

Flying Doctor's mission to improve men's health

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Meet Dr Dave Baldwin, New Zealand's very own flying doctor. A GP for more than 20 years, he is based in Bulls and well known in the region for doing the rounds in his Cessna.

On a mission to improve men's health and using his trademark humour, Dr Baldwin recently penned a book on all the health problems that can affect the average bloke.

If laughter is the best medicine, then Dr Baldwin's book 'Healthy Bastards' is the essential prescription for every man who wants to know more about his health.

Healthwise Editor Tamara Rubanowski caught up with Dr Baldwin, to find out how the idea for 'New Zealand's flying doctor' came about.

"I have always been passionate about medicine, but I wanted to find some way of applying my GP to my combined love of outdoors and family involvement. After developing my medical centre in Bulls, I specialised in Aviation Medicine. Then with my son Marc getting into flying and hunting with me, we started spending time in the West Coast of New Zealand. Our association with pilots in this region lead to the idea to provide a mobile 'armed' service to remote areas. It started in Haast and from there the idea and service has become very popular. Marc and I now cover over two thirds of rural New Zealand. It's going like a rocket.

Men need to read 'Healthy Bastards' because one of the key issues with regards to public health in New Zealand is that there is a large group of people (both men and women) who just don't listen to the health messages. These are the people who die early from self-induced illness created by obesity, smoking, lack of exercise and booze. There are just as many women in the category of the non-listeners.

'Healthy Bastards' is my way of trying to reach these people, although members of the "worried well" brigade will have a laugh too, if they read my book. By writing a Barry Crump style book that is fun, no bullshit and with some good serious messages, it may well take off within the group of 'at risk' people. If it gets good publicity then the target audiences may well start talking about it in the pubs and at the footy matches."

So what are the three most underrated men's health issues?

"There is no question that prostate cancer awareness is a biggie, but the reality of it all is that cardiovascular disease is the big killer and attention to risk factors like lipids and smoking is crucial. Thirdly, a very important health issue is that somehow young men and boys need to be loved and mentored by other men. Good role models and camaraderie are very important. So many of the troubled youth I see today in my practice are kids without a father or role model."

How many hours does a flying doctor work, on an average day?

"I work from 4am until 9pm. Then I am in the bath with a glass of chardonnay," says Dr Baldwin.

"It's not that I am some manic workaholic, but I am very, very appreciative that through all the hard work I have the following: physical wellness, an amazing family (my soulmate and wife Sandi is my tower of strength), an amazing medical centre in a dynamic little rural town, next to the best airforce base in New Zealand (Ohakea), with a Flying Doctor Service that is unique in the world, flying over the most beautiful country of the world and meeting real hard cases, working with my son and daughters in a family business, and now I have a book published ... how good is that?"

Dr Baldwin says he loves living in New Zealand because of the space, clean water, freedom, the mountains, lots of deer to shoot and because all of his family and mates are here. "Men should celebrate life," says Dr Baldwin. "Everyday is your birthday when you have been involved in medicine for 30 years and you realize that everyday you wake up could be your last. So don't moan and make a dick of yourself. Take a breath, think positive and kick arse!"

Dr Baldwin's favourite things include travelling with his wife Sandi and working with his family. "Flying by yourself in the big mountain valleys of the Southern Alps and shooting a big stag is hard to beat too."

How does Dr Baldwin keep healthy?

"Sandi, my wife, rules the diet with a rod of steel – a cruel, cruel woman, but nobody will listen to me. Otherwise I have a regular daily exercise routine."

What is Dr Baldwin's advice for a happy life?

"I am not some great guru who is qualified to give you the answer to this. I can only give you my personal experience in life and through observing people in my medical practice:

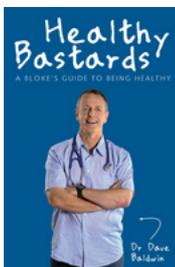
Individual health: It's very important for people to understand that the body is but a machine - a beautifully designed robot, not much different from Terminator (Arnie is my hero by the way). So you must take care of this machine as you would a new car. Keep it well oiled and clean with regular checks. If not, then you'll end up in

the wrecker's yard in no time and it's nobody's fault but your own.

As far as mental health is concerned, I go along with Freud. To be mentally happy you only need two things: love (to give and to receive) and work (if you work it is positive, if you sit around all day doing nothing then your mind starts thinking stupid things).

Spirituality? Lot's of people laugh at this and think spirituality is bullshit. But I disagree and reckon developing a spiritual side is very important to developing a happy life, whatever creed or religion takes your fancy.

Stay away from drugs and excessive booze. The virtual reality created by drugs is artificial, and always ends in unhappiness. It's interesting that the fella who designed LSD reckoned that the best trip he ever had on LSD was nothing compared to visualizing a really good sunrise."



Win a copy of Dr Dave Baldwin's 'Healthy Bastards'!

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