

Surgeon Profile Series

Mr Peter Kalu

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Peter Kalu, Consultant Plastic & Reconstructive Surgeon at Oxford University Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust, discusses the importance of a measured approach to training and his key role in organising the national virtual Summit ‘Unlocking the NHS’ to collaborate strategies to improve healthcare during the Covid-19 pandemic.

During the first wave of the Covid-19 pandemic, Peter Kalu realised early on the importance of information sharing. Together with his colleagues at WeShare. Healthcare, a global community of clinicians and scientists, they have orchestrated a platform to share best practices and innovations in healthcare. “We set up a group to try and encourage the spreading of information in response to the Covid-19 outbreak. We decided we needed to do something that would really capture the imagination and get people to start to share ideas. That’s where the Unlocking the NHS idea came from.” Unlocking the NHS summits took place in both May and June 2020 and were hosted by Alastair Stewart OBE. Senior representatives from the Royal Colleges of Physicians, Surgeons, Anaesthetists and Radiologists panelled the meetings, which can both be viewed on YouTube. The WeShare.Healthcare team are hoping to continue to collaborate with healthcare organisations and leaders in future meetings and podcasts to facilitate the wide adoption of best practice in healthcare.

One of four children to Nigerian parents, Mr Kalu grew up in North London. On his reasoning for choosing medicine he reports he was “fascinated by the pathology of normal health systems of the body and how this manifests in real life conditions.” He studied at St. Mary’s Hospital Medical School in London, where he also did his house jobs. A career in surgery was attractive for Peter as he could use surgical skills to sort physical problems in a constantly changing field.

Prior to commencing surgical training in Leeds, Peter worked for six months in an A&E department in Queensland, Australia. Despite being told it would ruin his chances at a surgical career, he saw it as an opportunity to stand out. When asked what advice he would have for aspiring surgeons, he responded with, “not being in any rush to get to the end. Get as much experience as you possibly can. No experience is wasted.” He highlighted that trainees have time on their side, and if something doesn’t go their way, there is always the opportunity to try again.

Mr Kalu was awarded a Microsurgery Fellowship in Oxford in 2015 and subsequently went on to become a Plastic Surgery Consultant. “When you start off in surgery as a Consultant, it is a real step up in professionalism which you don’t truly appreciate until you are in that position. In the initial period, I remember doing a major operative procedure that was not going as textbook as you would want. You have to just dig deep, go back to first principles, relax and solve the problem.” Mr Kalu states he has developed through reflection to appreciate the good aspects and work on the aspects that warrant improvement.

As the previous Plastic Surgery Representative for the University of Oxford Surgical Training Committee, Peter is keen to teach. He emphasises the importance of adaptability in teaching. “People work in very different ways; there is not a one off way to teach everyone. Some are much more hands on; some have a much more theoretical and academic approach.”

Mr Kalu believes the best part of his job is seeing the ‘evolution’ of patients. “Seeing them change and grow, I have had patients at their lowest when they have just been diagnosed with breast cancer. You have to try to pick them up and be as positive as you can. Then seeing them after their operation with their results, and getting to the point where they are discharged. Surgery is great, but it is the means to an end to see this transformation in a patient so that they can move on with their life that is the most rewarding aspect.”