Surgical personae

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Welcome to the January 2018 edition of the *Annals of the Royal College of Surgeons* and a very warm welcome to the New Year. For many, the last few weeks will have meant ‘business as usual’ with clinical commitments taking precedence over the festive period – a surgical devoir that we have long accepted will take us away from friends and family. If you have ever wondered what sort of individual commits to a career in surgery and the pandect of obligations that make a work–life balance increasingly difficult to achieve, then I recommend you read the article on surgical personality in this edition of the *Annals*.

The study involved a survey of fellows and members of the RCS to see if there were certain character traits which might go some way to defining a surgical character. The five factor personality survey detailed how agreeableness, conscientiousness, openness and neuroticism appear to be

attributes that predominate amongst surgeons. It is perhaps understandable that the term neuroticism is a singularity to which the casual reader will inevitably be drawn. Higher scores here have a negative association with emotional stability – not necessarily an attribute with which we might instinctively associate with the surgical character. But for some of our ranks, the association with anxiety and depression will inevitably resonate.

More significantly however, is that it is strongly associated with the phenomenon of surgical burn-out. It seems likely that markers of neuroticism simply reflect the nature of professionals who care deeply about those for whom they care and who acutely feel the impact of both personal and system failures – with inevitable consequences over the course of a career. None of the individual attributes identified in the survey should or need be seen in isolation. Indeed, some would suggest embracing these ‘inherent nature portends’ as attributes that reflect the surgical personality as a measure of who we are. Understanding the surgical persona may help us navigate a better work–life balance that might both enhance and maintain surgical careers. With a generation of junior doctors currently hemorrhaging from the profession we will need to renew efforts to identify and define those characteristics that lead the most experienced of our colleagues away from the profession at a time when they have most to give. There is an urgent need for things to change in this respect.

And change is something that is currently very evident at the RCS in Lincoln’s Inn Fields. Refurbishment work is now well under way with boots and safety helmets replacing electronic passes as the *de facto* requirement for entry onto some parts of the site. The *Annals* team has entered a period of nomadic existence moving from one corner of the building to another as construction work extends week by week. I am very grateful for their forbearance and for their continued support during this challenging time. I am also very pleased to announce that the RCS Journals App is now freely available for download on both Android and Apple smartphones and tablets. The *Bulletin* is free to access for anyone who wants to download the app, and RCS members will be receiving an email in the new year with instructions on how to log in to access the *Annals*. Happily, the log-in process will only need to be done once, so no more typing of usernames and passwords.