

The Future Of Our Health



REM Radio's **Mary Harboe** visits **Preventicum**, a futuristic clinic in London for a thorough MOT-style health check and discovers her body is a well-oiled machine. Here she looks at the future of healthcare and how the wealthy are protecting their wellbeing

Just imagine you could look inside your body: watch your heart muscles beat, check the ebb and flow of blood through the main arteries, delve into the intricacies of your brain and – joy of joys – travel through the metres of your bowel and colon checking for any nasty lumps or bumps on the way. And you are not alone on this journey of self-discovery. To hold your hand and explain the status of your abdominal organs like spleen, kidneys and liver, is a highly skilled team of medical professionals able to point out any potential problem areas. Surely it would be a life-changing experience? It could also save your life.

Nowadays, increasing numbers of well people are taking advantage of this service – known collectively as preventative medicine – to either put their minds at rest; or, if occasionally their worst fears are confirmed, to at least know that any disease would be in its early stages where lifestyle changes or treatment would have a far greater chance of success.

Debates have raged about the ethics and advantages of running such elaborate tests on healthy people. Some argue that it's just feeding their hypochondria; and what about radiation risks of unnecessary X-rays and from some body-scanning machines?

Personally, I think there's nothing wrong with a healthy degree of hypochondria (it can be an entertaining and an often amusing preoccupation) and if radiation risks are taken out of the picture – and you can afford the price tag that accompanies this type of service – then surely the argument collapses. After all, what could possibly be more precious than our health?

So when I was invited to experience a complete medical health check in what is described as the 'six-star' surroundings of Preventicum, London Centre of Preventive Medicine, complete with

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radiation-free MRI (Magnetic Resonance Imaging) scan, I leapt at the opportunity. I accepted not only because it was a very generous offer (this special service also comes at the very special price of £2,750), but also because, having reached a certain age and witnessed the decline and even sadly the demise of several contemporaries, I wondered whether I was taking my good health for granted. Was I damaging my health by burning the candle at both ends, accepting that extra glass of wine and perhaps not exercising as briskly or as often as I should? All would be revealed.

As the day of the check loomed my feelings of excitement and curiosity turned to those of apprehension. "Maybe ignorance really is bliss," said the little voice in my head in the wee small hours of the morning, especially as the implications of the MRI colonoscopy sank in. I had elected to have this additional check because of a family history of bowel cancer, one of the biggest killers in the Western world. This examination would detect any colonic tumours in their very early stages – 90% of colon cancers develop from polyps in the colon which can be easily removed when discovered in time. Logically, however, to have a clear look at this part of the anatomy it needs to be clean and empty. I followed the dietary advice



for the preceding two days and took the sachets of the dreaded 'Picolax' as per its instructions. Suffice it to say, it is not for nothing that you are advised not to venture out of sight of a toilet the day preceding the examination!

The clinic's rooms resemble upmarket hotel suites with everything you could need for your day-long stay – including branded track suit, satellite television, computer and even a tasty healthy lunch (when you finally break the fast). It is here that the initial consultation with Medical Director, Dr Garry Savin takes place. Unfortunately – or perhaps fortunately if you are on a tight schedule – clients get to spend little relaxation time in this haven. We are rotated from test to test with air traffic control-like precision, meaning that we never meet each other in the corridor. Undoubtedly the rich and famous are among the Preventicum client list. Privacy is an important part of its code of conduct since it opened in August 2005 following on from the success of the first centre which has been operating in Germany for over three years.

However, among those to go public with their experience is Birmingham City FC Managing Director and high-profile businesswoman, Karren Brady, whose routine health check almost certainly saved her life. Her tests revealed a brain aneurysm – a potentially fatal weakening in a brain artery that could have ruptured at any time. Following successful emergency surgery, Karren is now back at work, although she will have to undergo brain scan assessments at regular intervals for the rest of her life.

Despite the comfort and hotel-like comparisons at Preventicum, there is no doubt that this is a serious medical/diagnostic centre with highly skilled - and delightfully personable – professionals at the controls of all the state-of-the-art equipment; the star of which is undoubtedly the MRI scan.

Using a magnetic field – instead of X-rays – the MRI has been described as a miracle diagnostic tool taking literally hundreds of pictures of every part of the body. The brain scan, for instance, not only detects tumours in their early stages but also assesses blood circulation which could prevent a stroke. Through the insertion of dyes, the state of the arteries and heart are also studied while in

addition the colonoscopy using MRI allows other abdominal organs such as the liver, kidneys and spleen to be observed. The MRI procedures take almost two hours and I was frightened that I might feel claustrophobic inside its tunnel. My fears were unfounded as the process is broken up into segments – none of which last more than 20 minutes. It is also made as painless as possible and with the 'panic' button in one hand and the choice of radio station and CD selection through the headphones, I was almost relaxed. I turned down the offer of special prism glasses which enable you to see outside the scanner, instead preferring to close my eyes.

In addition to the MRI experience and the subsequent fascinating virtual tour of your body in the company of the radiology director, it feels as if every other part of the body is also examined including sight and hearing, while lifestyle factors are assessed, ECG checks carried out and around 40 blood and urine tests analysed. Clients also undergo an ultrasound examination of the abdomen and crucial carotid neck artery.

So what was the verdict? Thankfully there are no sleepless nights waiting for results as these are all presented and explained on the same day. In my case, I was happy to learn that I am in the top one per cent of the population on the heart attack and stroke risk scale with a three per cent chance of suffering either in the next 10 years. No potentially serious conditions were found; and yes, I have taken the doctor's recommendations on board for continued improved good health.

I found it a moving, magical and memorable experience to see inside myself and quite fascinating to walk away with an inner knowledge I would wish for everyone. Surely, to experience this miracle of modern technology means to safeguard our health and not take it for granted.

Oh, and I have so far resisted the urge to show the souvenir snaps of my arterial network at dinner parties. Although I will pull them out to compete with a friend's latest grandchild picture!

+DETAILS

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