Triumphs and challenges in a world shaped by medicine
Professor Christopher Whitty CB DSc FRCP FFPH FMedSci

Since Sir William Harvey made his great discoveries, every generation of physicians has provided a body of knowledge that has changed medicine irreversibly for future generations. During our generation, medical science – coinciding with widespread economic development – has led to remarkable falls in child mortality, is stabilising global fertility and is substantially increasing longevity on every continent. The shape and distribution of the world’s population is changing rapidly as a result. This population change will have major social as well as medical implications in the medium and longer term.

Against this backdrop, medicine is still making rapid advancements on many fronts, including against major infections, cardiovascular disease and many cancers, which will change future medical practice. This progress is not however being replicated in all areas of medicine. For some challenges that are increasing in importance – including multimorbidity and the economic sustainability of the medical model – current medical and scientific structures are barriers to progress and they must adapt. The 2017 Harveian Oration will therefore consider generational opportunities and responsibilities.