

Editor's Corner

As if Hollywood film stars don't already get enough attention, once a year even more adulation is heaped upon them with the annual OSCARS awards: a glamorous events where the good and the great of showbiz world reflect on their achievements and the lucky winners gain awards and recognition for their work.

We Clinical Engineering don't generally get this level of public recognition. Our teams can sometimes feel undervalued – no red carpets and flashing cameras for us. Often hidden away in the bowels of the hospital, we dedicated professionals ensure medical equipment is appropriate, legal, safe, properly maintained, used correctly by clinical colleagues and available in the right places and in the right amounts; but we do so in quite a non-showy way. As a breed, we don't tend to seek the limelight, being content in the knowledge that high-quality patient care is dependent on our skills and hard work.

Well actually I was lucky enough to have my own little bit of limelight just the other week when received an OBE from the Princess Royal in Windsor Castle. For those of you not familiar with the UK honours system (and why would you be!) this is a very prestigious award with only a few made each year recognising outstanding service across any field: military, community, charity, sport or professional. My award was for services to Clinical Engineering, and whilst I was the one receiving the medal, this award was very much for the team of clinical engineers around me and indeed for clinical engineers everywhere. It was a very proud moment for me and my family and I received a many, many messages from well wishes all over the world so thank you for all of that.

In all honesty, and believe me when I say that this is not false modesty, I also felt a wee bit embarrassed. Yes, embarrassed. Because although I know that I have had some degree of success throughout my career and have achieved many successes locally and nationally, perhaps most notably during the covid-19 pandemic when we

all faced such pressures, I also know I have been very privileged. When I reflect on my career I realise just how lucky I have been and how much support I have received from colleagues, from professional bodies, from family and friends. My international experience has put my personal fortunes into even starker contrast: so many clinical engineering colleagues from around the world achieve great things in the face of daunting challenges and with none of the support I've been so fortunate to receive. So initially, I did feel a little embarrassed that I was being so recognised for my achievements when others were not.

However, I realise that despite our natural inclination to stay in the background, we Clinical Engineers do need to celebrate our successes and broadcast them to help raise our profile. Because only when we raise our profile can we gain the recognition we deserve for the work that we do; only when we gain recognition can our value be acknowledged; only when our value is acknowledged will we see investment in our resources, training and capacity building for our profession; and only through this investment can we build our profession, strengthen our teams and develop the services we deliver. And, ultimately, only through developing our services, can we continue to maximise the potential of technology for the benefit of patients – and that, after all is what Clinical Engineering is all about.

So, I got over my natural reluctance and promoted my personal success through news articles, webpages, twitter and the rest and used my award to showcase the work of all clinical engineers everywhere. And my plea now is for you to do the same – the time for modesty is passed. We need to show off our achievements, celebrate our successes and use these opportunities to raise the profile of our profession which in turn will help us to grow.

And there are so many ways to lend your weight to this effort. Why not write an article about a success you and your team have had and get that published in your

local journals or indeed submit it for consideration here, we're always looking for good news stories. Why not offer to review manuscripts, and we're always looking for volunteers, or become a mentor for junior staff. Organise an open day of your department and invite your senior clinical colleagues and hospital directors to come along. GCEA and IFMBE both have awards every year^{1,2} – not yet matching the glitz and glamour of the OSCARS but every bit as prestigious in our own way - so why not put your team or your colleagues forward for one of those. Utilise social media, tweet pictures of your work and short notes about your achievements. If you're into such things, why not make a video of Tik-Tok or similar. There are so many ways to promote our profession, so don't be embarrassed, be proud!

The world needs well trained clinical engineers; it just doesn't always know it. As we struggle to emerge from under the cloud of the covid-19 pandemic, healthcare systems all over the globe are struggling to find sustainable business models. It feels like the challenges before us are dauntingly large. Populations in the richer nations are getting older, fatter and more prone to long-term diseases like diabetes, coronary heart disease, and dementia. Our life expectancies have risen sharply over the last couple of decades and our demands on the healthcare system have risen even more so. We now expect to be treated for, indeed cured of, conditions and diseases that a generation ago we were prepared to live with and indeed die from. And this is of course a really good news story. As an industry, healthcare has been incredible successful but we are now, in many ways, the victims of our own success: there are more and more people, expecting more and more healthcare and the cost of meeting this expectation is increasing faster - much, much faster - than the resources we have at our disposal. Whilst in the

poorer nations, access to healthcare facilities, medicines and technology can continue to be a challenge.

A daunting challenge indeed; but a challenge we clinical engineers can play a huge part in solving. Technology is already a part of the solution and will increasingly become ever more important to the wellbeing of the patients globally. It will enable new diagnosis and new treatments; it will increase access to healthcare to remote environments and make healthcare provision more affordable for all. But to maximise the potential of this technology for the benefit of patients requires clinical engineers – both developing and adopting new technology and managing and supporting existing technology. So we need a strong, vibrant and connected community of clinical engineers. We need a confident and growing profession. We need resources, training and capacity building. And we need to have a shared platform to promote all that we need to best serve population expectations.

So let's be proud of the work we do. Let's celebrate our successes and shout about them as often as possible. Let's grab the recognition we so richly deserve. Let's stake our claim to those red carpets and camera flashes. And let's make sure the world sees us, clinical engineers, as the film stars of the future.

References:

1. GCEA Awards (<https://www.globalcea.org/clinical-engineering-awards>)
2. IFMBE CED Awards (<https://ced.ifmbe.org/about-us/awards.html>)

Together we are making it better!

Prof. Dan Clark (OBE)

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