



*Dear Colleague*

## What's new at Braemar?

Braemar's new orthopaedic surgeon Jason Donovan shares a name with one of Australia's favourite sons. But they couldn't be more different...



**Jason Donovan is used to receiving amused looks when he introduces himself.**

The 36-year-old orthopaedic surgeon, who recently joined the Braemar team, shares a name with one of Australasia's most famous pin-up boys – Jason Donovan, who played a leading role in the long-running Australian soap opera *Neighbours*.

"I had a little respite when I was living in Canada. No one had heard of *Neighbours* there," he says.

But the similarities end at that point. Waikato's Jason Donovan is an accomplished orthopaedic surgeon, more interested in fixing bodies than flexing his muscles for the camera.

Jason specialises in foot and ankle surgery, paediatrics and sports injuries at Waikato Hospital and now at Braemar.

He said he was drawn to orthopaedics because the idea of being able to fix things appealed.

"Orthopaedics is quite logical. My brain is more logical. There was more of a natural fit with my strengths than other specialties."

He says while orthopaedics is not as black and white as he first thought, "the logic is still there along with the bio-mechanics, the physics and the planning and decision-making, which is what I enjoy. As well, patient satisfaction is very high."

Born and raised in Te Awamutu, he graduated from Otago Medical School in 1999 and completed his pre-clinical and clinical years at Otago and Wellington before working as a house surgeon,

SHO and junior registrar at Waikato Hospital. In a serendipitous turn of events, he did his GP training with the family doctor in Te Awamutu – Dr Fraser Hodgson.

He did further training in Taranaki, Dunedin, Tauranga and Hamilton before completing a six-month sports fellowship in Auckland and later spent 18 months in Canada where he completed a year at Toronto's Hospital for Sick Children ("commonly shortened to SickKids") and six months at St Michael's Hospital completing a foot and ankle fellowship.

He arrived back in New Zealand last year with his wife, Liz, and their two children. The couple has subsequently had a third child, a daughter born in May.

Jason says he particularly enjoys the field of foot and ankle surgery. "The foot is an intricate bit of machinery. There are also a lot of exciting innovations in foot surgery, such as locking plates that are specific to feet, compression screws and ankle replacements."

Ankle replacements are of particular interest. He says they are now getting to the stage where the

replacements are lasting longer and becoming more viable for more people. New technology allows surgeons to more reliably treat a lot more injuries, particularly high energy fractures and fractures of frail bones.

“Previously ankle replacements failed because the designers did not respect the anatomy and biomechanics of the ankle. Later replacements have attempted to replicate the anatomy of ankle with improved results.” “We are now getting closer to the results being obtained with knee replacements.”

He believes ankle replacements, which are commonly done when people have had multiple ankle sprains that develop into arthritis, will become much more common in future. “Historically, the treatment would have been ankle fusion and that is still the gold standard. But the problem with ankle fusion is you lose the motion in the ankle which puts greater stress on the joints around it. An ankle replacement has been developed to try to retain that motion as well as provide pain relief.”

He believes ankle replacements will become the gold standard in the future but says there is still some way to go. “Currently, there are problems with ankle replacements wearing out before a patient does. A huge amount of force goes through a foot and ankle through a small surface area. The movement that occurs is not typical of a hinge joint or a socket joint – and ankles can vary widely. It is complex and difficult to replicate with an ankle replacement.”

A typical case of a successful replacement was a man in his sixties who was a keen trumper. He could walk only 200m without substantial pain. The man was keen to retain movement in his ankle, which ruled out a fusion. He had the operation and within six weeks there was a marked improvement

in his pain. At the six-month mark he was essentially pain free and able to get back to tramping as long as he didn't push himself too hard.

Jason says he is particularly interested in sports injuries and has some concern about the increasing prevalence of sports injuries in young people, especially ruptured ligaments around the knee.

“Previously kids were allowed to play in whatever fashion they wanted. They might play rugby or soccer or play on the jungle gym. Today sports are more structured and kids from an early age focus on one or two sports. That can lead to repetitive-type injuries and those injuries are not allowed to heal themselves. Sport is also becoming more competitive and kids at a younger age are training harder in an effort to win. This is leading to an increase in injuries previously thought to be adult injuries. Kids are still growing. Their bone remodels according to the stresses put across it. We need to allow recovery time.”

He says the warnings are already being heeded in North America, and New Zealand will follow suit. Some changes have also been put in place by codes such as rugby.

He particularly enjoys paediatric work. “The biology of a child is that they still have a lot of remodeling potential. Kids heal so well. It's unusual to have a bone not heal with kids”. He says he also enjoys relating to kids – “I get a bit goofy, which they seem to like” – but he sometimes needs to work in a “veterinary way”. “Young kids can't talk so you have to be like a detective to work out where the pain is.”

Outside of work, Jason enjoys surfing and snowboarding – “though more cautiously these days.” He also plays the drums in two bands, one of which is made

up of two cardiologists and a non-medical keyboardist. His musical tastes run to the “heavier variety” – U2, Switchfoot and Coldplay. Music runs in the family. His parents played in a band named Simple Faith, which cut a record, and his three brothers and sister are all musical.

Thankfully for his patients, he has no plans to pursue that passion and follow his Australian namesake Jason Donovan on the celebrity circuit.

## Mr Jason Donovan Orthopaedic Surgeon

### Qualifications

MBChB 1999, FRACS 2008

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### Areas of Specialization

Foot and Ankle; Paediatric Orthopaedics; Knee arthroscopy and ACL reconstruction including Paediatric Sports Knee

### Specialist Training

Bachelor of Medicine Bachelor of Surgery University of Otago - New Zealand 1999

Fellow of the Royal Australasian College of Surgeons - New Zealand 2008

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