiastically swallow the media's news values. This results in a breathy over-

they've seldom got the full story. Things are rarely as bad as one might imagine from reading the papers or watching the news, nor is the latest treatment quite the miracle cure that the media coverage might sometimes imply. It's down to the GP to put it into a proper context. I try to bring that sense of perspective to my television and writing work.'

In addition to his TV appearances, Dr Jones writes a column in the *News of the World*, answers reader's questions in *Sunday* magazine, and is the author of six books covering family health, child health, stress, general wellbeing, alternative therapy and the menopause.

Fortunately, he's not too busy to work with the voluntary sector on causes that he considers important. 'I tend to stick to the half a dozen or so organisations of which I'm a patron,' he says, 'although occasionally I'll do other events. It's difficult to turn things down. I'm involved with diabetes as a result of my son but it's not always a family link.'

Dr Jones and his wife Sarah have three children, twins Rupert and Samantha, and Dylan, their youngest, and Hilary has two sons, Tristan and Sebastian, from a previous marriage.

So, other than his own experience of joint problems, where does his interest in arthritis come from? 'I think it's a

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with long-term, fluctuating conditions.'

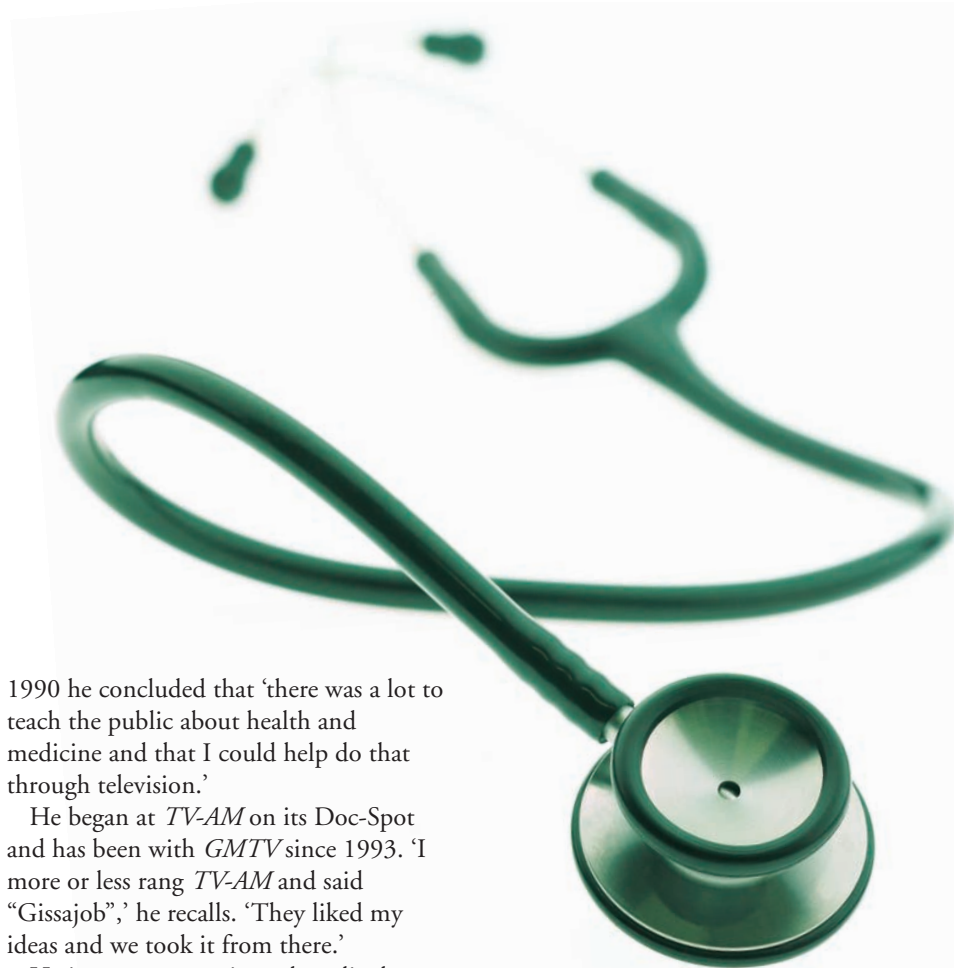
Despite his flourishing media career, *GMTV*'s health and medical advisor still does two or three GP surgeries a week. 'My media work keeps me very up-to-date with the research which helps my patients,' he says, 'while the views and experiences of my patients help keep the TV work relevant. I wouldn't like to forgo either. I think they complement each other.'

Dr Jones now lives in Hampshire but has practised in some unusual places including the incredibly remote mid-Atlantic island of Tristan Da Cunha and the Shetland Isles – he 'wanted a bit of adventure'. Then in

excitement better suited to *Top of the Pops* where every change in the NHS is a 'crisis' and every new medical treatment is a 'breakthrough' – not the measured consideration we expect from a health professional who has taken the Hippocratic oath.

Then there's that category of media quacks who are so patronising that you want to kick in the television set – not good for the joints.

Fortunately, Hilary Jones is well aware of all the potential problems: 'As a GP you often get patients arriving in the surgery clutching an article that they've read, but



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very neglected condition. There are nine million people with arthritis in the UK and I believe the Government and the medical profession can do a lot more for them. It's as simple as that.

'The worst thing that you can say to a patient is that there is nothing that can be done. Contrary to what many people who should know better may say, this is very rarely true with arthritis. Patients, doctors and policy-makers – we're all unaware of how much can be done and one of the main reasons is resources.'

We've seen a lot of so-called tsars appointed under this Government. We've had an e-government tsar, a drugs tsar, a schools tsar, a climate change tsar. Dr Jones is very clear about what his first steps would be were he appointed arthritis tsar, should such a role be created.

'We need more physiotherapy,' he says. 'I see a lot of excellently qualified physiotherapists who can't get jobs after they've finished their training – what a

people think they're for pregnant women but I've had two myself. These are just two small examples that could make a big difference. I think we need greater urgency in our response to arthritis.'

You get the impression that were he made the tsar of anything, Dr Jones would have the energy to do it without dropping any of his other commitments. 'I start work early and finish late,' he admits.

'But I think sensible and frequent exercise is one of the reasons why I am able to do this. Instead of having a nap in the afternoon which I sometimes feel like, I go out and take some exercise which wakes me up again and improves my sleep when I go to bed at night. I keep my weekends free for the family though.'

Dr Jones may well be something of a housewives favourite but he's also a healthy example to men. He's comfortable talking about his own health concerns and has been happy to advise online on the sort of problems that men don't tend to want to

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waste of resources. We need earlier intervention. I'd also like to see mini-clinics in GP surgeries. This would enable us to tackle and prevent the muscle-wastage that we often see before patients have joint operations. Reducing muscle wastage around affected joints reduces the need for operations and, if operations are deemed necessary, increases their chances of success.

'We need to raise public awareness. How many people know that you can dramatically reduce sports injuries by having your gait assessed and choosing running shoes to reflect the way you move? How many people know about epidural injections to treat a slipped disc? Most

discuss. If men are to talk more openly about their health, they need more male doctors to take a lead in this way.

Hilary Jones is also different from some of his contemporaries in his open-minded approach towards complementary therapies, particularly for arthritis. 'The value of powerful orthodox medicines in arthritis is considerable,' he says, 'but still limited. I believe that several types of complementary therapy such as acupuncture, yoga, t'ai chi, massage and osteopathy have much to offer too.'

If not the arthritis tsar then, perhaps the host of a new medical programme on television? 'I think a one-hour show including news, humour and stories could



Dr Hilary Jones hosts the Arthritis Care fashion show Star for a Night with suave sophistication

attract a decent audience of people,' he says. 'There are many, many interesting stories out there. I hear them in my surgery every week. We'd put them over through people rather than through dry medical facts. Unfortunately I can't see it happening as television today seems to be more interested in gimmicks and humiliation.'

'Perhaps we need to do a show called *I'm A Consultant, Get Me Out Of Here*. It could be set in a large teaching hospital.'

You can imagine Dr Jones smoothly handling even this. At the Arthritis Care fundraiser, he was the quintessential example of the ever-alert professional.

David Davies, the head of the Football Association, was drawing the raffle and received a good humoured public grilling from the host over who was going to be the new England football manager. Anyone who can carry that off and also get in a few quips comparing the salaries of GPs to those of premiership footballers without getting a left-hook could surely take on telling a couple of senior consultants that they'd been nominated for eviction...

Dr Jones is looking forward to working with Arthritis Care again in the future. 'The fashion show fundraiser was terrific,' he says. 'All the models had arthritis or were family or friends of people with arthritis and the same was true of the brilliant designers. I'm no expert in these things but I think Kate Moss and Naomi Campbell have got some competition.'

A charming man, indeed. Will this charm extend to persuading the Medicines and Healthcare products Regulatory Agency to give co-proxamol a reprieve? Many people with arthritis hope so. **an**

MOST EMBARRASSING MOMENT

Perhaps the toughest thing for a media doctor is to be asked about a disease that you've never heard of, during a live TV phone-in, as Dr Hilary knows only too well.

'I was unexpectedly asked about an exceedingly rare condition I'd never heard of. Rather than admit my ignorance about it, I found myself promising to phone the caller back later saying it was important to discuss such an issue in much greater detail far from the gaze of the prying public.'

So now you know, if you want a private chat with Dr Hilary, phone up and ask him about your ruptured polymicroblabectomy...