

Surgeon flies in the face of ignorance

Amazed at the lack of campaigns to raise awareness of facial cancer, leading specialist and Belsize Park resident Iain Hutchison has launched a charity called Saving Face. Fundraising kicked off with an exhibition of paintings showing patients before and after surgery.

IAIN Hutchison has a sense of purpose that is almost overwhelming. He talks rapidly, words tripping off his tongue with great facility. And his focus of attention is targeted in one direction only – to promote the worthy cause of cancer prevention. Not just any cancer, but facial cancer.

To him, it is the most underpublicised form of cancer in Britain, yet it enjoys only a fraction of the public awareness of cervical cancer though

by JOHN GULLIVER

just as many women suffer from it.

He wants to change that. And it is his mission to do so.

Not only is he one of the country's leading cancer specialists but, unlike many consultants, he has the gift of the gab and is able to give a lay person the most graphic picture of the most complex medical condition.

Mr Hutchison, who lives in Belsize Park (and happens to be one half of a firebrand partnership, the other half being Baroness Helena Kennedy), this week launched Saving Faces, a charity devoted to research into the prevention and treatment of oral and facial diseases and injuries.

Sensitive to what makes the public stop and listen, he persuaded Glasgow artist Mark Gilbert to paint portraits of patients before and after



CARING SURGEON: Iain Hutchison with comedienne Ruby Wax

surgery.

To do this, Mr Hutchison turned his office at The Royal London Hospital into a studio where most of the paintings are now stored, waiting to go on a tour throughout Britain to publicise the charity.

Whenever he sets out to describe his project, the word "amazing" crops up. He is one of those people who can see what is wrong, and amazed few others can't.

He is "amazed" there are no campaigns to make the public aware of facial cancer as there are for breast and skin cancer.

He is "amazed" few know that facial cancer affects as many, if not more, people as many others form of cancer, yet knows no one talks about it.

But he doesn't just talk. He acts. Recently, he gave a talk to a school to warn children about the dangers of smoking, another cause of facial cancer. And he drove home the point by per-

suading a patient to go with him to the school.

He showed slides of what a mouth can look like under the attack of cancer. The children gasped in horror.

Would any of them stop smoking? Fifty per cent of them, who had been smoking, stopped smoking, a survey discovered one month later.

Mr Hutchison wants fellow facial cancer surgeons – there are 38 in the country – to give similar shock-horror talks.

But all this takes money.

And this is where his unstoppable enthusiasm comes in again.

He has set a target of persuading 2,000 people in Britain to donate £1 a week for five years which would be sufficient to set up a proper research body.

All the money, he promises – aware of the bad name some charities have attracted – will be spent on research. He and his colleagues would sift through the evidence, come up with answers,

and tackle this scourge.

To launch Saving Faces, he staged an exhibition of pictures by Mark Gilbert at the National Art Gallery last week, attracting stars such as comedienne Ruby Wax and chat show host Clive Anderson to help give the charity a push.

Patients who had undergone reconstructive surgery helped to open the exhibition.

Will the charity be successful? If anyone can make it succeed, Mr Hutchison can.

■ **Donations can be made to 'Saving Faces' and credited to the account of this registered charity through your own bank or any HSBC branch: HSBC Bank plc (Saving Faces), Kentish Town Branch; sort code 40-04-03; account number 31371045.**

Cheques can also be posted to:

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