

# IN GOOD HANDS

*From the operating theatre to the television screen, Norfolk's consultant plastic surgeon Rozina Ali is a woman in demand, as Rachel Buller reports*

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LISTEN hard, and you will hear the faint trace of a Scouse accent as Rozina Ali talks, especially the more animated she becomes. We meet the day of the first junior doctors' strike and she is unwavering in her support for the NHS and very clear on why we should treasure it. As one of the country's leading plastic surgeons, specialising in microvascular reconstructive surgery, she has honed her skills all over the world and is currently a consultant at the Norfolk and Norwich University Hospital.

"I have never been afraid to stick my head above the parapet," she laughs. "While training at St Thomas' Hospital in London I was forever down at the Houses of Parliament shouting about something. But it taught me that I had a voice and you cannot be mute when society is suffering. Once you are in a position where you can make a difference, in whatever role, you have

woman you were considered successful if you worked in a bank on the counter."

Initially she was keen to specialise in bowel surgery – "that to me was the stuff of real surgery", but on the advice of a colleague who recognised her "good hands" she took a plastic surgery placement.

"I absolutely loved it, then it was recommended I try microsurgery. In Taoism they say 'Lean in to your strengths' and I believe I have tried to do that my whole life."

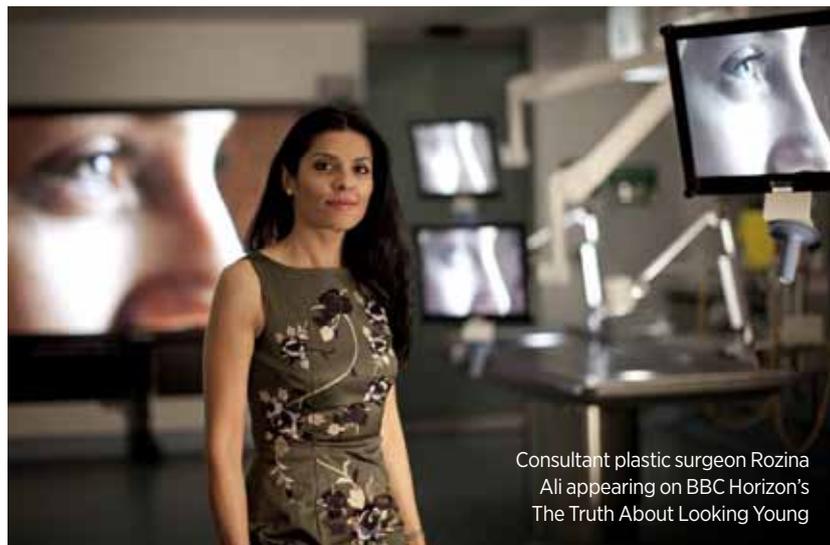
Her specialism, microvascular reconstructive surgery, uses tissue from one area of the body to reconstruct defects caused by trauma, cancer or birth defects. She won the prestigious Stephen Kroll Scholarship to study microvascular breast reconstruction in Ghent, Belgium; was a craniofacial fellow at Great Ormond Street Hospital, and was selected as the International Microvascular Fellow to study surgery in Taiwan.

"As a doctor you are always learning. But as you grow up, you realise there is a lot more to being a doctor than a certificate or qualification. Understanding the human condition and its vulnerabilities makes you a better surgeon."

It was the growing reputation of the N&N which brought her to the county and she is proud of the ground-breaking surgery it is undertaking and plays an active role in pioneering charity Keeping Abreast.

"There are so many areas in which we are excelling and leading the way, especially in reconstruction surgery. We are pushing plastics forward all the time," she says.

In the past few years, her surgical renown and refreshing openness has brought her a new challenge – as a presenter on the BBC Horizon series *The Truth About Looking Young* and Channel Four series *How Not To Get Old*, and



Consultant plastic surgeon Rozina Ali appearing on BBC Horizon's *The Truth About Looking Young*

a duty to use that voice to help others. I felt that sense of duty, I still do. I worked hard and have done fine, but you cannot sit back - I owe that to my profession, my gender, my working class background, even my ethnicity."

Rozina grew up in Liverpool, in one of its most deprived areas – did that drive her on?

"Not consciously, no. I just never doubted I would do it; I didn't have any naysayers telling me I couldn't. I wanted to be a surgeon. It was all clear to me. You make a diagnosis, then fix it with your own hands. I love that simplicity and directness."

Her father worked in a factory and her mother was a stay-home mum to Rozina, her three sisters and brother - to whom she is incredibly close.

"No-one in my family had ever studied medicine but they all really believed in me, as did my school, which was fantastic. It was in a really tough part of Liverpool, in Toxteth, and as a

there are more projects in the pipeline.

"I think women actually get better with age; I feel better now than I did in my 20s. But what I think these programmes highlight is the bigger picture, the importance of looking after yourself inside and out. Maintaining your physical appearance does not just mean having surgery, it could be going to the gym, taking regular walks, using a good skin cream, eating a good diet or going to the hairdresser, or," she says, "doing nothing at all. It is different for everyone and it is about choice and empowerment.

"It is too easy to say women only seek plastic surgery because of vanity, vanity is a hugely complex thing. Issues with your own self image can have a huge impact on self-esteem and mental health and it can cause anxiety. Surgery in those instances can have a really fundamental benefit to all aspects of that patient's life." ♦

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Surgeon Rozina Ali

