

BUSINESS



DOCTOR'S ORDERS

*A more responsible
approach to self care*

WHAT'S YOUR EMOTIONAL IQ?

*Jann Richardson can
help you find out*

SUFFOLK'S TOP 100

*A celebration of the
county's influencers*

A full-page photograph of a man running through a lush green field at sunset. The sun is low on the horizon, creating a warm, golden glow and long shadows. The sky is filled with scattered white clouds. The man is in profile, running towards the right, wearing dark shorts and running shoes. The title 'DOCTOR'S ORDERS' is overlaid in large, white, serif capital letters, with the runner's body acting as a visual element within the text.

DOCTOR'S ORDERS

Could taking more personal responsibility for our health not only make us feel better, but ease the burden of the overstretched NHS at the same time? Paul Simon talks to Dr Simon Frey about a more holistic approach to health care

YOU'VE overindulged haven't you? Yes, I mean you! Too much drink and rich food and too little exercise at Christmas – again. So, now it's January, and you're worrying what to do about it. You are not alone. But before 'it' means signing up to some ill-conceived solution, please listen to Dr Oliver Frey.

Oliver is the only wholly private practice GP in Suffolk, running CountryHealth in the centre of Ipswich. And he advises a more cautious approach to restoring one's New Year vitality. "You might want to invest in a health screening to find out exactly where you are and then adapt a lifestyle that supports great health" he suggests gently. "You simply cannot get rid of too many calories in a 30-minute gym workout once a week. The art is in changing your habits - not to go on a fad diet. Low fat diets don't work, and counting points and calories do not work in the long term. Going back to the roots, eating like our ancestors and taking a few carefully chosen supplements, based on the advice given by a knowledgeable healthcare professional, can make a big difference with a long-lasting effect." Oliver's own roots

are in Germany where he started his medical training in cardiothoracic surgery in Homburg/Saar, before joining a private hospital in Nuremberg where he covered bowel, thyroid and vascular surgery. He next moved to the UK to pursue a "holistic approach to treating a patient as a whole person", which involved him becoming a general practitioner and joining the Royal College of General Practitioners. He also pursued an interest in complementary medicine and earned a certificate in Reiki and acupuncture.

"When I met my Estonian wife, we moved together to Tallinn. I took a sabbatical and joined a 300-bed spa hotel as strategic development director and head physician. Later, I looked after the diplomatic corps and most of the 5* hotels in Tallinn as their hotel doctor." But, surprisingly, the lure of the east of England proved too much. In 2011 the family settled in Suffolk and he set up CountryHealth. "Suffolk reminds us of home, as the countryside is similar to Frankonia and rural Estonia. We also enjoy the high quality



Dr Oliver Frey

'Many patients suffer for years with chronic tiredness and get told that all is OK'

food from local farm shops and farmers' markets. We like the people who are honest and approachable," he says thoughtfully. Oliver's business offers nearly the whole spectrum of general practice services, but specialises in thyroid conditions.

"Hypothyroidism - or an underactive thyroid - affects one in 70 women and one in 1,000 men according to the NHS. But it can be a tricky disease to diagnose and treat. "Lack of energy, being unable to perform well at work, brain fog, lack of concentration are just a few of the symptoms of an underactive thyroid." Brain fog? So that's what I've got.

"Many patients suffer for years with chronic tiredness and get told that all is OK. The diagnosis of thyroid problems requires more in-depth testing than the usual NHS panel of TSH and T4 as it is important to check for the active T3 level. This is where functional medicine can really help and make a difference."

Another symptom is a lack of sleep, and not just due to worrying about the flab that seems to have appeared recently. Oliver sees the problem as a matter for the whole of society. "The public health consequences of sleep loss are far from benign. Some of the most devastating human and environmental health disasters have been partially attributed to sleep loss. Less visible consequences of sleep conditions take a toll on nearly every key indicator of public health – mortality, morbidity, performance, accidents and injuries, functioning, and quality of life and



family well-being.” As well as individual patients, Oliver Frey’s practice works with local businesses to keep their staff healthy – at all times of the year. He believes that companies can do a lot to keep their staff healthy and happy. “This can be as simple as having a fresh fruit basket in the coffee room, to providing speedy access for health problems. I often hear from patients that their line managers put too much pressure on them and that they lack support. Being appreciated for what you do, having a work environment that fosters one’s skills and a no-blame culture are very important. Bullying has no place in our society, not in school and not at the workplace. People need a healthy work-life balance, and need to be able to take holidays with their kids - without penalties for flying during holiday season,” he adds with force.

So much of Oliver’s work benefits more than just the top directors. “Whilst we are certainly happy to see all the CEOs of the Suffolk business world, we see currently patients from nearly all walks of life who are often desperate to turn their health around, to get answers to their questions that cannot be given in a 10 minute consultation. Patients frequently travel up to four hours to see us - we have patients in Yorkshire and Milton Keynes. By looking at all their health problems together we can often identify patterns and root causes which can sometimes be very simple and cost-effective to fix.”

But isn’t the cost of private healthcare out of the reach of most people and most businesses? “How expensive is it for a small company if a key person suddenly falls out of the workforce? This can be devastating for a one-man-band but also have a huge impact on a bigger company. Every person in a company is important and absence from ill health puts a lot of strain on the remaining team members.” Oliver clearly enjoys the challenges of not only helping his patients, but running a business as a wholly private GP. He is certainly a skilled user of networking events and social media to engage with prospective clients and raise the profile of thyroid problems.

“There are a few extra requirements to run a private medical practice compared to

‘We see ourselves as a complementary service to the NHS, and not a replacement or competition’



Oliver Frey holding a seminar

any other business. We have to be registered with and regulated by the Care Quality Commission, which involved the creation of several hundred protocols and several hours of one-to-one interviews to get accredited. Running a private GP practice requires an extra premium for the medical indemnity insurance. We only have the highest quality of staff members and practitioners and require enhanced DBS checks for all of our team members.” I raise with him the ethical issues of being a private GP in relation to the increasingly over-stretched NHS. He explains that several Ipswich practices refer their patients for private and DVLA medicals, which helps reduce their workload.

“We see ourselves as a complementary service to the NHS, and not a replacement or competition, as we help patients who want additional services which the NHS cannot afford to provide with their overstretched resources.” Oliver’s holistic approach to becoming and remaining healthy extends to his own family and how they enjoy Suffolk. “We have two dogs and take regular walks through the nearby farm. A little while ago I joined the Morris Men, which was great fun. I get involved in Framlingham College, recently talking to their sixth form students during a career fair. We never miss the family days in Easton Farm Park, the Suffolk Show and recently discovered the Aldeburgh food festival and the Gluten-Free Festival in Norwich. Frequently we go to the Suffolk Foodhall where the kids enjoy the outdoor playground, and enjoy Thornham walks and trips to the coast.”

So, maybe it’s time to be like Dr Frey and shape up – not just for New Year but for life. ♦



Mirjam Frey