

## IN CONVERSATION WITH

# Mary O'Brien

Interviewed by The PMFA Journal



We were delighted to catch up with **Mary O'Brien**, Consultant Plastic and Hand Surgeon and President of the BAAPS, about her career and plans for the association.

## Can you tell us a little bit about what led you into the field of plastic surgery and what have been the highlights so far?

It was the compelling history of reconstruction of patients following devastating injury that was the initial aspect of the specialty that captured my imagination and how that remains so relevant today. It's the depth and breadth of the specialty with the underlying importance of psychology in restoring individuals' lives that is such a privilege to be part of.

I think the highlights are (after years of training!) being appointed as a Consultant Plastic & Hand Surgeon, also now seeing my trainees established in their consultant practices and outside the NHS working with fantastic colleagues at the British Association of Aesthetic Plastic Surgeons (BAAPS).

## Who inspired you in your career and why?

A combination of trainers, trainees and patients. The common theme being determination, commitment and resilience in the face of challenges.

## What is the best piece of advice that you have received in your career and what advice would you offer to those following in your footsteps?

The best piece of advice I received was to treat 'the patient' not 'the condition'. Advice I would give is to treat your patients in the way in which you would like to be treated.

## What one paper or book would you recommend every plastic surgeon should read?

*Plastic Surgery: its Origins: The life and works of Sir Harold Gillies* by Richard Petty.



## Many congratulations on becoming the President of the BAAPS. What are your main aims for the role?

To support patients by supporting the community of plastic surgeons particularly in the current challenging climate, and also in the future, by ensuring high standards and safe practice are not just talked about but are a reality through education and legislation.

## You are the first female President of the BAAPS. Do you think that plastic surgery has traditionally been a more male dominated specialty and, if so, is that starting to change?

Yes! And yes! It is not gender in my view that defines a plastic surgeon but skill set and training. I do not think there should be any reverse discrimination either but a fair and level competitive playing field for any individual who is captivated by this specialty.

## Of course the COVID-19 pandemic has made life very different for everyone; how has the BAAPS supported its members during the crisis?

It has been very difficult on a number of levels for both patients and surgeons. With regard to supporting members, the BAAPS has run a successful series of Support webinars on more general topics alongside a very popular academic programme of virtual masterclasses in various surgical techniques. We have adapted our annual meeting, reviewed safety guidelines in line with current evidence during COVID and run a psychology course in person. This focused not just on patient psychology but surgeon psychology which I think is key particularly at this time.

## This year's BAAPS Annual Meeting is planned for 1 October 2021; can you tell us a bit more about the speakers and what the meeting will focus on?

I am really excited about the opportunity to meet in person with colleagues and friends after such a long time, in the fabulous central London venue at the Waldorf Hotel. The focus of this year's meeting is Face & Breast. We are welcoming an amazing faculty from across the globe (Brazil, Italy, Spain, USA as well as the UK); Andre Auresvald, Chiara Botti, Francisco Gomez-Bravo, James Grotting, Niall Kirkpatrick, Nina Naidu, and Norman Waterhouse. There is a splendid conference dinner following the academic programme and an entertaining after dinner speaker!

**Would you encourage others to get involved in the BAAPS?**

Absolutely! Plastic surgery, both reconstructive and aesthetic, can be a challenging specialty and in my view to achieve the best outcomes for patients, it is essential to be part of a supportive surgical community and to be up to date with the latest techniques, advice and guidance. This is what the BAAPS provides.

**And finally, if you have any spare time, how do you like to relax?**

I find myself at the side of a track or lake at various athletic and water sports events cheering on my two boys with my husband!

**BAAPS Annual Meeting 2021**

1 October 2021, London, UK (and virtual)

<https://baaps.org.uk/asm/>