

Mr Chancellor,

Whatever the context, the word cancer is emotive. It induces a reaction, whether that is fear, compassion or confusion, but it rarely feels positive. Everyone in this room will have been affected in some way or another. Harpal Singh Kumar works in cancer research. Research into cancer over the last couple of decades, has transformed and continues to transform the outcomes for patients. Whilst the word is still emotive, the progress in its management is so much more positive.

The remarkable progress in managing cancer is not an accident, and it is a very long way from reaching a conclusion. That progress has been built on the back of a great deal of hard science, on an understanding of everything from the most basic cellular mechanisms that underpin life itself, to population science and public health that have allowed us to implement robust policies based on evidence. Consequently, if I were to ask any of you sitting here this afternoon to imagine someone involved in cancer research, I wonder what you would see?

Maybe you would see Harpal in a lab coat clutching a pipette, maybe as a clinician peering at an image on a screen or sat at bedside or in theatre, masked and with surgical instruments in his hand. Whatever you see, I am pretty sure that there were not many of you that immediately pictured a Chief Executive, a man in a boardroom.

The lab scientists, oncologists, radiotherapists, surgeons, nursing teams, trials units, public health teams and all of the rest do outstanding work but they do not lead themselves. The progress that has been delivered by these

myriad groups has not been achieved by people doing their own thing in their own bubble. Smart and sometimes heroic though they are, the industry of cancer research needs more than just people researching, it needs financial investment, strategy and direction. It needs resource in the right places doing the right things in a co-ordinated way to ensure that each discovery leads to an incremental development which, when combined with all of the others, makes a difference. That is the bit that Harpal Kumar does, and delivering that is a rare skill.

Cancer Research UK, usually shortened to CRUK, is the second largest funder of cancer research on the planet, and the biggest independent funder. The only organization that ploughs more money in to the field are the National Institutes of Health in the US, and that is government funding. Furthermore, because CRUK has to raise its funds through public donation, the public who run, walk, shave their legs, bungee jump or leave a legacy, they all have to have full confidence that the organization will use every penny for the reason they raised it.

Harpal Kumar is the Chief Executive of CRUK. He is barely 50 and has already been leading the organization for 8 years. His first chief executive role was at the tender age of 27. Most of the new graduates here today will not be far off 27 and some will be well beyond. Do you reckon you could be a successful CEO?

To understand how Harpal ended up in charge of an organization with a turnover of £0.5 billion per year you really have to start before he was born. Following the partition of India, Harpal's parents found themselves as refugees in a camp in Delhi. His father came over and worked in the UK in the early 1960s, taking whatever job he could, sweeping floors for very low

pay. Harpal's mother followed and he was born soon afterwards. When he had saved enough his father opened his own business, a corner shop, and from an early age Harpal worked there at weekends and after school. He was not doing this as a little Saturday job to save up and go out with his mates, he was doing it, unpaid, because the business, his family, needed him to do.

He will have absorbed many lessons in these years, about how to run a business, how to deal with people, how to communicate and above all, how to work hard. You can imagine the pride of the family when, barely two decades after they arrived in London, the young Harpal won a place at Cambridge University.

People respond to an Oxbridge education in different ways, some seem to see it as a birthright, some love it and some hate it. Harpal loved it and maximized the benefit. He studied Chemical Engineering but made, what any dentist like me would see as a fundamental mistake, by knocking around with medics. This young chemical engineer, sponsored by the Atomic Energy Authority, was interested and inspired by what he learned from his medical friends and when he qualified, with a first.... of course, he was head-hunted into management consulting by McKinsey, and specifically into healthcare management. They sponsored him through an MBA at Harvard and he worked for a while for a biotechnology company on the US west coast. The experience at McKinsey, the MBA and the rest furnished him with a whole range of strategic skills. He was still only 27 and it was now time for a really big challenge!

Having worked on a pro-bono basis with a medical charity, the Papworth Trust, he was spotted, and asked to take over. This was an organization that

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employed around 500 people but it was struggling. He took it on and in five years he turned it around. It was now 1997 and he was making a name for himself. He was approached by a venture capitalist group to set up a company making medical devices related to physiological monitoring of respiratory changes in heart failure. This fused his management background and his interest in the healthcare sector with his engineering training. Starting the business from scratch, once again, and not surprisingly, he made this a success too.

In the early 2000s, the two big UK cancer charities, Imperial Cancer Research Fund and the Cancer Research Campaign were merging into what is now Cancer Research UK. As part of this process the technology transfer and development subsidiaries were merged into *Cancer Research Technology Limited* and Harpal Kumar took over in 2002. Things moved fast and by 2004 he was Chief Operating Officer of CRUK itself and in 2007 he became CEO and he is still there.

Harpal Kumar is clearly a very talented leader. He fuses an extraordinary work ethic with great humility and an inclusive and strategic approach to leadership born out of a natural understanding of people; he has, by all accounts, bags of emotional intelligence. His role requires him to be the perfect custodian of all that charitable resource. He himself is one of the fundraisers, he completed the London Marathon this year plunging through the pain barrier to raise over £70K for CRUK. That is leading from the front, even if, in the case of the marathon itself the front was... a bit distant.

In an organization built around the funding of science he has to understand the complexities of all aspects of the science as well as the business. In his own words he reckons he has to know enough about the medicine and

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science of cancer to drive the organization... but not enough to be dangerous. That is still a lot to know! It is not just about CRUK though, he has to interface with government organizations and influence policy as well as ensuring that the work of CRUK meshes neatly with that of the many other funding bodies. Cancer research goes from strength to strength, the discovery and treatments continue to evolve and improve.

So, that is how Harpal Kumar, a man in a boardroom, is at the heart of global cancer research.

Doubtless he could be paid much more for doing much less, his beloved Liverpool Football Club need some new recruits after all. So, other than some shortcomings in his technical ball skills, what keeps him in this role in cancer research? It is because he really cares about what the organization does and because of his empathy for the patients, their families and the cause.

Now, after that glowing citation he is clearly not perfect. So, before I close there is one important thing we need to raise with Harpal. Right back in the early 1980s when he filled out his UCAS form, he actually applied to Newcastle as one of his five choices and we offered him a place! Harpal, look at what you have missed.

Mr Chancellor, I think we can make up for his minor error of judgment now. For his contribution to medical research, I commend Harpal Kumar to you for the degree of Doctor of Science honoris causa.

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