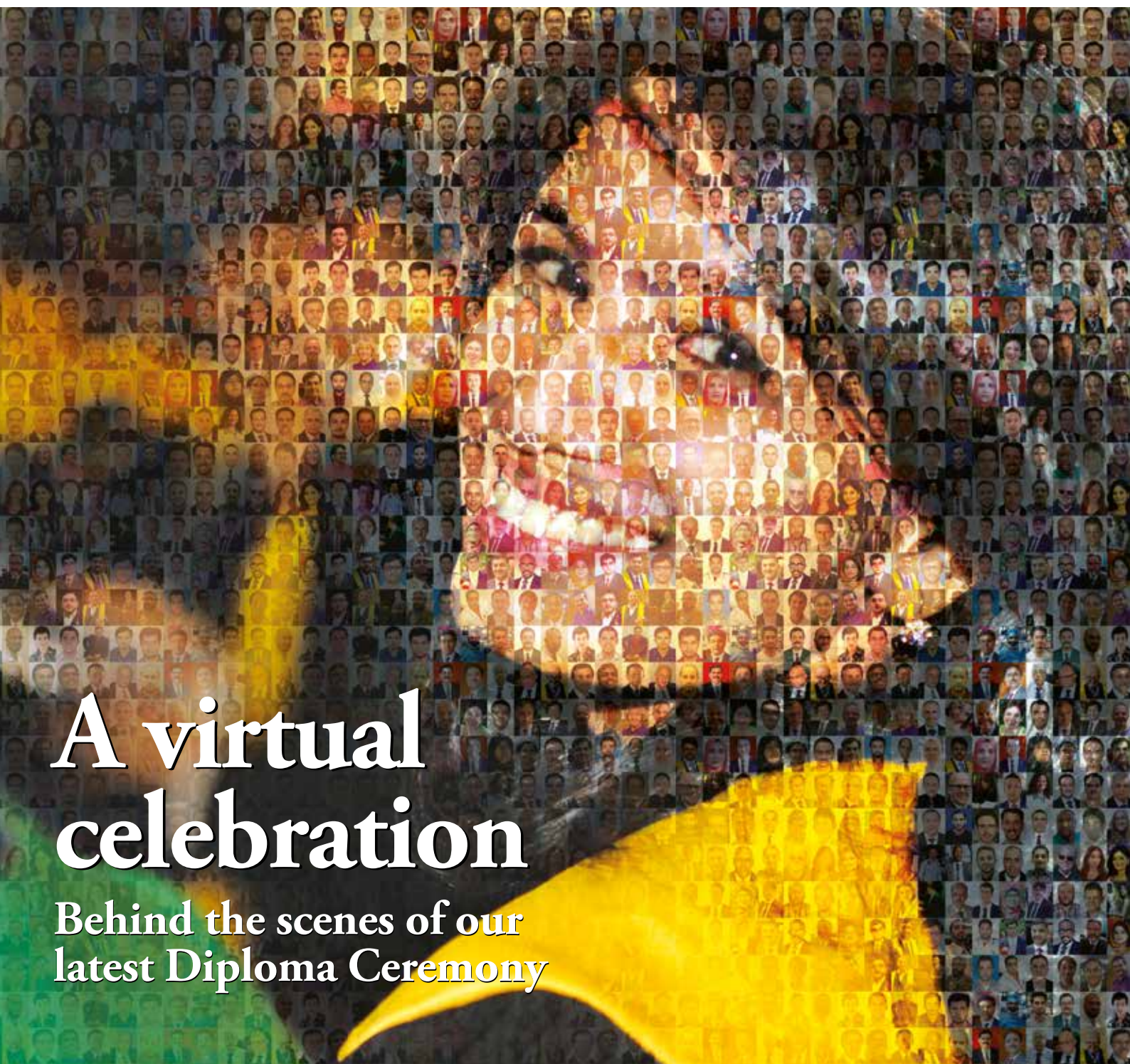


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PHYSICIANS

voice EDITION 8



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PRESIDENT'S VOICE

College President Professor Jackie Taylor writes for voice.



A decade ago the Marmot Review “Fair Society, Healthy Lives” was published to a great fanfare here in the UK. Initiated by the government to examine health inequalities in England, it set out this challenge in stark terms:

People with higher socioeconomic position in society have a greater array of life chances and more opportunities to lead a flourishing life. They also have better health. The two are linked: the more favoured people are, socially and economically, the better their health.

The report went on to set out a comprehensive range of proposals designed to address these inequalities and improve the health of those most in need. Ten years on, when the authors of the report published a follow-up in February this year, the results made stark reading. This update concluded that people can not only expect to now spend more of their lives in poor health, but improvements to life expectancy have stalled (and declined for the poorest 10% of women), while the health gap has actually grown between wealthy and deprived areas in England over the past decade.

Over the past six months it's clear that these deepening, structural inequalities have been instrumental in how the COVID-19 pandemic has played out across the UK.

We have all seen the clear evidence that COVID-19 has had a disproportionate impact on individuals and families from already disadvantaged populations and marginalised communities. A recent article from the Lancet Respiratory Medicine (August 2020: “COVID-19 casts light on respiratory health inequalities”) set out the impact quite simply:

“People living in social deprivation, Black, Asian, and minority ethnic (BAME) groups, older people, and those with pre-existing health conditions, for example, have increased vulnerability to COVID-19 and its consequences.”

Over the course of the summer our College has tried to play its part in casting light on these challenges. Behind the scenes we lobbied for additional protections within the health

service for BAME colleagues who were most at risk from the virus. Working with Obesity Action Scotland we have now published two briefings on Obesity and COVID-19 which have highlighted the emerging evidence of the association between obesity and the severity of symptoms and death. As we are all aware, the prevalence of obesity in the UK is strongly linked to socioeconomic factors.

As medical professionals, we do not practice in a social vacuum. It is simply not possible to support our patients fully without addressing the social and economic factors which continue to play a determining role in their health throughout this pandemic and beyond.

I believe passionately that it is vital for our College to continue to play a proactive role in highlighting and combating wider social issues which impact on public health, and I'm pleased to say that we are doing this in a number of ways.

Firstly, we need to show leadership. At the last meeting of our College Council we set in place an important building block towards this by adopting our first Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Policy. While we have achieved some recent successes in promoting diversity and inclusion, we know that both our College and our profession can make further improvements to ensure that all have equal opportunities to fulfil their potential. In the first instance this new policy will enable us to collect better information on how we are performing on a number of measures, allowing us to track and improve our position over time.

Our recent Virtual Diploma Ceremony also allowed us a platform to recognise the outstanding work to support homeless people carried out by the founders of Social Bite, Josh Littlejohn and Alice Thompson. Social Bite works to support some of the most marginalised people in our society, and a group which faces enormous challenges in accessing healthcare. This outstanding charity has made huge progress in providing practical support for people affected by homelessness across Scotland, so I was particularly delighted to be able to show our public support for this work by awarding Josh and Alice this year's President's Medal. I hope we can continue to build on our partnership with them in more practical ways in the months and years to come.

Finally, as part of our wider commitment to health inequalities this year we have joined with a range of other Royal Colleges and health organisations to campaign together on these issues. Earlier this year we worked together to call on the UK government to increase both the 'national minimum wage' and the 'national living wage'. Such a move would reduce the number of people receiving state benefits, increase their purchasing power, improve their health, and make work pay. It will also have a direct impact on the demand on our NHS. More recently we have had some success in working with others to lobby government on its approach to evictions during the pandemic. We will also be building on these partnerships over the months ahead to help ensure that the voice of our membership is heard at the highest levels of government when policy is made.

This coronavirus has not created the problem of health inequalities, but it has once again highlighted them in graphic terms.

The original Marmot Review set out a blueprint to effectively tackle the social determinants of health and health inequalities.

The main points of action were to:

- Give every child the best start in life
- Enable all children, young people and adults to maximise their capabilities and have control of their lives
- Create fair employment and good work for all
- Ensure a healthy standard of living for all
- Create and develop healthy and sustainable places and communities
- Strengthen the role and impact of ill health prevention

As we rebuild our society and healthcare systems stronger as we move through this public health crisis, we must ensure that we keep these principles at the forefront of our plans. Only by addressing inequality in our College, profession and society, can we ensure that we maximise the health and wellbeing of all our patients.



BODY *of* WORK

The new heritage podcast series from
the Royal College of Physicians and Surgeons of Glasgow

This new series of podcasts is all about celebrating our collaborations through medical heritage. Each episode features a different professional who has worked with our heritage department; they chat about their work, and what drew them to it.

With guests:

Episode 1 - Marianne Macrae

Episode 2 - Sam Langford

Episode 3 - Dr Cheryl McGeachan

Episode 4 - Lucy Threadgold

Episode 5 - Victoria McCulloch

Episode 6 - Dr Morven McElroy

Listen to Body of Work on **Apple Podcasts**, **Spotify** and **Buzzsprout**.



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