

# Dr Benoit Hendrickx

The PMFA Journal team were delighted to chat with Dr Benoit Hendrickx about his career in plastic surgery and this year's Corsica Medical Summit.

## 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?

Well, that's a long and interesting story. As a teenager, I was very interested in psychology, conducting experiments on my fellow students, trying to influence and stimulate human behaviour. When I wanted to pursue university studies in psychology, I was told by my parents I'd better get a decent diploma, like a master's in law, economics or engineering, as those lead to 'real jobs' with a 'decent future'. As medicine also fell into that category, I started there, with the ambition to specialise in psychiatry; that seemed to be the closest to my psychology dream. As I moved on with med school, I soon realised that psychiatry was perhaps not what I was made for. For a time, internal medicine was a serious candidate, but when doing that internship, I enjoyed the technical acts like bone marrow punctions or ascites aspirations more than the hardcore intellectual work. That made me realise I was perhaps better made for a surgical career. Weighing the pros and cons of different surgical specialties, I fell for plastics, as that reflected best both my character and my creative mind. Now, after more than 15 years in that field, I realise I'm back where I started. People sometimes underestimate how much of the job of a plastic surgeon consists of the delicate interaction between patient and surgeon. Of course, that interaction is important in almost all medical fields, but by far the most in cosmetic surgery, where we really need to build a trust relationship with our patients. Cosmetic surgery is mostly a choice for patients, not a necessity. I often joke to my patients that half of the work is done before I even touch a knife. Plastic surgeons are in a way psychologic surgeons. People think we change the body of our patients, but the real goal is to change the way our patients see their bodies. And that's psychology.

## Who has inspired you in your career and why?

To quote Sir Isaac Newton: "if I have seen further, it is by standing on the shoulders of giants". We can only make progress if we get inspired by others. My first mentor in the field was Prof Dr Jan Vranckx, who was a young plastic surgeon when I started my residency and who is now world famous in reconstructive microsurgery and also secretary general of EURAPS, the main European professional scientific organisation. He stimulated me to start my PhD and taught me the basic surgical skills. Besides a teacher, he also quickly became a friend and we have travelled often together for both work and pleasure. I'm pleased that Jan has now left the university, to join me in my private practice. At the end of my training in plastics, I met Marc Pacifico when I was doing my fellowship in reconstructive microsurgery. He was also doing a lot of cosmetic work in his private practice (he later became president of BAAPS, the British Association of Aesthetic Plastic Surgery) and thanks to him I had the chance to do a cosmetic fellowship



after the reconstructive one. He also helped me to get into my next cosmetic fellowship, in Melbourne, Australia this time, with Graeme Southwick. From the beginning of this fellowship, Graeme was like a dad to me, not only teaching me the surgical tricks that made him (and later me, I hope) excel in cosmetic surgery, but also looking after me and my fiancée like we were his own kids, spoiling us in restaurants or in his beach house during the weekends. Although he is now in his 70s, he's still very active, even doing lots of surgery. I hear from him on a regular basis and although he's at the other end of the world, he is still very close to me.

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

Graeme also taught me to 'work hard, play hard', which I believe is still his motto. Nothing comes for free in life, we are often blinded by the success of others, not realising how much effort was at the base of it. But there's more in life than work alone. My main aim is to be happy and to make my beloved ones happy too. That implies taking time off with family to travel and do nice things.

Also, we must realise that our training is never ending. Regardless of how many years we have been in practice, we must keep on questioning ourselves and our surgical outcomes, to see where and how we can improve. Once you stop learning, you get old very quickly.

## What do you think have been the most exciting developments in plastic surgery in recent years?

To be honest, there haven't been that many breakthrough developments in the surgical field. It's true that some new breast implants have been developed, but it takes decades to evaluate them on longevity and late complications. In face lift surgery, the use of an Auersvald net has become increasingly popular, and with reason. This technique involves closing the subcutaneous 'dead space' of a face lift with a running suture that is placed through the skin, thereby reducing haematoma rates, allowing for proper distribution of the skin and taking away the need for drains.

On the non-surgical side, the evolution doesn't stop! That's where the evolution is going at a much higher pace. I stood at the cradle of some breakthrough technologies that will increase safety with injectables. Most injectors are aware of the extreme variability in arterial anatomy of the face and the risks of blindness, stroke or skin necrosis after filler injections in an artery. We therefore developed ARtery3D, a technology that displays someone's unique arterial anatomy in augmented reality, so that the injector can avoid the blood vessels when injecting. Also, we recently developed mARking3D, a new medical record for injectables, that allows one to see previous treatments, again in augmented reality. I'm truly convinced that within five years' time, most injections will be done under augmented reality guidance.

## Do you enjoy being involved in training the next generation of surgeons?

It's more than training alone, it's more about motivating youngsters in the field to think, question, read, and watch other surgeons. I usually challenge my trainees in many fields, also outside surgery, hoping to plant a seed. If anything, I would love to be thought of as an inspirer, more than a teacher.

## You are the Congress President for the Corsica Medical Summit taking place in June this year – can you tell us the themes and potential highlights of the event?

As this congress is growing bigger year by year, we manage to attract a lot of speakers outside the French community, which increases the scientific level of the meeting and brings a fresh breeze to the conference. I would highly recommend the session on imaging techniques for vascular mapping, where for the very first time at a conference, we will bring together all novel technologies to visualise the blood vessel anatomy, ranging from classic ultrasound, lighter handheld probes, the new SibUS finger probe ultrasound device, to MRI based vascular mapping. This session is followed by a hands-on rotation in different workstations so that the participants can actually experience the pros and cons of each technology.

Although outside the scientific programme, the congress party is a true highlight, barefoot in the sand, overlooking the Mediterranean Sea, dancing in the moonlight until the early hours.

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

Like we've mentioned above, if one works hard, one must play hard too. I therefore try to play sport as much as my agenda allows me to. That means that on my surgery days, I always run to the hospital, it clears my mind before surgery and relaxes me after. Besides running, I like sailing and have a small catamaran on the beach, no more than 300 meters away from my home and practice. Nothing is better than finishing a clinic and getting out on the open sea no more than half an hour later. I also like to escape from work from time to time to travel, explore other cultures, and unwind under some palm tree on a remote island. But the simple pleasures in life can also be found in a walk with my dog, a good book, a succulent dish or a delightful bottle of wine.

Many thanks for your time!

## SAVE THE DATE

Corsica Medical Summit  
12-14 June 2025

<https://www.corsica-medical-summit.com/>