



**BATH LIFE BUSINESS CLUB**

**JAMES SCOTT**

Chats about the NHS so often turn into litanies of woe – ageing populations, unsafe practices, ineffective treatments, chronic staff shortages – that it’s refreshing to meet someone like RUH boss James Scott...

**J**ames Scott has been in charge of Bath’s Royal United Hospital for 12 years now (a vast amount of time, when most NHS CEOs last only two or three), and his take on the place is exhilaratingly positive. “Not that we’re perfect, of course,” he says, “and there’s always work to do. But on a daily basis I get more letters of thanks than I do of complaint.” James is a professional hospital manager who once ran the biggest sexually transmitted disease clinic in western Europe – “yes, I’ve got stories to tell from those days, and no, I’m not going to share them here” – who’s stuck with the RUH for so long because of, he tells us, the people who work there. “They get under your skin – or they’ve got

under mine, anyway,” he says, “so coming to work every day is very easy for me. That said, I do think it’s best if you stick around for a while in a role like this. You certainly do have to stay long enough to deal with the consequence of your own mistakes.” And there have been plenty of those over the years, he says, alongside a good deal to be proud of. For one thing, the hospital makes a surplus every year, allowing James to invest the excess in new buildings, like the Dyson Cancer Centre, and state-of-the-art equipment. “It means the RUH is a bit of a building site at the moment,” he concedes, “and I’m very sorry about that – but I promise to finish in 2021. That said, in 2022 we’ll probably just start all over again.”

**RUH IN NUMBERS**

- 5,200 – total staff
- 430 – EU staff
- £344m – turnover
- £40m – spending on capital
- 759 – total beds (including 11 at the Min, acquired a couple of years ago)
- 550 – beds for acute medicine
- 500,000 people – catchment area

It also means that the RUH punches well above its weight in many areas. It’s the only hospital in the UK with the newest Siemens radiology kit up and running, for instance, and it’s one of the most research-active in the country too. “We’re lucky enough to have the number one consultant anaesthetist in the world working here,” James says, “while – regarding research into airway management – the top three institutions in the world are the University of Toronto, Harvard, and then the RUH. Yes, like all hospitals, we have constant problems recruiting qualified nurses, but I never have trouble getting the world’s best consultants to work here. In many ways, the RUH is a typical regional hospital, and in other ways it’s not. In fact, when I first started here one very senior person at the NHS told me, ‘It’s like a district general hospital – with attitude.’”

**BLUE LIGHTS**

It all sounds very positive, doesn’t it? But what are the problems? As already touched upon, the recruitment thing will always be an issue – “I currently employ 430 staff from the EU,” James says, “from doctors and nurses to porters and cleaners, but with Brexit uncertainty, the supply has dried up” – but the vast area the RUH serves brings its own challenges too. “Not many people realise this, but we actually see more patients from Wiltshire than we do from B&NES,” James says. “And 16 per cent come from the Mendips in Somerset, too. This is an area with an older population than most, so the RUH is inevitably full of frail old people and will continue to be so, with the local over-85 population due to grow 14.6 per cent in the next five years. That said, we’ve recently seen far more people in the 18-64 age group calling the ambulance service and 111 than ever before, and we don’t quite know why. It could be

that they’re finding it hard to get a GP appointment, so they’re coming straight to us.”

Though the period just after Christmas and New Year is always the busiest at the RUH – “one week last winter we saw 100 blue light ambulances a day, when we’re usually stretched if we see 65” – the hot summer wasn’t great, either.

“In fact, August was almost as busy,” James says, “with a mixture of the expected chest and respiratory problems, plus people stay up late, drink outdoors and fall over. But we make no judgements. It’s our job to look after whoever comes through the door.”

**“I NEVER HAVE TROUBLE GETTING THE WORLD’S BEST CONSULTANTS TO WORK HERE”**

Our time together is coming to an end, but does that, we wonder, include animals?

James looks a little confused. “Er, well we do have a scheme called Pat Dogs, which sees them come in so patients can stroke them – it actually makes a difference to recovery times – and we had a horse come in once, for a young person at the end of their life.”

Actually, we meant if they’ve got a hurt paw or something.

“Ah, I see. I have to say, I think my answer is much better than your question, then!”

Which, we have to concede, is probably fair enough.

For more: [www.ruh.nhs.uk](http://www.ruh.nhs.uk)

**FRESH THINKING OVER A FINE LUNCH**

The Bath Life Business Club brings together a select group of senior business people. It features a leading speaker and a two-course lunch at The Royal Crescent Hotel. The next is on 28 January with Geoff Rich of Feilden Clegg Bradley Studios. If you’d like to join, please contact Stephanie Dodd (Stephanie.Dodd@mediaclash.co.uk). These events sell out quickly, so look out for the emails... [www.bathlifebusinessclub.com](http://www.bathlifebusinessclub.com)