

Confidences de Salon



European Respiratory Society President, Jørgen Vestbo, is Professor of Respiratory Medicine at The University of Manchester, UK, and adjunct Professor of Respiratory Medicine in his native country at the University of Southern Denmark. His work principally focuses on clinical research and the epidemiology of COPD and he has more than 300 articles to his name, including the 2011 revision of the GOLD Strategy document and recent papers on COPD phenotypes and trajectories, along with contributions to many major textbooks, including the most recent *ERS Monograph on Controversies in COPD*.

Did you always dream of being involved in medical research/healthcare?

To be honest, I was always interested in history and politics and thought that I would apply to study politics and economy at the University of Copenhagen. However, in high school, I fell in love with a girl whose entire family was doctors. I thought that I needed to impress them and apply for medicine and so I did. We split up shortly thereafter but I was on my way in medicine. I have never regretted it and subsequently strongly believe that you can find satisfaction in life in many different areas, including those you were not aware of.

What is the best advice you had when you were starting your professional career?

To be open-minded and seize opportunities. Our world is full of exciting things but if you meet them with pre-conceived thoughts you will likely miss opportunities!

What advice would you give someone at the beginning of their professional career?

Work hard, do your best to find a mentor you trust and take their advice.

What has been the greatest change to make a difference in your field in your lifetime?

It is difficult to pinpoint one single event; I think I have been lucky to experience the growing interest and investment in COPD and to be able to be part of that.

What do you foresee being the next great thing and what do you foresee as being the biggest challenge in your field in the next 10 years?

The next great thing will be that we leave behind the concept of treating individual patients with airways disease on the basis of a diagnostic label alone. We will see the arrival of precision medicine enabling us to target individual disease pathways and specific disease characteristics in individual patients; independent of whether we would label them asthma, COPD, chronic bronchitis, etc. Through this, we will be able to get treatments with better effects and hopefully fewer side effects.

What is your favourite scientific breakthrough from any field?

The IT revolution in general. I am of an age where I can remember a world without the computer. My



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wife and I studied with a woman whose husband was doing a PhD at the technical university of Copenhagen. One evening, he took me into his study and showed me one of the first ever IBM PCs. He told me that this was a “personal computer” and that in 10 years’ time every family would have one. I thought “what a nerd, nobody would want something like that in their home”. I was wrong!

How do you see the future of ERS?

I see a very bright future with a society that is open and embraces more or less everyone with an interest in research and care of respiratory diseases. Gone are the days when ERS was an elitist society for the middle-aged European respiratory specialists. We will see an increasingly vibrant society, ready to take on the huge challenges of improving knowledge and care in our field.

When are or were you happiest?

I am happiest in two situations: when I am with colleagues discussing data and study findings, and when I have the opportunity to spend more than a day at home in the Danish countryside with my wife and closest family and friends.

What do you dislike most?

Arrogance and hidden agendas.

Who has been your greatest inspiration?

I have been lucky to meet people who have inspired the whole field of COPD, including Neil Pride, Nic Anthonisen and James Hogg. They have all inspired me, probably more than they know.

Whom would you most like to thank?

The numerous colleagues I have worked with for years. No man is an island; we all thrive through

social interaction and we rarely achieve much unless we collaborate.

What do you consider your greatest achievement?

I do not think my greatest achievement has been in my professional life. I have managed to marry an amazing person and to find a life companion in my wife. After 32 years of marriage we are still able to inspire each other, to learn and to enjoy the achievements of two great children. No professional achievement can ever compete with that.

Who are your favourite authors?

I have no single favourite author. Like many other busy people of my age I have become almost addicted to the new wave of fascinating crime novels and always travel with one.

Where would you most like to live?

I have been extremely lucky to be born on a very peaceful spot of the globe where I have had a safe childhood, good education and numerous possibilities. I am very happy with living in Denmark but working in the UK and often visiting other countries has made me realise that I could be happy in many places.

What qualities do you appreciate most in your friends and colleagues?

Loyalty and humour.

What do you consider to be your strengths and weaknesses?

I think that my main strengths are that I can listen and make people collaborate. I can also condense fairly complicated issues into smaller parts that are more easily digested. On the weak side, I may not be the most patient person, I am not good at reading other people, and I wish I would be better at saying “no”.