

# Life at the Cutting Edge

**Meet Vik Vijn, a man on a mission to change the face of cosmetic surgery in the UK. *Cosmetic Surgery & Aesthetics Guide* caught up with him to find out more about his background, his plans for the future and what makes him tick...**

At first glance, you might be forgiven for thinking Vik Vijn is just another 'celebrity' plastic surgeon. He writes for national newspapers, has made numerous TV appearances – for a long time, he was Channel 4's go-to cosmetic surgeon – and runs his own surgical group, the Beauty Gurus.

However, speak to Vik for more than a few minutes and you'll see that his agenda is far more than mere self-promotion. He really wants to make a difference to the way that cosmetic surgery is practised in the UK, and to that end *The Beauty Gurus* is no ordinary clinic group...

## A brain for beauty

Vik wasn't always planning on being a plastic surgeon. "Originally, I was a

neurosurgeon," he explains. "But I was always very pernickety, always interested in getting the neatest looking result, and in fact it was my boss,

when I was a neurosurgical registrar, who suggested that plastics might be the field for me.

"He was watching me work one day, and he said, 'you need to go and try plastic surgery for six months'. So I took his advice and went and tried it out, and that was it – I was hooked."

Never one to do things by halves, Vik rapidly moved up the ranks within his chosen

specialty and is now clinical service lead (head) of the plastic surgery department at University Hospital Birmingham, one of the biggest departments of its kind in the country, which treats all the soldiers returning from Afghanistan and other warzones.

So what is it that he loves so much about it?

"I think it's the challenge – the reconstructive aspect, microsurgery, is very difficult. Also you're on show; with most surgery nobody can see what you've done, because it's under the skin, but this is there for all to see, and it very much separates the men from the boys."

Still heavily involved with the NHS, Vik does a lot of teaching about the cosmetic aspect of plastics, and lectures the cosmetic surgery section of the pre-exit exam course offered at University Hospital Birmingham for those surgeons about to sit their final exams before they become consultants.

## World class surgery

Vik is a surgeon at the top of his game, and he's determined to keep it that way. "I make a real effort to be good at what I



do," he says. "I spend half my life on a plane, flying around and meeting what I consider to be the best surgeons in the world, attending meetings and conferences and learning all about the very latest techniques."

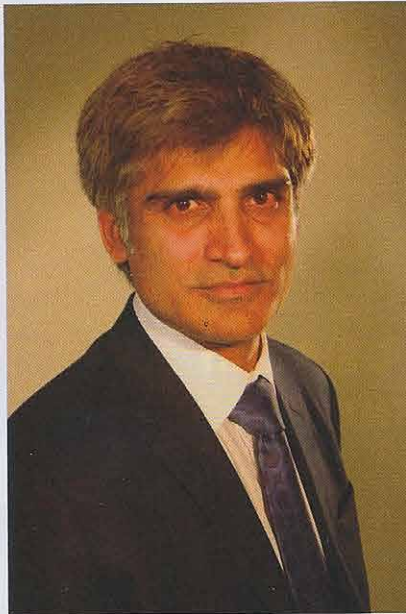
This is something that sadly doesn't happen often enough in the UK, according to Vik: "I went to a meeting in Brazil with 2,500 surgeons from around the world, and only six of them were from the UK," he sighs. "In Australia, there were 1,000 people and two were British. That's a real problem for me – if you're going to be good you need to be out there, keeping yourself up to date, being at the cutting edge."

In order to help other surgeons achieve this degree of insight, Vik devised and introduced The Cosmetic Surgery Fellowship, a programme which allowed surgeons who were coming to the end of their training in the NHS to take three months out and work full time with Vik or one of his colleagues to hone their skills.

"They had all the skills of a plastic surgeon, but we wanted to give them that finesse, that aesthetic eye," he explains.

"If you ask your average plastic surgeon how to do a breast augmentation, they will often offer only one technique, whereas I wanted to teach them when to use round implants, when to use shaped implants, when to go under the muscle, when to go under the gland, how and when to lower a fold... What I wanted was to give them a master class in cosmetic surgery."

Sadly, that fellowship is now at a standstill, but Vik is in the process of setting up a new programme with the Beauty Gurus, to ensure that standards



are raised in British cosmetic surgery.

### A different approach

It is easy to be cynical about cosmetic surgery companies – they each promise to be the best and to change your life, but most are at heart just well-oiled marketing machines. Which is exactly what drove Vik to launch The Beauty Gurus.

**“The patient is guaranteed that whichever Beauty Guru they go to they get the same high quality product”**

"I used to be managing director for cosmetic surgery at one of the big hospital groups, and doing that job taught me a lot about what was happening in the market place," says Vik. "And I realised that cosmetic surgery was effectively being bought up by venture capitalists and business men."

"Many of the big high street clinic chains were effectively driving down prices – not the price paid by patients, but the fees they were paying to the

surgeons and staff – and as a result of this, they were driving down quality. They were often supplying a poor surgeon, a poor anaesthetist and a poor implant in a poor hospital environment with poor post-operative care. And that bothered me."

Vik realised that unless surgeons were able to offer a consistently high quality of care and, crucially, let the public know they were doing it, that the good work they were doing would be driven out of the market by these groups with huge marketing budgets and clinics in every major town.

"Another thing that irked me was that I looked at some of the industry bodies, and effectively they're clubs. You pay your fee, you get a reference from a mate to say you're a good guy and you're in," Vik opines. "They don't check anything – so long as you're an NHS plastic surgeon you're fine by them, and you might not be able to hold a knife properly when it comes to cosmetic work."

"The Beauty Gurus is not a club. Nobody pays me a fee to be a member. What we provide is a consistent product. The patient is guaranteed that whichever Beauty Guru they go to they get the same high quality product, which means the technique of surgery and the quality of the implant or tools used."

One thing that isn't different is the price, and that's something Vik is adamant about: "We're no more expensive than these high



street clinics, which is something a lot of patients can't get their head around. But the difference is that they have to pay their shareholders, whereas with me that money goes on a better quality implant, a better quality anaesthetist and a better quality service."

### Making the grade

So how do we know that this isn't just another soundbite of smooth marketing speak? Well, you won't find a Beauty Guru in every city yet, for a start. Vik is a man of exacting standards and to impress him enough to be allowed to call yourself a Beauty Guru is no mean feat.

"At the moment, there are five of us," says Vik. "Myself, Anne Dancey, Shiv Singh, Sukh Rayatt and Darren Lewis. There are a lot of people on the waiting list, but I have to be happy that they offer a consistently very high standard of surgery, and that takes a very long time.

"For example, tonight I have my private clinic and the next person who wants to join the Beauty Gurus will be in with me and has been every single week for the past few months, to ensure that I am happy with their knowledge and the manner in which they deal with patients."

There are some benefits to seeing a Beauty Guru that the high street chains just can't match up to. "If you're a difficult case," says Vik, "your surgeon won't just call in a mate for a second opinion, you get referred to our MDT meeting, where instead of two surgeons discussing your case, you'll have five or six top quality consultant plastic surgeons debating how best to solve your problem.

"And you never find yourself in a position where you can't get hold of anyone, or you're



“ Vik is a man of exacting standards so for a surgeon to be accepted as a Beauty Guru is no mean feat ”

fobbed off with a nurse or a salesperson. The other day I was busy in theatre with a soldier and a past patient arrived at my private clinic with a query about her implants. One of the other Beauty Gurus, Mr Singh was able to help her, because he knew exactly who she was and what she'd had done."

### Facing the future

Vik is passionate about protecting plastic surgery as a whole. "I think we have to protect plastic surgery within the NHS," he insists. "Other specialties are consistently trying to erode away at those parts of the NHS that plastic surgeons do.

"Plastics is an important specialty and the present war proves that – plastic surgeons

are spending thousands of hours fixing the soldiers, and I don't think people are even aware that we do that. They think we fill our time doing facelifts and lipo, but we don't – we do a huge amount of work to fix soldiers, victims of car crashes and cancer patients."

And it's not just the reconstructive side that Vik fears for. "At the moment, anyone who can hold a knife calls themselves a cosmetic surgeon. And I have an enormous fear that more and more people are going to dabble in this field and lower the quality.

"That's why I think it's essential that organisations like The Beauty Gurus exist. So that patients know that if they come to us, they're guaranteed a high quality and they're guaranteed a proper plastic surgeon."

One exciting new string to the Beauty Gurus' bow is the introduction of varicose vein treatments, with one of the UK's top vascular surgeons having recently joined the team. Vik is confident that his rigorous selection process when it comes to allowing new surgeons on board means there will be many more such developments in future.

So will Vik achieve his aim of transforming the face of British cosmetic surgery? That remains to be seen, but with plans to expand the Beauty Gurus to cover the whole of the UK, we shouldn't have long to find out. Well, only as long as it takes for Vik to personally train each one!

### CS&AG

For more information on Vik and the Beauty Gurus, call 0800 612 5919 or visit [www.thebeautygurus.com](http://www.thebeautygurus.com).

The Gurus currently cover Worcestershire, Herefordshire, Staffordshire, Birmingham, the West Midlands and London.