

# Retirement of Neil Baker: a ‘health hero’



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The term ‘health hero’ has never been used more appropriately than to describe Neil Baker, with his relentless quest to improve the foot health of people with diabetes both in the UK and overseas. Throughout his entire professional career, his dedication, accompanied by his energy, skills, compassion and good humour has focussed on reducing the burden of foot disease that sadly often affects many people with diabetes.

His career has been punctuated with outstanding contributions to the foot health of so many people, from Southampton to Ipswich, from Brazil to Tanzania, and several other countries. His contributions have been recognised by many of his colleagues and patients. He received the *Ipswich Evening Star’s* patient award following a nomination from one of his patients who described Neil as “always cheerful and I know he does a lot of good by giving lectures and going to poorer countries to help teach them about diabetic clinics. I’m sure I speak for most of the patients that I meet in the clinic and I would like to nominate him most highly.”

It is not just his teaching in foreign countries that I recall. I vividly remember Neil demonstrating his improvisation when resources are sparse and often non-existent; his infectious enthusiasm as he told me of taking old unwanted car tyres and fashioning footwear from them to help patients with neuropathy from damaging their feet. Neil’s dexterity in treating foot disease is remarkable to observe, as are his cobbling skills!

Among several awards, arguably the most prestigious was the Alf Morris Award from the Society of Chiropodists and Podiatrists in 2013. Alf was the President of the Society until his death in 2012. He was renowned for his championing of the disabled when he served as Minister of State for Social Security. Neil was the first recipient of the award, acknowledging his outstanding contribution to health and social care. How fitting.

Neil was a member of the Executive Committee

for the European Association for the study of Diabetes. He was also a co-founder of the International Diabetes Federation Foot Training Programme; the ‘Train the Trainers’ programme has been delivered far and wide, including Slovenia, where the team trained people from 16 countries. Neil has served as an advisor to parliamentary working parties and Diabetes UK. He was co-founder and co-chairman of FDUK and he is a teacher and examiner for the diabetic foot module run by his professional body. He has presented at many conferences throughout the world, been published widely in prestigious journals and contributed to book chapters. Closer to home, Neil provides care to approximately 100 patients with diabetes every week and his contribution to the notable reduction of amputations in Ipswich deserves a special mention.

Neil has made an impact on so many patients and healthcare professionals. Through the international ‘Train the Trainers’ programme alone, his work will have been cascaded to many thousands. The good news is that this tribute is only closing one chapter of his career at Ipswich. Neil will continue to work towards better diabetic foot care both in the UK and beyond with his irrepressible humour and energy intact. I am sure all the readers of *The Diabetic Foot Journal* will join me in wishing him a fantastic retirement from Ipswich and every best wish for his next adventure! ■



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