

TV shines spotlight on pioneering NI doctor whose career was shaped by father's murder

BBC films Lisbellaw consultant who devised technique for cancer surgery

By Mark Bain

THE exceptional medical career of Dr Andrew Carrothers was shaped from a very young age.

Growing up in a small Co Fermanagh village, one incident, he says, made his mind up that going into trauma work was his ambition.

When just a 14-year-old boy on May 17, 1991, his father Douglas (Doug) Carrothers was murdered.

The part-time RUC reservist died when a bomb exploded under his car as he left work at a timber yard in Lisbellaw.

What followed for Andrew (43) was a life devoted to finding out if he could help other people in times of need.

For the past eight years he has been Consultant Orthopaedic Surgeon at Addenbrooke's Hospital in Cambridge and his pioneering work is set to be featured in a new BBC2 series when the first episode of *Surgeons: At the Edge of Life* airs on Tuesday night.

"I suppose that's the moment that has most influenced me in life," said Andrew. "From then on everything was black and white for me. It was a career in trauma, and it was always going to be surgery."

That single minded approach reaped its rewards and, after moving to Manchester to attend university in 1996, sparked his early career as a military surgeon, serving in Afghanistan and Iraq, then into orthopaedics.

But some surgeons operate. And some surgeons invent oper-

ations. And it's Andrew's development of a pioneering surgery to help cancer patients enjoy a better quality of life that has attracted attention.

"I just see it as doing my job," said Andrew, who in 2016 came up with a new technique to strengthen the pelvis in cancer patients to help them regain movement so they can walk again.

Making advancements in medical science seem easy, his new element to an already complex operation is now called the Harrington Plus in the profession.

Sixteen times he has completed the procedure now, and sixteen times he has given a little extra to enhance the lives of cancer patients, allowing them to enjoy freedom of movement when otherwise they would have had none.

"The pelvis has always been a problem area in cancer patients. It's spongy, has a massive blood supply and is one of the secondary areas that always provides a perfect spot for the cancer to settle. It eats at the bone, it leaves patients unable to stand up. But having worked in hip replacements, it seemed natural to take that a step further.

"What we have now is a strengthening of the pelvis with a special plate, a long-lasting fix to see them to the end of their lives. It's offered to patients who have more than a year or so to live. It's no cure, but it's all about quality of life.

"The results have been good over the past four years. It is a



Pelvic cancer surgery:
Dr Andrew Carrothers
RYAN MCNAMARA

thing. But I suspect this will be my five minutes of TV fame. There is much more to this than just me. You have the determination and courage of the patients and a fantastic team of doctors and nurses working with me.

"I did have a bit of an input into television before," he added. "A few years ago I had to rush to Tilbury Docks where a crane worker was trapped. That turned into a leg amputation to save his life. Weeks later BBC's *Casualty* ran that storyline and even had a Northern Ireland actor playing the doctor. I've always wondered where they got that idea!"

Life for Andrew is now is a far cry from carefree days growing up in the small village of Lisbellaw. But he still finds the time to enjoy the simple pleasures.

"Taking my little boy Dougie, he's called after his grandad, to football, taking my daughter Molly to ballet. Those are the important things. And of course my wife Liz is at the heart of everything I'm able to do."

Surgeons: At the Edge of Life starts on BBC2 at 9pm on Tuesday

Change the 'cruel' rule for dying people claiming benefits: MLA

By Staff Reporter

PEOPLE should not have to prove they only have a number of months to live before being able to claim certain benefits, an Alliance MLA has said.

Kellie Armstrong was speaking ahead of her Assembly motion today calling for an end to what she called a "cruel" rule.

She is calling on the Communities Minister to bring forward legislation immediately to remove the 'six-month rule'.

Under the Special Rules for Terminal Illness, certain welfare benefits for those with a terminal illness can be fast-tracked if they can produce a doctor's note saying they have six months or less to live.

Campaigners argue that the rule unfairly excludes some dying people and forces them to go through long delays and distressing assessments to access their benefits.

In July, Belfast High Court ruled that the difference in treatment for terminally ill welfare claimants who don't meet the six-month life expectancy criterion is discriminatory and "without reasonable foundation".

Strangford MLA Ms Armstrong said: "This is a cruel rule which takes away people's dignity in what can be their final months. The distress and pressure the six-month rule puts on a person, their family and medical professionals is a disgrace."

End of life charity Marie Curie

has urged all Stormont parties to support reform of the law for dying people.

Craig Harrison of Marie Curie Northern Ireland, urged MLAs to back the motion.

He said: "The six month rule is cruel, arbitrary and causes enormous harm by forcing dying people to wade through unnecessary red tape and endure long delays to get the support they need.

"In the worst cases, people are even dying before seeing a penny of their benefits because the standard application process takes so long. No one should be turned away from the fast-track system because they aren't deemed to be dying quickly enough, but that is the reality of the six month rule."

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