



Dear Colleague

What's new at Braemar?

Braemar's Brandon Adams works in reconstructive and cosmetic surgery. While the needs in these fields may be different, he says the aim for both is to always have a highly functional result...



Plastic surgeon Brandon Adams' cv is punctuated with academic and professional achievements: degrees in physiology, bioethics, medicine and surgery, plus and the prestigious John Corby Medal for Distinguished Service to the Royal Australian College of Surgeons.

Yet, it is the human side of his work that ignites his passion. "I had considered becoming a medical research scientist. Partway through med school, I was considering going down a public health track. But then at clinical school I realised I enjoyed working with people one-to-one so much, I felt compelled to not give it up."

Caring for his patients means much more than a good clinical outcome. "The care for the patient; the desire to return someone to a normal life – that is what is paramount. If someone has surgery with me and, in

10 years' time, they are living a life they are happy with, then that is success."

An example is of a woman who came to him with a breast deformation. One breast was a normal size; the other was small and constricted. "She had never shown her partner her breast. She was so embarrassed about it. But there was a way we could improve that – and that is what we did."

A large part of his work in the public sector is complex head and neck reconstruction following cancer surgery. His job is to reconstruct the area affected as far as possible so the patient can eat, swallow and speak. But also to give them the best facial appearance they can have to function well in the community. "If you have a terrible cancer of the face, it can be socially isolating. You can be fearful that your face upsets people. My job is to rebuild a good face, which people will be happy to interact with."

At Braemar, he works in both reconstructive and cosmetic surgery. He sees the fields as being very similar. "The needs may be very different – with a cancer patient who needs reconstructive surgery there may be time pressure - but the techniques are the same. I am operating on the same parts of the body with the same tissues. On the cosmetic side, there are no diseases as such, but

a person has something they want to improve. The goal is always to have a highly functional result."

He says with any type of surgery, the process is always a partnership between the specialist and the patient.

"For many people there is an obvious problem and an obvious solution. But medicine is a partnership and patients have autonomy. A century ago, doctors sat in isolation because they were part of the educated minority. The people who come to see me are well educated and articulate about their own conditions. It is a decision-making partnership." He says some people simply want him to fix the problem. They say, 'you are the technician; you make the decisions', but I see that as them being in the driver's seat as well."

Understanding people's values is crucial, he says. "How much time and investment are they prepared to put in to solve their problem and get a particular benefit? For example, how much do I (the patient) value a short, nearly invisible scar versus how much do I value a quick, uncomplicated recovery time. My job (as a surgeon) is to produce both those outcomes but sometimes there are trade-offs."

Some things that people value are intuitive – such as getting rid of cancer – but when it comes to reconstruction it can be very simple or very complicated to get good results. “For me, the really enjoyable part is talking to patients to establish what their values are.”

He says the field of plastic surgery is exciting and revolutionary. Fifteen years ago, microsurgery – in which tissue is taken from one part of the body to repair another area – was prominent. In the future, tissue for these procedures may be able to be grown in the laboratory. The early work has been promising.

Because of his work with skin cancer, he is also excited about the advances in treatment of melanoma, an area of particular interest and concern in New Zealand. “In the past three years treatments have been developed that lead to longer-term survival for advanced melanoma. It’s a desperately difficult disease and good surgery plays a part in that.”

There are also changes in the way people now seek treatment for problems they may have previously lived with. One is breast reduction. “Whereas in the past, this may have been seen as purely cosmetic, it is now understood there is a real functional benefit. People who have large, heavy breasts experience neck and back pain, but they may also have trouble getting clothes to fit and experience social comments about their size and shape. Women with large, troublesome breasts find breast reduction surgery transformational. The evidence is that you get as much benefit from a breast reduction as you get out of a knee replacement. It’s life-changing.”

He says as a result of more women talking about the benefits, more women are coming forward. “Whereas before it might have been a private thing and women may have been embarrassed to talk about it, they are now more likely to say, ‘I’ve got a problem; what can be done about it?’”

He says cosmetic surgery for aging can also be life-changing. “Most people want changes that restore them to looking on the outside the same way they feel on the inside. A person might say, ‘everyone tells me I look tired or worn out, but I feel energetic and lively on the inside’. People want help to improve that. They want to look like themselves but they also want to reflect their energetic,

youthful personalities rather than a care-worn exterior.”

He says New Zealanders are realistic about what they want and are not looking for the “Hollywood over-operated look”.

“There are some negative things on American TV, which are inappropriate. But more and more people are becoming aware of what is possible and available – and also understand what is realistically possible.”

Men are also seeking improvements as they also try to maintain a more youthful appearance to reflect their fit and active lives. “Men in their fifties and sixties are now young men. They don’t see themselves looking like their father at the same age.”

Dr Adams says the field of plastic surgery captivated him as a student because it presented complicated problems for which there were solutions. Now, 38, and one of the leading young practitioners in New Zealand, he is still excited by what is possible and the ability of plastic surgeons to help people lead fully functional lives.

He says New Zealand has a worldwide reputation in plastic surgery from the time that two New Zealanders – Sir Harold Delf Gillies and his nephew, Sir Archibald McIndoe - restored appearance and function to soldiers left disfigured and disabled.

“Two generations have followed on from them. They have brought concepts back to New Zealand. The man who inspired me to take up plastic surgery, (Swee Tan, Wellington-based professor of plastic surgery and consultant plastic surgeon) is one of a generation who have been trained by the protégés of those pioneers. There is a degree of pedigree that comes with it. And while the techniques we use for solving problems now is quite different, the values are the same: the care for the patient and the desire to return someone to a normal life.”

Kind Regards,



Dr Greg Spark – Deputy Chairman

Mr Brandon Adams

Qualifications

FRACS (Pl Rec Surg) 2012
MB ChB 2003 Otago
BMedSc(Bioethics) 2001
BTech(BioMedSci) (Hons) 1998

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Areas of Specialisation

Brandon’s specialty interests include reconstructive plastic surgery of the face, hand and body and all aspects of cosmetic surgery.

- Plastic & Reconstructive Surgery
- Cosmetic Surgery
- Head and neck cancer reconstruction
- Skin cancer surgery
- Melanoma surgery

Specialist Training

Fellow of the Royal Australasian College of Surgeons (Plastic and Reconstructive Surgery)

Advanced Aesthetic Surgery Fellowship,
New Zealand Institute of Plastic and Cosmetic Surgery

Microsurgery Fellow, Princess Alexandra Hospital, Brisbane, Australia

Positions & Memberships

Royal Australasian College of Surgeons,
New Zealand

New Zealand Society of Plastic Surgeons
Australasian Society for Aesthetic Surgery

Currently Working at Braemar Hospital?

Yes