A close-up portrait of Vikram Vijn, a man with dark hair and a slight smile, looking upwards and to the right. He is wearing a purple striped shirt and a patterned tie.

Vikram Vijn spends his working life between rebuilding battle-torn soldiers, working in private practice and appearing on TV, giving his expert views

Sharon Chilcott talks to surgeon Vikram Vijn whose casebook ranges from servicemen and women to tv stars

Plastic, surgery's

MR FIX IT

AS ONE of the UK's leading consultant cosmetic and reconstructive plastic surgeons Vikram Vijn shares his time between treating wounded soldiers, burns and cancer patients on the NHS, and providing a service to private patients.

He heads up a large team at the Burns and Plastic Surgery Unit at the Queen Elizabeth Hospital, Birmingham, which serves the whole of the West Midlands. He and the 16 consultant plastic surgeons working with him also operate a trauma team, on call to the Centre for Defence Medicine which is based in the hospital and is the main receiving unit for all British military casualties injured in conflict around the world.

With wounded soldiers currently returning from Afghanistan, trauma is an area of his work which is busy and challenging and is likely to remain so:

"The soldiers come to us with everything you can imagine, from minor wounds, gunshot wounds, burns to soldiers blown to almost beyond recognition.

"In some of the worst cases, there can be a team of 10 consultants spending 30 hours saving them and fixing them. I consider it an honour to be able to do that for them because their sacrifice is enormous.

"Already we are kept busy with the sheer volume of trauma coming in and now Queen Elizabeth is due to become a Level 1 Trauma Centre. We were operating a system of seven days on call 24/7 cover to ensure continuity in the care for military and trauma patients but I have recently changed this because I thought the consultants were all going to keel over. Now the system is that consultants will be on call 9-5 during the week, with a different

person on call at night and a different person at the weekends, so there will still be continuity of care, which is really important."

For Vikram, nothing but the best is good enough for his patients and he says: "It's a brand new hospital, possibly the best in Europe, and we have to set high standards and that's what I am aiming for."

For this perfectionist: "Second best or 'that will do' is not good enough." He describes how he has just removed a mole from a soldier. "I finished it, looked at it and said, I am really sorry but I don't think that's quite good enough and then I undid all the stitching and did it again. It has to be that little bit better."

It is a similar attitude which he teaches to cosmetic surgeons who attend the West Midlands training programme to help them prepare for

“The soldiers come to us with everything you can imagine, from minor wounds, gunshot wounds, burns to soldiers blown to almost beyond recognition

their exams to become consultants. “I teach them the finesse. They know one way to do a breast augmentation – I teach them six ways to do it and how to choose what is right in each case.”

“I always say to all my trainees to know how to treat a patient you have to imagine they are your own father, mother, brother, sister or child and do the right thing, even if that is to say, I can’t do well enough and send them to someone better.”

In the private sector, Vikram has clinics in Birmingham, Worcestershire Herefordshire and London, where his celebrity clients include Pineapple Dance Studios star choreographer and Dancing on Ice judge Louie Spence.

His expertise is also called on by TV producers, “I have probably done more TV than any other plastic surgeon in the country,” he says. He featured as one of the experts on Extreme Male Beauty on Channel 4, performed plastic surgery on Extreme Makeover UK and the other programmes he reels off include Ten Years Younger, You Are What You Eat and Embarrassing Bodies. He is currently working on a programme for the Discovery Channel called Last Chance Salon, putting right cosmetic surgery mistakes.

“I spend so much of my time fixing things that other cosmetic surgeons have done that have gone wrong, that I am also hoping on the show to give a three minute consultation to show people what things to ask and look out for. So if, for example, they want a breast augmentation and they walk into a clinic and the surgeon is talking codswallop they will know it, because I’ll have told them what to ask, what they should be saying to them and what answers they should be getting.”

He says he has particular concerns ►

Vikram Viji at Prospect View in Malvern



PHOTO: ANTONY THOMPSON

CHARACTER

about: "Clinics where the gate shuts at 5pm and where they do operations under sedation or local anaesthetic because they don't have a licence for a general anaesthetic. Patients should go to a proper hospital and I consider a proper hospital to be one that has full general and local anaesthetic facilities and 24-hour cover from a doctor in case of problems afterwards."

Vikram is also called on as a media commentator and has appeared on ITN news, BBC news and local news. Breast augmentation and reconstructive breast surgery are areas in which he specialises and he is, to put it mildly, incensed by the recent PIP scandal, the subject of several of his recent TV interviews.

"I wrote about my concerns about 18 months ago and at that time only one regional paper listened. I told the Medicines and Healthcare Products Regulatory Agency about the problems and a few months ago I wrote to them and suggested they bite the bullet and issue recommendations that they are all removed."

He says the low cost of the implants should have sounded warning bells and points out: "I use the implants which I consider to be the best. I choose the product rather than the company and I use specialist implants for specialist scenarios and some of the ones I put in cost £500 each.

"The PIP implants were £69 and the companies who bought them bought them purely on price. This company came to my office and I threw them out. I said this looks rubbish, feels rubbish – no, I didn't refuse to use them in the NHS, I refused to even discuss it!"

He adds: "I took out three ruptured PIP implants in December and three in January – how many ruptured implants, from all the other manufacturers, have I taken out that

have been made in the last 20 years? Not one."

Earlier this year, Vikram set up a new plastic surgery service in Malvern. Working under the name The Beauty Gurus, he has brought together a group of highly qualified and skilled plastic surgeons based in the West Midlands and Worcestershire.

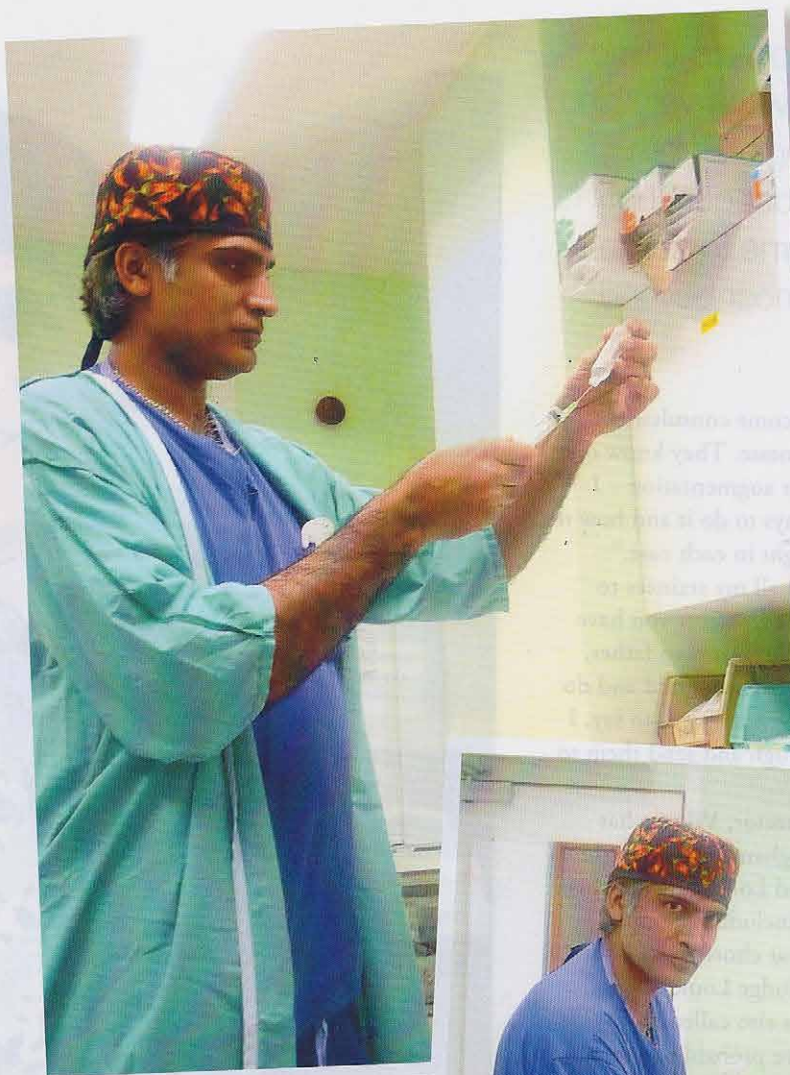
Every week, he and his team will be visiting Prospect View on Pickersleigh Road where they will be available for consultation for all aspects of plastic and cosmetic surgery, whether that's facial surgery, body contouring such as liposuction, tummy tucks or breast augmentation and reduction.

This is the first time a service of this nature has come to Malvern and with the PIP implant scandal firmly in

mind, Vikram and his team are offering free consultations to any women who have concerns.

To launch the service, there will be a patient open evening with the chance to discuss PIP implants and any other aspect of cosmetic surgery on March 26 at 7pm. ■

For details visit www.thebeautygurus.com or call 0800 612 5919.



Vikram Vih working at the Queen Elizabeth Hospital, Birmingham

