

LEONARD RAYMOND FENWICK DSc

Mr Chancellor,

When I am not doing research, teaching or speaking to you, I am a doctor in the hospital of which Len Fenwick is the Chief Executive. I am, therefore, a little more anxious than usual as I stand with both my bosses in the same place at the same time. I am also delighted to be able to speak without Len being able to say anything in response.

As you are well aware, Mr Chancellor, hospital managers tend to occupy a place in the affections of the populace adjacent to estate agents and politicians so a prerequisite of survival is a thick skin. When I met the Chief Executive of Central Manchester Hospitals last week and told him Len was to be honoured he said I should check he had his O-levels. Mike Deegan went on more seriously to express his delight at the award for his old friend and confidante.

In fact Len did well at O-level at John Marley secondary school in the city where he went on to complete A-levels in Geography, Geology and Chemistry, before joining the NHS at eighteen as a management trainee. He worked his way up, displaying a quick mind, an intimate knowledge

of the organisation and a legendary capacity for hard work and attention to detail.

When I first worked under his leadership, as a registrar in paediatric cardiology at Freeman Hospital, I was too busy rushing around to be conscious of his existence. That was thirty years ago and he was barely older than me yet he had been put in charge of a brand new hospital. Over the last 20 years, as head of the genetics service, I have spent many hours in his company and often enjoyed his unflinching inquisitorial style, except when I was in the spotlight of course. Ten years ago the decision was taken on high to merge the three teaching hospitals in Newcastle to form the Newcastle Hospitals NHS Trust. There was, as you might imagine, some competition for leadership of the new organisation and RVI staff were apprehensive when “the Freeman lot” won but the outcome has vindicated the choice of Len to be its leader. Two years ago the Newcastle Hospitals NHS Trust was voted the Best in Britain. Despite living in the goldfish bowl of NHS management at a time of intense change, he’s still here, close to being the longest serving hospital chief executive in the NHS.

There is a common misconception that the NHS spends too much on managers. In truth, as an organisation the NHS spends a far smaller

percentage of its income than comparable corporations. Len Fenwick is responsible for 9000 staff and a budget well in excess of half a billion pounds each year. His team have negotiated a £300 million contract for reconstruction of the hospital. It is inevitable that he sometimes stands on toes, but he remains single minded in his pursuit of excellent health care for the people of the North East. His long service and his rise through the ranks ensure he has the respect of the legion of unsung, and often lowly paid, staff who keep the hospital running. But he never relents in his pursuit of high standards. Digital photography has enhanced his ability to confront staff with evidence of shortcomings; “Len’s in with his camera again” is a cry which has a galvanising effect.

There were fears with Len’s appointment that the relationship with the University might suffer. In fact it has prospered. He knows full well that our hospital owes much of its reputation to the excellence of its academic specialist staff. Our Faculty scored top marks for teaching and is one of the highest ranked research centres in the UK, yet few are aware that it receives more of its funding via its NHS partnership than from the Higher Education Funding Council. He has provided wholehearted support for our latest successes in the development of stem cell research as a basis for the therapies of tomorrow.

Len's surname links him to one of the old border reiver clans of Northumberland and his other passion is upholding the tradition of the Freemen of the City whose organisation he chairs. In contrast to his high tech hospital, a major job of this role is to preserve the Town Moor where freemen are entitled to graze two cattle each. Their pooled entitlement is still enacted. You can walk five minutes from this hall and see the huge expanse of unspoilt grassland where my wife and I go jogging each morning, marvelling at the nightingales and trying to stop our dog eating the fresh cow dung.

Mr Chancellor, Len Fenwick is not the abstract thinker some might associate with prestigious academic awards, but he is nonetheless a deserving recipient. He is an honest, highly intelligent, hard working ordinary man who is passionate about our city and its institutions. His ability to withstand the buffeting of constant reform, his unblinking commitment to excellence in our health care and his clear understanding of the relationship between the academic achievement of our Faculty of Medicine and the quality of care on our wards make him part of the very structure of this University and it is right that this is recognised. I commend him to you, Sir, for the award of Doctor of Science, *honoris causa*.

Citation by Professor John Burn