

TheFitList



The 26 Most Influential Men In Health & Fitness

True influence cannot be measured in likes and followers.

It's worth more than #ads and double taps. That's why this list is different: you'll find true change-makers, from life-saving scientists to tech innovators. These are the people making a difference to your life right now, whether you realise it or not

ILLUSTRATIONS BY NOMA BAR & PADDY MILLS





01. Kamal Patel

Director of **examine.com**, opposer of nutritional “fake news”

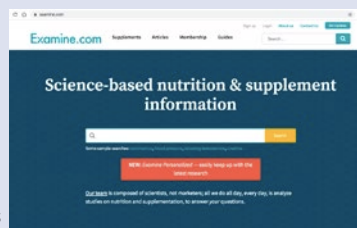
Analysing research papers might not be many people's idea of a hobby. But it's Kamal Patel's – as well as his profession. Patel and his **examine.com** co-founder, Sol Orwell, met after discovering that they were both sufferers of the same rare and painful joint condition, Ehlers-Danlos syndrome, and were searching for ways to manage it.

At the time, Patel was researching vitamin D at the US Institute of Medicine. “I was also a wannabe powerlifter,” he says, “so I was tweaking my diet a lot.” Both men were dismayed by the lack of a comprehensive source of unbiased nutritional information. Given the thousands of game-changing studies published each year – and the haphazard way in which they're reported by the media – how could the average person keep up? They created a solution. (And bought the domain name for \$41,000.)

Today, **examine.com** attracts millions of visitors each month. “We

don't pump out click bait, we don't accept third-party ads, and we don't sell supplements,” says Patel. Instead, they assist hospitals in crafting research tools for their physicians and sell targeted content packages. Taking the path less trodden is a slog. “After all, we're not a mega-corporation,” he says. “We're just a team of research nerds.”

The area of research on which Patel is currently most frequently nerding out is gut health. “There used to be this concept that when you eat something, it's just integrated into your body,” he explains. “But now, we know that everybody's gut is different and reacts very differently to foods. That's why people sometimes say a certain diet didn't work for them.” But more important than what he does know is his willingness to recognise what he *doesn't*: “We know that we're fallible. We make mistakes. So, if anyone catches anything, please let us know.”



JUST THE FACTS: EXAMINE.COM DEBUNKS PERNICIOUS MYTHS ABOUT NUTRITIONAL SCIENCE



James Clear
Best-selling **self-help author**, forger of good habits

James Clear's *Atomic Habits* has sold more than a million copies, and the odds are that you'll find one at your workplace or gym. Ten million visitors browse his website each year, and more than 650,000 people subscribe to his weekly “3-2-1” newsletter – among them Ryan Holiday, another author whose titles can be found in NFL, NBA and MLB locker rooms. Clear has also had speaking gigs at Lululemon, LinkedIn and Intel. His popularity is down to his lucid style and focus on the only *real* “one weird trick”: how to do things consistently enough to get results.

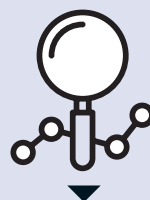
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Adrian Hill
Vaccine maker at Oxford University, COVID-19 combatant

Under more normal circumstances – in “precedented” times, if you like – it takes 15 years for a vaccine to go from idea to licensing. Hill's team has been tasked with turning one around within months. A pioneer in vaccines for diseases such as malaria and Ebola, Hill, at the time of writing, is “80% confident” that the coronavirus vaccine that he and his team at Oxford are developing will work. If it proves effective, the pharmaceutical giant AstraZeneca has committed to producing two billion doses – of which at least 100 million are earmarked for the UK.

KNIGHT IS PUTTING GUT BACTERIA UNDER THE MICROSCOPE



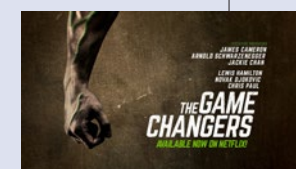
Rob Knight
Director of the Center for Microbiome Innovation, **gut-health guru**

If your shopping basket has been full of kefir, pickles and kombucha in recent years, you have one man to credit. When New Zealander Rob Knight was invited to collaborate on a project investigating the link between gut bacteria and bodyweight, he was initially sceptical. His work has since tied our microbiomes to everything from obesity and immune health to anxiety. (It's a good thing he didn't go with his gut...) In the near future, he hopes we'll be able to “read” our bacteria like copy fed through Google Translate and use that info to build personalised medicines and diet plans.



Mark Twight
Founder of cult fitness facility **Gym Jones**, anti-influencer

When director Zack Snyder first hired Mark Twight as a mountain safety expert for 4x4 ads in 2001, the former alpinist was best known in climbing circles for his death-defying feats. Later, in the words of *Vanity Fair*, Twight proceeded to set “a new standard for male physiques in Hollywood action films” with the cast of Snyder's 2006 movie *300* – not to mention most of the Justice League. Moving on from the cult of his former training facility Gym Jones (a name riffing on Twight's charisma and hardcore methods), he has more recently reinvented himself as a mind transformation specialist and teaches his “philosophy of effort” to followers via his Project Mayhem-like NonProphet Media.



TRUE TO ITS NAME, WILKS'S FILM RE-ESTABLISHED VEGANISM AMONG THE FITNESS ELITE

06. James Wilks

Pro MMA fighter, producer of *The Game Changers*, **maker of vegans**

Veganism used to have an image problem. Or, more specifically, vegan men, who have often been unfairly characterised as oversensitive and underfed. With his documentary *The Game Changers* – which was executive-produced by James Cameron, among others – Wilks ripped this idea up at its roots, arguing not only that meat is expendable in the quest for strength, but that a plant-based diet is actually superior for athletes of all disciplines.

“The response has been incredible,” says Wilks. “Within a week of the film hitting Netflix, the interest in plant-based eating more than tripled worldwide, according to Google Trends metrics.” Among those said to have switched up their diets after watching the film are actor Dolph Lundgren, strongman Hafþór Björnsson and the CEO of sausage roll purveyor Greggs, Roger

Whiteside. “We have also had hundreds of very elite athletes reach out to us,” says Wilks. He won't name names but reveals: “Soccer is one of the big ones.”

Some of the film's admittedly more hubristic claims have been met with scepticism, including by this magazine. Wilks is accepting of this fact, though he feels that the backlash has often been more emotional than analytical: “People are very attached to their meat-eating. It's behavioural psychology.”

He would know. A former mixed martial artist, with black belts in tae kwon do, kickboxing and Brazilian jiu-jitsu, there was a time when Wilks believed that eating animal protein at every meal was integral to his health and performance. “That's backwards thinking,” he says now. “If you really think you need meat to build muscle... that's just so old-fashioned.”



WORDS: SCARLETT WRENCH, JAMIE MILLAR, TED LANE AND DAVID MORTON | PHOTOGRAPHY: GREG FUNNELL, AGATA PEC, ALAMY, NBCUNIVERSAL/GETTY



07.

Dwayne Johnson

Actor, producer, wrestler and polymath, **the Rock**

When polls showed that the wrestler-turned-actor Dwayne Johnson would beat Donald Trump (with a People's Elbow, *MH* votes), it was inevitable that the most statesmanlike geological specimen since Mount Rushmore would announce his campaign for 2020. That 2017 *Saturday Night Live* skit seems less like a joke now with Johnson calling impassionedly for real leadership to his 189-million-strong Instagram base, while Joe Rogan pleads: "C'mon, man – we need you." Until this generation's Arnie goes the full Reagan, he leads by example: training hard, opening up about his experience of depression and being a role-model dad.



A BORN LEADER, THE ROCK INSPIRES MILLIONS WITH HIS SELF-DISCIPLINE



08.

Chris Whitty

Chief medical officer for England, voice of reason

With the UK suffering more coronavirus deaths than any other European country (second only to the United States as we write this), the government has been criticised for its confused and oblique messaging ("Don't go outside! But do go to work..."). England's cautious and plain-speaking chief medical officer, Chris Whitty, has proved a reassuring presence at Downing Street press briefings. Whitty and his colleagues have frequently opposed plans to lower the UK's threat level and defended care home staff. At least someone's alert.



WHITTY'S EXPERIENCE HAS HELPED TO STEER A NATION IN CRISIS



09.

John Berardi

Author, founder of Precision Nutrition, no-nonsense educator



"John has literally revolutionised the way most of us think about nutrition," wrote bodybuilding website T-Nation in 2002 – the year before the "Large Professor" co-founded the hugely respected online coaching company Precision Nutrition. With clients from Nike to Equinox, Olympic gold medallists to UFC champ Georges St-Pierre, Precision Nutrition has helped more than 100,000 people eat their goals, and qualified almost as many coaches to give scientifically sound food advice. Having taught at recognised learning institutions, Berardi has established the Change Maker Academy to turn coaches into, well, him.



10.

Robin Carhart-Harris

Brain researcher, scientific psychonaut



CARHART-HARRIS IS TURNING TRADITIONAL MEDICINE ON TO THE POTENTIAL OF PSYCHEDELICS

"Obtaining magic mushrooms on the NHS is a realistic goal, and it could be coming sooner than we think," Robin Carhart-Harris told *MH* in 2018. We might not be there yet, but the doc's predictions have proved incisive. The years since have seen the opening of Imperial College London's multimillion-pound Centre for Psychedelic Research, headed by Carhart-Harris, where studies comparing psilocybin to traditional antidepressants show potentially game-changing results. He has also researched LSD and MDMA. Even Gwyneth Paltrow is on board – though don't let that put you off.



11. Tony Bignell

Nike's VP of footwear innovation, creator of the world's fastest trainer

The top-three marathon men at the 2016 Rio Olympics were all Nike Zoom Vaporfly guys. In 2017, Eliud Kipchoge ran two-and-a-half minutes faster than the men's world record of 2:02:57 in the Vaporfly Elite, albeit unofficially. In 2018, he officially smashed the record by 78 seconds in the Vaporfly 4% – that figure being its scarcely believable improvement to the wearer's running economy. And in 2019, Kipchoge finally (unofficially) broke two hours by 20 seconds in... What are those? Are they legal?

Paula Radcliffe's 16-year women's marathon world record (Brigid Kosgei), the nine-year men's 10K road world record (Joshua Cheptegei), and the men's 5K road world record (Cheptegei again) were also smashed by Vaporfly runners.

Some have demanded stiffer regulations, even a retrospective ban for "technical doping". "On one hand, it's a vote of confidence that people are talking about it because

we feel like we're making a difference and that's what we're trying to do," says Bignell. "But on the other hand, it is a little bit limiting."

World Athletics' tighter footwear restrictions in January ostensibly took aim at Kipchoge's sub-two platform moon boots, with their alien forefoot foam pods. But the Alphafly Next%, launched to the rest of us in June, complies with the sole thickness limit of 40mm. It contains the one permitted carbon plate, not the rumoured three. It's not "spring-loaded". The confusion, Bignell says, is partly because Nike files countless patents for lots of prototypes. Other manufacturers boast similar technologies. But it's Bignell and his team who, with "hundreds and hundreds" of tweaks and feedback from Kipchoge and co, have nailed the blend.

Running shoes typically lose 30-40% of the wearer's energy. If they returned more than 100%, that would be cheating to Bignell: "We're just making them more efficient."

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13.

Johann de Bono

Regius Professor of Cancer Research, life-extender

Prostate cancer now kills 32 men in the UK every day, even more than women lost to breast cancer. De Bono – based at London's Institute of Cancer Research and Royal Marsden – is on a mission to reduce that statistic. He has been dubbed one of the world's most influential scientific minds by Reuters, having developed more than 100 cancer drugs, including olaparib, which is due to become the first gene-targeted precision medicine for prostate cancer. All you need to know is that he has improved both patients' longevity and quality of life. "I know men today who would be dead if I hadn't done this work," he says.



DE BONO'S WORK IS BRINGING A CANCER CURE CLOSER TO REALITY



12.

Andy Puddicombe

Founder of meditation app **Headspace**, purveyor of peace of mind

After a personal tragedy, the voice of Headspace spent a decade as a monk meditating for up to 16 hours a day, during which time he learned to focus less on himself and more on bringing happiness to others. Among the first people he helped was an anxious ad man called Rich Pierson, who became his business partner. The "Google of mindfulness" (the search-engine giant is one of its corporate clients), Headspace is now a household name, with 54 million users. With evidence of its effectiveness mounting, Puddicombe will soon reach his nirvana of doctors dispensing it.





Stephen Manderson

AKA rapper Professor Green, suicide-prevention campaigner

In 2011, long before male mental health became a major media talking point, Stephen Manderson released a song addressing his father's death by suicide, "Read All About It", in which he proclaimed, "Pretending everything is all right when it ain't, really isn't working." It's a statement that he has stood by – and acted on. Alongside his role as the patron of the leading mental health charity Calm, he has made BBC documentaries on subjects such as suicide, poverty and homelessness, and was an early supporter of *Men's Health's* campaign, #MendTheGap.



PROFESSOR GREEN WAS AMONG THE FIRST PUBLIC FIGURES TO BREAK THE SILENCE ON MALE MENTAL HEALTH

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Paul Sinton Hewitt

Founder of Parkrun, transformer of Saturday mornings

Sacked from his marketing job and injured, the Parkrun founder – a CBE for services to grass-roots sport – kept his spirits up by organising a weekly timed 5K in Teddington, London for 13 or so friends in 2004. "The Bushy Park Time Trial" has since grown into a movement of more than 350,000 runners and volunteers from the seven million registered, turning out every weekend across 2,000 locations in 20 countries. Bringing fitness to marginalised groups, deprived areas and prisons as part of its mission to create a "happier, healthier planet", the charity remains "free, for everyone, forever".



16. Cory Wharton-Malcolm

Track Mafia founder and Nike coach, champion of inclusive fitness

Track Mafia isn't a running club – it's a community. "People don't just come for the exercise. They come for friendship," says founder Cory Wharton-Malcolm, "Beefy" to his friends and followers. "At Track Mafia, you'll meet chefs, illustrators, hospital workers, CEOs, TfL workers... Everyone has a common purpose." On Thursday nights at Paddington Rec's athletics track, there is no hierarchy. It's free, and novices train alongside pros.

Groups such as Track Mafia and Run Dem Crew, for which Wharton-Malcolm has also worked, have changed the face of recreational running. It's been said that the sport attracts a narrow demographic – slim, middle class, white. These crews are the antidote: a home for those who don't fit the profile, but take their running no less seriously.

When Wharton-Malcolm took up running in preparation for joining the 2007 London Marathon, he

could barely jog to the bottom of his road without gassing out. "My friends laughed and said, 'You're fat, you smoke, you eat kebabs. How do you plan to do this?'"

They're probably not laughing now. Today, as well as fronting Track Mafia, Wharton-Malcolm is a head coach (and voice) for the Nike Run Club app, which during lockdown became the fourth most popular app in the UK. He has acted as a speaker in parliament and Buckingham Palace, talking about how sports can be used to engage young people, strengthen communities and reduce antisocial behaviour.

Championing inclusivity remains his MO, including opening up new pathways into top-tier jobs. "I think a lot of organisations feel, 'If this person wasn't taught the way I was taught, then they're not for us. We'll have to spend too much time showing them how to do things our way.' But don't you want to learn how to do things their way, too?"



17. Dorian Yates

Six-time Mr Olympia, unlikely icon of holistic health



The former pro bodybuilder and original "mass monster" dominated his discipline in the 1990s, supersizing it permanently. But "the Shadow" shunned the limelight outside of contests, instead going to dark places in his dungeon-like Temple Gym in Birmingham with his unmatched high-intensity training: one "all-out", soul-microtearing set per exercise. Following injuries, retirement and depression, Yates swapped steroids and growth hormone for marijuana and ayahuasca. Into meditation and yoga in a big way, he's become an unlikely advocate for developing spirituality as well as muscularity.



18. David Weir

Paralympic hero, proof that "disability" is just a word



David Weir is, by anyone's standards, an exceptionally gifted athlete. Not only has he collected six Paralympic gold medals – along with an MBE and CBE – he has won his category in the London Marathon a record eight times. This April would have marked his 21st consecutive attempt at the top spot. Instead, he powered through 26.2 miles in and around his home to raise money for the Weir Archer Academy, which he founded to provide other wheelchair users with sports coaching. He's not so much breaking barriers as smashing through them.



19. Justin "JC" Coghlan

Co-founder of Movember, the man who made fundraising fun

Like many of the best ideas, the concept for Movember was dreamed up in a pub. Inspired by the work they had seen women doing to raise funds for breast cancer, Travis Garone and Luke Slattery felt that men should be taking similar action on behalf of their own well-being. So, they challenged 30 of their mates to grow a (sponsored) moustache. The following year, they registered as a company and gave Justin "JC" Coghlan a role as campaign manager.

Their first big campaign was titled Give Prostate Cancer a Kick in the Arse. "We were young men," says JC. "We got hit hard by the media at the start. We had straight-laced cancer organisations saying, 'Cancer's not fun.' We knew that. But to cut through the stigma, we had to get men having fun together."

The risk paid off – generously. Today, Movember has raised more than £598m for men's health causes. Cancer remains a focus, but in

recent years, suicide prevention has proved itself more urgent.

"It's what keeps me awake at night," says JC. Movember is not a crisis-point charity, and JC's approach has been to target men and boys whose mental health is average to poor, and ensure it tends towards the former. "That middle area is the game changer," he says. Many of his initiatives have focused on providing support to marginalised communities, where young men are in desperate need of mentorship or healthy outlets for their energies.

Most recently, he helped to launch Movember Conversations, a tool designed to coach people on broaching difficult topics. "I'm as guilty of getting it wrong as anyone else," he says. "I hear a problem, and I want to solve it. But people aren't looking for a solution. They're looking for support."





20.

Louie Simmons

Founder of Westside Barbell, weightlifting mover and shaker

If you've tried any trick to lift a heavier barbell, you've benefited from Simmons's trailblazing. Attaching resistance bands or hanging chains was his idea. Doing partial reps, benching to wooden blocks on your chest and deadlifting from pins in a power cage was his, too. He and his gym, Westside Barbell in Ohio, have pushed the extremes of powerlifting with staggering results. Now 72, he hit a 420kg squat, 270kg bench press and 327kg deadlift after hitting 50: proof that the pursuit of strength can be a lifelong endeavour.



SIMMONS HAS RAISED THE BAR OF STRENGTH TRAINING

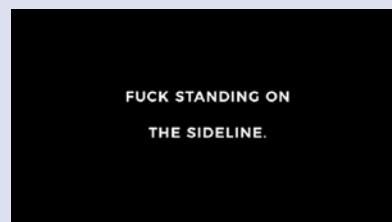


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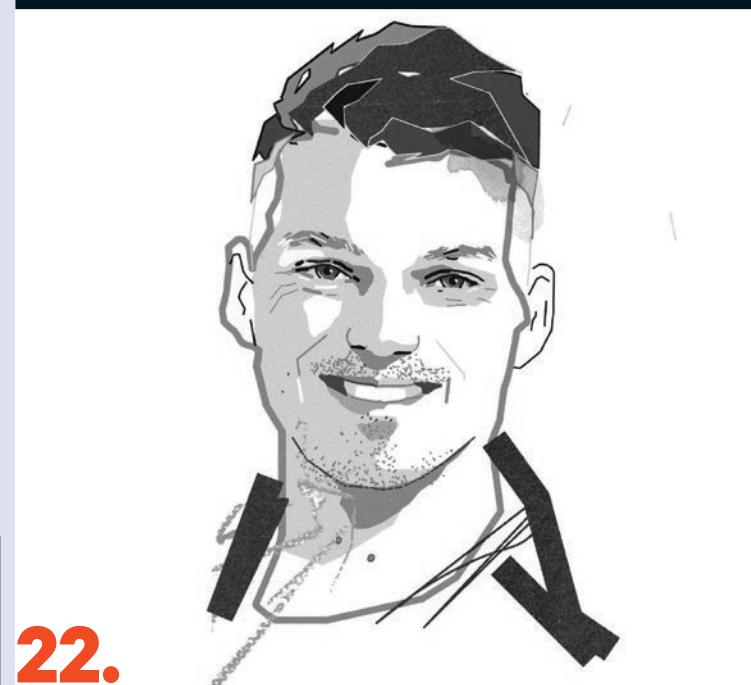
Damien Bailey

Concussion researcher, "extreme scientist"

Former footballer and endurance athlete Damien Bailey has been at the cutting edge of research into the brain's relationship with oxygen for more than 20 years. Most important is his research into concussion. His findings prove that repeated blows to the head in rugby reduce the brain's ability to use oxygen and increases the risk of degenerative diseases such as Alzheimer's. Crucially, people are listening: his impact is now global. Last year's World Cup was the first to feature the High Tackle Sanction Framework, and the overall concussion incidence decreased by 28%.



THE UK'S FASTEST-GROWING FASHION LABEL IS UNAFRAID TO TELL IT LIKE IT IS



22.

Ben Francis

Founder of activewear brand Gymshark, pioneer of influencer marketing

"Fuck standing on the sideline. Fuck injustice. Fuck racism."

Where some brands virtue-signalled vaguely in the wake of George Floyd's murder, Gymshark spoke out, donating \$125,000 to Black Lives Matter and committing to driving change via its channels.

A "red thread" of community runs through the UK sportswear company, says founder Ben Francis, fresh of face at 28. "We're super-inclusive, super-caring, super-transparent." And unlike the older, clunkier competitors that it's circling,

the spandex predator is "extremely agile". At the start of lockdown, it deftly changed its social media handles to "Homeshark" to remind its fam

that: "This ain't no joke."

That nimbleness is despite Britain's fastest-growing fashion label swelling into a £500m

megalodon based in Solihull in just eight years. The 500-plus staff also has outposts in Denver, Hong Kong and Mauritius. With no high-street stores, traditional advertising or outside investment, social media has turbo-charged the expansion of Gymshark, which Francis started in his parents' garage when he was 19, while studying business and management at Aston University by day and working at Pizza Hut by night.

"I wish I could tell you that it was this master plan," says Francis. As a 16-year-old, he was inspired to join a gym by fitness YouTubers. So, when he and friends began hand-sewing and screen-printing their own clothing, more tapered than traditional bodybuilder apparel, sending samples to their online idols seemed only fitting.

Francis has a big vision, too: "I want us to create the greatest community, and I want us to be the greatest fitness brand on the planet."



23.

Will Ahmed

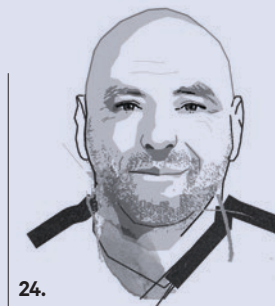
CEO of Whoop, health metric front-runner

Ahmed came up with the idea for Whoop – a wearable that monitors a range of metrics to give people usable feedback on their exercise recovery – while studying at Harvard in 2011. A year later, he and two friends launched the company, which went quickly from tests with LeBron James and Michael Phelps to becoming the tracker of choice for CrossFitters and nine-to-five athletes. Whoop pivoted quickly after the spread of coronavirus, providing users with respiratory rate readings to reliably chart a more critical kind of recovery.



AHMED DREAMED UP WHOOP, THE LAST WORD IN TRACKING DEVICES

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24.

Dana White

UFC president, pandemic-era sports visionary

The ink was dry on the success story of the UFC: a freak show, bought by White and the Fertitta brothers for \$2m, that grew into a global force sold to Endeavor Group Holdings for \$4bn. Then a certain pandemic cancelled sport. White reacted quickly, with spectator-free fight cards making the UFC the first major North-American pro sport to resume. His next move is "Fight Island" in Abu Dhabi, which will operate as a COVID-19 safe zone for fighters and their coaches to live, train and compete. The sport-starved world will be watching.

THE FIGHT CONTINUES ON A COVID-FREE ISLAND



25.

Chris Mosier

Mould-breaking sprint duathlete, Olympics reformer



Chris Mosier holds a lot of "firsts". He was the first transgender athlete to represent the US in international competition, the first to appear in ESPN's iconic "Body Issue" and, this year, he became the first to qualify for the Olympic trials in the gender category with which he identifies. Activism wasn't his intention, but with guidelines for transgender people in sport still politically charged, he has picked up the baton and run/cycled with it. His website, transathlete.com, tracks and opposes discriminatory policies.

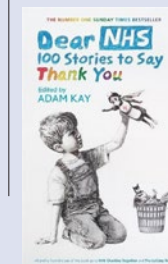
MOSIER'S SITE IS A KEY RESOURCE FOR TRANS INCLUSION IN SPORTS



26.

Adam Kay

Comedian and best-selling author, defender of the NHS



KAY'S MISSIVES FROM THE NHS HAVE INSPIRED THE NATION

There's nothing more influential in health than our NHS. We have known for years that this giant, life-saving machine is in peril; Kay's genius has been in humanising it. His memoir, *This Is Going to Hurt*, shifted our focus to the overworked, underpaid people propping it up. It ignited a conversation that exploded in response to COVID-19 and resulted in 400,000 people signing up to the NHS "volunteer army" in 48 hours. His latest book, *Dear NHS: 100 Stories to Say Thank You*, is a continuation of this story and seeds hope that, in his words, "The NHS will never again be taken for granted. Not by the British public, not by the media and, most importantly, not by the politicians." **HB**