Professor Nilesh Samani to be the next BHF Medical Director

Eminent Indian-origin researcher and cardiologist Professor Sir Nilesh Samani is to be the next Medical Director of the British Heart Foundation (BHF). He will succeed Professor Peter Weissberg who will retire in October 2016 after twelve years as Medical Director of the cardiovascular research charity. Professor Samani, whose family originally hails from Gujarat in western India, is currently BHF Professor of Cardiology at the University of Leicester, Head of the Department of Cardiovascular Sciences at the University, Director of the NIHR Biomedical Research Unit and a consultant cardiologist at Glenfield Hospital in Leicester. He is a Fellow of the Academy of Medical Sciences and a NIHR Senior Investigator. In 2015 Professor Samani was knighted for services to medicine and medical research.

Professor Samani was born in Nanyuki in Kenya and raised in Kitale at the foothills of Mount Elgon – his grandparents had move to Kenya from India in the 1920s. In 1971 he moved to Leicester and in 1975 he was among the first intake of medical students at the University of Leicester.

Among his many research achievements, Professor Samani has co-led the discovery of over 50 genes associated with coronary heart disease (CHD), with the BHF Family Heart Study, of which he was co-principal investigator making substantial contribution to this effort. These important findings are providing new insights into the causes of CHD and identifying potential future treatments to help prevent or slow the development of the condition.

Married to Varsha and with two sons – one studying medicine and the other Economics – Professor Samani, who is fluent in Gujarati, is closely connected to the communities in
Leicester. He has secured multi-million pound investments, including support from the local Asian community, and established Leicester as a world-leading centre for heart research.

Professor Samani said: “It is an enormous privilege to serve the Foundation as Medical Director. From my own experience, I know the central role the BHF plays in supporting cardiovascular research in the UK. Advances made through research funded by donations to the BHF have saved countless lives both in the UK and world-wide and reduced the devastating burden of premature heart disease on families and individuals.”

In October 2015 the BHF announced its new research strategy and committed to spending over half a billion pounds on research over five years. The Medical Director of the BHF oversees the charity’s research funding – the BHF currently funds over half of all non-commercial cardiovascular research in UK universities and hospitals. Through donations to the charity, the BHF funds over 1,000 different research grants at any one time.

Professor Samani said: “Although there has been great progress, cardiovascular diseases still remain the number one killer and a growing problem in many parts of the world. The BHF has recently announced an ambitious strategy for funding research for the next five years so it’s tremendously exciting to take on this role at this stage.

“By working with the research community in the UK and overseas, the NHS and other funders, including the Government, and patients and the public, we will continue to make important breakthroughs that save and benefit the lives of people with heart and circulatory disease.”

Alongside his new role as the BHF’s Medical Director, Professor Samani will continue research at the University of
Leicester and some clinical work at Glenfield Hospital, part of the University Hospitals of Leicester NHS Trust.

The British Heart Foundation

Coronary heart disease is the UK’s single biggest killer. For over 50 years The British Heart Foundation (BHF) has invested in world leading research that has helped transform the lives of people living with heart and circulatory conditions. There are around 175,000 heart attacks in the UK each year, meaning someone suffers a heart attack every three minutes, but successful research has led to treatments that mean seven in ten people now survive. A quarter of all deaths in the UK are caused by cardiovascular disease and there are an estimated seven million people living with the condition. The BHF raises vital funds to fight heart disease through legacies, fundraising and its over 700 charity shops across the UK.

For more information visit bhf.org.uk.