Could you provide an insight into your background and expertise?

After training in medicine and surgery at the Royal College of Surgeons in Ireland, I moved to London to become a consultant general surgeon and subsequently settled at St Mary’s Hospital in 1994. I focused my early career on developing the emerging trend of minimally invasive and laparoscopic surgery and my aim was to reduce the physical and psychological traumas of surgery for patients. To do this I took an academic approach, bringing together surgeons, scientists and engineers to draw on collaborative skills and advance the technology and clinical translation.

Later in my career I focused on the translation of evidence-based practice and supported the development and promotion of innovative policies, technologies, services and business models that offer potential solutions to the global health challenges of today. I have been a clinician, academic and parliamentarian, but my goal has always been to champion patients’ needs and promote equal access to high-quality healthcare.

What have been your major motivations throughout your career?

Tackling inequalities that exist in healthcare on a local, regional, national and international level; bridging the gap between what we know and what we do – spreading best practice and improving the quality of healthcare.

As Director of the Institute of Global Health Innovation (IGHI), what are the major healthcare challenges you are working to tackle?

Key challenges facing healthcare today are the ageing population and an increasing prevalence of lifestyle, cognitive and noncommunicable diseases. These challenges will require greater emphasis on patient-centred healthcare provision and long-term chronic management of disease. A major difficulty is that this shift in the patient demographic is occurring in parallel with increasing economic pressures around the world and healthcare expenditure.

The vision of IGHI is to improve health through innovation and reduce health inequalities worldwide. How is it working to achieve this?

At IGHI I lead a multidisciplinary team of experts based within distinct centres that focuses on surgical innovation and technology, healthcare design, patient safety and innovative policy research across a range of pertinent global health topics. Each centre is tasked with supporting the translation and spread of best practice. Our newest addition, the Health Innovation Exchange Centre (HELIX), promises to deliver exciting new patient-centred healthcare solutions from our industrial designers who are embedded within the clinical setting at St Mary’s Hospital.

The Global Diffusion of Healthcare Innovation was launched at the World Innovation Summit for Health (WISH) in Doha late last year. What were the key findings of this report? How can governments and healthcare organisations work together more effectively to implement new ideas?

This study was born out of the pressing need to spread innovation and best practice within organisations and across healthcare systems, rather than reinventing the wheel. It looked to explore the enabling factors which support the adoption and diffusion of innovation and delineate the prevalence and perceived importance of different enablers at supporting diffusion and adoption (such as information technology capacity, funding for R&D, etc.). The study showed that across a range of countries, there was a universal gap between the prevalence of these enablers and the degree of importance that healthcare professionals associated with each enabler. More must be done to address this gap and support the diffusion of best practice.

How important is international collaboration to fulfilling the Institute’s goals? More specifically, are you collaborating with North America?

Collaboration is vital in health policy and WISH in 2013 illustrated the great potential of bringing academics, industry professionals and policy makers together in one place to raise the debate on global health. The policy reports that we published, on topics ranging from obesity to big data, were the product of strong and lasting collaborations with a host of academics including Professor Shiriki Kumanyika of the University of Pennsylvania and Professor Sandy Pentland of Massachusetts Institute of Technology, respectively.

www3.imperial.ac.uk/global-health-innovation
www.gdhi-im.com
www.wish-qatar.org

Professor the Lord Darzi of Denham, Director of the Institute of Global Health Innovation, closes the issue by detailing his aims to tackle today’s prominent global health challenges and the Institute’s plans for the coming five years.