



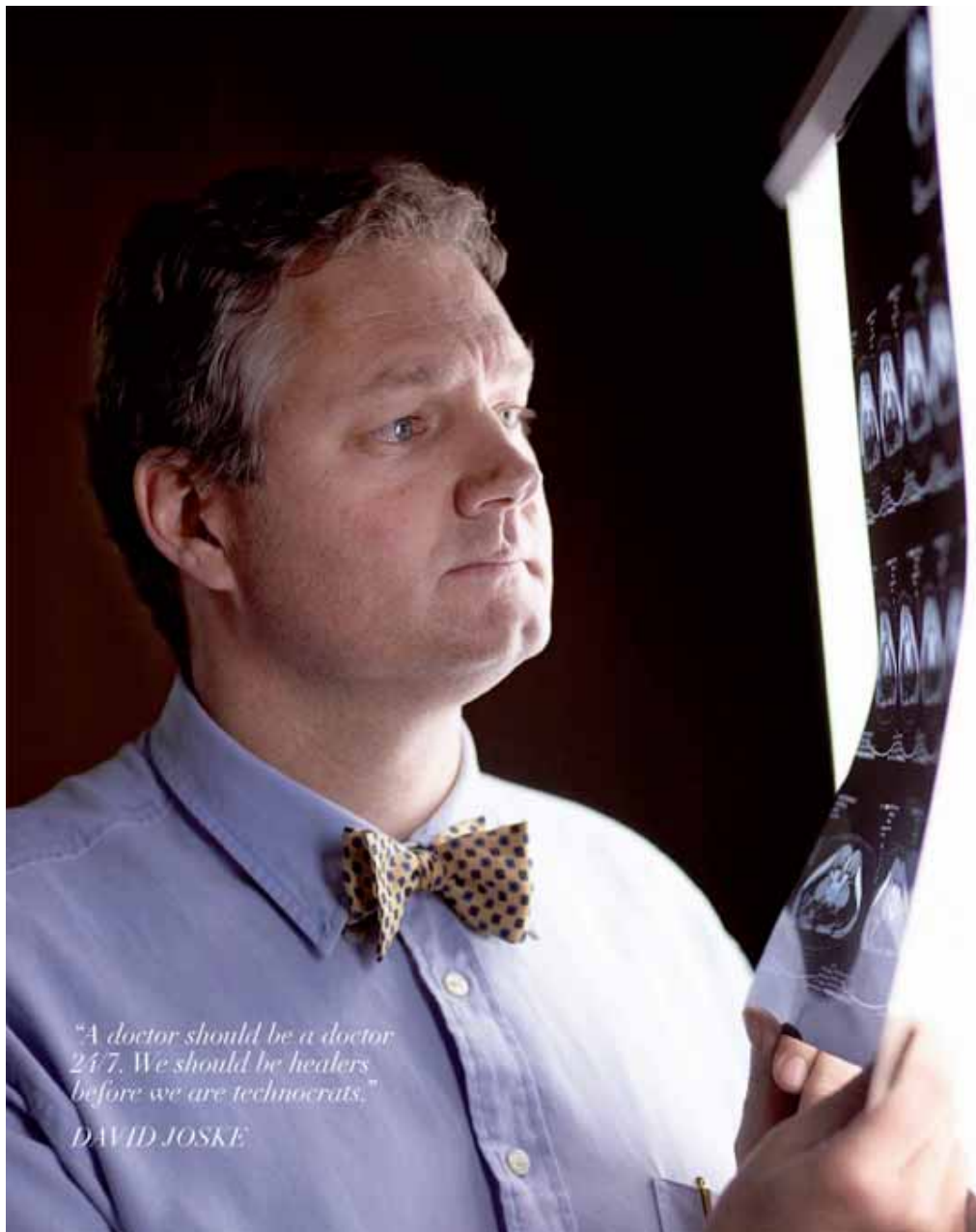
Media Release

Date: Winter 2006

Publication: Scoop Magazine

Writer: Sian Briggs

Photographer: Rob Simeon



*"A doctor should be a doctor
24/7. We should be healers
before we are technocrats."*

DAVID JOSKE



David Joske

The doctor transforming the lives of cancer patients

There are doctors who cease being doctors at the end of their shifts. They swap their stethoscopes for slippers and switch on the answering machine for after-hours service. But Dr David Joske, head of Haematology at Sir Charles Gairdner Hospital, is cut from an entirely different cloth. “A doctor should be a doctor 24/7. My patients know they can contact me anytime they need to,” he states firmly. “We should be healers before we are technocrats.”

It’s a lesson he learnt in equal part from his doctor father Richard (“the model of what a doctor should be”) and his late mother Pru, and one that drove David to instigate the Brownes Cancer Support Centre at Sir Charles Gairdner Hospital in 2001. Originally a hub of support for patients fighting cancer, it has now ballooned into a foundation (SolarisCare) dedicated to researching and providing complementary therapies, as well as mainstream cancer treatments.

“There’s no doubt in my mind that complementary medicine and ancient healing practices have something to offer,” David says. “The question is how we can best make them work with modern medicine.”

Staffed by 80 volunteers, the centre offers everything from reiki, reflexology, aromatherapy massage and chi meditation to creative art therapy, acupuncture, counselling and beauty therapy. Patients receive eight to 12 free sessions with subsequent sessions costing a gold coin donation.

The centre has battled its fair share of scepticism – mainly from fellow doctors – but David is unfazed, citing overwhelming appreciation from the patients. “Those who are sceptical are fixated on the mixed evidence from the impact of these treatments on survivor rates. They’re missing the point,” he says. “How were those patients as they lived and died with cancer? Was their life intolerable or did they live and die with some peace?”

The third of four boys, David is a fourth-

generation Australian medico whose grandfather wrote an MD thesis on the success rate of treating typhoid with patients in tents rather than in buildings in 1911.

Growing up in Claremont and Nedlands, the self-confessed “goodie-goodie” excelled academically, winning a scholarship to Christ Church Grammar in 1971. “I always wanted to be a doctor. I was never forced into it, it was a drive within myself,” David says. “I made the right choice – I feel happy going to work every day.”

His science side derives from his father, and his humanist side from his mother. “My mother always said to me, ‘whatever doctor you become, don’t forget that you’re a people kind of doctor’. I’ve stayed mindful of those words,” he says.

Though he has always prided himself on having an open mind and a willing ear during his career, David knew little about complementary and alternative medicines until a chance comment from a patient in 1999 spurred him to find out more.

“He said it takes three months to learn how to be a cancer patient. First you have to learn the geography of the hospital, then you have to understand the big words and then you need to work out which doctor you can talk to about alternative treatment without being poo-pooed,” David says.

This comment triggered a fork-in-the-road moment for David. “I realised that complementary and alternative medicine was an issue I could either pretend to be open-minded about, or it was something I could actually look into. So I started learning about it and it snowballed from there. It’s been a fascinating journey,” he says.

What he discovered along the way was that, over the past 200 years, mind and body medicine have become mutually exclusive.

“It can be traced back to 1910, when medical schools that excluded the mind and concentrated on the body were more likely to get funding,” David explains. As the prominence of alternative medicine withered, so too did its perceived credibility. “But it’s wrong to be dismissive. Acupuncture does help nausea. Massage does help anxiety. There’s no reason why we shouldn’t have the best of both worlds.”

But wholesale acceptance of various alternative therapies is marred by a number of things. One is lack of research (“so much more work needs to be done,” David says), another is the scope for “quacks and rip-offs”.

A third problem is the way that cancer is often portrayed – a shock diagnosis, a short, horrific illness and the all-clear after three months. “But it’s a chronic illness,” he says. “Patients have a cloud hanging over their heads for three years. We should be looking at the concept of survivorship –

the psychology of cancer is very difficult. The centre is a way patients can wrestle back some control over the cancer. The medical model tells people what to do, but the centre provides people with the means to manage and improve their symptoms with complementary medicine. It allows them to get on top of the situation.”

The avalanche of positive feedback from patients has more than vindicated David’s faith, hard work and dedication. “You see a psychological turnaround time and time again. Some say that it has completely changed their lives,” he says. “One woman told me it turned hospital visits from feelings of dread to pleasurable anticipation.”

As he reels off the statistics – “one in three men and one in four women will die of cancer” – David’s goal to improve access to complementary medicine for all cancer patients and to secure funding for a centre in all teaching hospitals seems high priority.

“Society makes a meal of diagnosing and treating cancer patients,” David says candidly. “This cancer epidemic has come at a time when we’ve abandoned the extended family and close community ideals. There are lots of patients out there with very little support; the centre provides a sense of community to those who need it most.”



Margrete Helgeby

Australia’s best female dancer taking a leap of faith

When Margrete Helgeby’s name was called at the Australia Dance Awards, no-one was more shocked than the winner herself. She had gone to the ceremony in Sydney only after gentle encouragement from her parents and expected to just have a good night out with a friend she hadn’t seen for a while.

“I really didn’t think I had a show,” she says, without false modesty. “The performance was something I’d done back in February, it hadn’t toured the eastern states, and I looked at all the other dancers nominated and I just thought ‘how many people know anything about me?’”