

**October 7, 2020**

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*In this episode, Taren Grom, Editor of PharmaVOICE Magazine meets with Jody Casey, VP of Healthcare Partnerships, Elligo Health Research.*

**Taren:** Jody, welcome to the PharmaVOICE WoW podcast program.

**Jody:** Thanks Taren. I'm really happy to be here.

**Taren:** We're happy to have you. Jody, as the VP at Healthcare Partnerships, this has got to be a really interesting time. We're seeing collaborations and partnerships expanding due to COVID-19. What are some of the trends you are tracking?

**Jody:** Sure. There's a couple of trends that we're tracking at Elligo, and some key ones for us are more diversity in trials. As you see the nation look for vaccines for COVID-19, you're also getting more insight into the fact that we don't always have a lot of diversity in our trials, and that also holds true for our COVID-19 vaccine trials. So that's something we're definitely tracking because at Elligo we are in communities and we work with community-based physicians for clinical trials and a lot of the communities we're in are very diverse. I live in El Paso, Texas; we're over 80% Hispanic. We're actually running a vaccine trial in Laredo, Texas which has a Hispanic population of over 87%. So it's very important to us to have diversity in trials and that's definitely one thing that we're tracking for this very strange time right now.

**Taren:** As part of that push to have more diversity in the clinical trial process, what are some things that you're doing to make sure that those diverse populations understand what clinical trials are all about? Because I understand that that's one of the biggest gaps.

**Jody:** It's definitely a big gap. And two of the communities that we're in running COVID-19 vaccine trials are largely communities of color. And so we think it's really important to partner with local leaders, whether they be religious leaders or city officials or even just physician leaders who have a voice in the community to make sure that people understand what their options are and why it's important to be part of a vaccine trial, especially for something like COVID-19. So we definitely take a community focus, which we always have done. And so that's just given us even more of an advantage when running COVID-19 trials because we really believe in the trusted relationship between a physician and a patient and that physician's community position and their community outreach.

**Taren:** Excellent. You have noted that clinical research as a care option is a focus for you. Tell me why this is so important. And then as a follow on, let's talk about what needs to change to make this a scalable solution for more patients.

**Jody:** Sure. When we talk about clinical research as a care option, what we mean is that it's important for patients to have access to clinical trials in communities that otherwise would not have them. In my community for example, if you were to be diagnosed with late stage prostate cancer – we'll just use that as the example – for a clinical trial treatment option you would have to leave our community and drive or fly at least 400 miles away. And for many patients that is just not an option; they don't have the financial means or the ability to leave their families or their jobs, or they're retired and they can't get there on their own. And so their option is to go into hospice. But if we're able to run that late stage prostate cancer trial in a community which would otherwise not have access, that is an incredible care option for patients.

That doesn't just go for cancer. That is true for rheumatoid arthritis, celiac disease, so many other indications. It's just as wide... PTSD... I mean it's as many as you can think of. So providing those care options and those cutting edge clinical trial options for patients in communities that would otherwise not have them is incredibly important to us.

And it's hard to scale because you mentioned how do we make this a scalable solution for more patients; it's hard to do under the traditional model of clinical trials. But when you partner with healthcare physicians and you find the patients through their practice EHR database, it makes it a whole lot easier. So that's really our goal at Elligo is to provide these options to communities that would otherwise not have them.

**Taren:** Excellent. And so I also understand, I mean this also touches on COVID where we started our conversation with one of the trends you were tracking is that finding those patients for physicians now amidst the pandemic is a little bit more challenging than it has been in the past. What are some of the things that you're doing or otherwise also noted in terms of physician practices and how COVID has impacted them?

**Jody:** I mean it's challenging. Some of our physician practices that were running trials had to shut down. Some of our trials temporarily shut down too because their monitors couldn't travel. I think all of that necessitates us accelerating alternative models of clinical trials so that patients can access these trials more directly through their healthcare providers. So thinking differently, how we accelerate trials, how we do things remotely, how we decentralize trials is really important, especially in times like now where, like I said, a lot of these offices are critical patients only or have shut down altogether or patients are nervous about going into a healthcare facility, and so all of those things necessitate these really accelerating these alternative models.

**Taren:** And at the same time these alternative models, i.e., decentralized or hybrid clinical trials also have their own inherent challenges in terms of educating and having physicians and patients and sites, correct?

**Jody:** Yeah, absolutely. I mean in this industry we say that we are innovative and you see a lot of our customers have like huge innovation teams that they fund, but I find that being relatively new to this industry I find that it's not... it hasn't been innovative in a really long time, and there was a huge opportunity for disruption. Because if the majority of trials are delayed, yet the majority of patients can't find trials, there's a disruption to be had to match patients and healthcare settings to clinical trials. So getting physicians and our customers, CROs and sponsors past this idea that everything has to be done just this way that it always has been is hard. It's a challenge, but I really think that we can do it.

**Taren:** I agree. I think we can do it as well. It's just a matter of changing our mindset. And I think you're right, when we talk about innovation in the industry, so much of that is focused on the scientific breakthroughs that are happening, but not necessarily the processes that are involved in the trial.

**Jody:** Absolutely. And I shouldn't say that we aren't innovative; clearly you see so many amazing treatments out there that weren't available just a few years ago for patients, which is amazing. But getting those to market takes so long, and that's where I really feel like we have to be more innovative. Like you said, the process has to be more innovative.

**Taren:** Agreed. Agreed.

**Jody:** And we need to leverage technology for that. Elligo from the very beginning decided we were going to build our own robust research stack platform to meet all of these strategic goals, including rapid study setup and centralized data integrity control, all of those kinds of things, and so I also think that technology plays a huge part in this.

**Taren:** Fantastic. And speaking of that technology and the teams you're working with, obviously it takes a lot of teams and it takes good teams to move the envelope and push the envelope. What is your approach to building successful teams?

**Jody:** Sure. I worked for GE for many years and then also took a leave of absence to go into politics for close to two years and all of that and including working in a startup like Elligo has taught me how important it is to have successful teams. I start with a person first. I feel like it's really important to find good listeners who are also willing to learn. I feel like emotional IQ is really important to me because I feel like the processes and the technology and all of those things can be learned, but having a good social awareness and presence and high emotional IQ can't necessarily be learned. It's very, very hard. And so that's what I look for when I'm building the team.

And then I think it's just really important to empower people to do their job successfully, to build loyalty. I love mentoring young women, not just in this industry, but in other industries and I think that's a big piece of it too, especially in STEM type fields. So I think with successful

teams, you just have to build a lot of trust and make sure you find the right people who are the right fit for the role with, like I said, high emotional IQs.

**Taren:** Absolutely. Before we get on to your leave of absence and your foray into politics, which is going to be a fascinating part of our conversation, let's talk about mentoring and you say that it's important especially in STEM. You came from a technology background. So I would imagine sometimes you would find yourself as an n of 1 in some conversations. What advice do you have for women who are looking to advance their career in the technology field?

**Jody:** So I think the first thing that I do, especially if we're talking about high school students is even make them aware that it's an option for them. When I was in high school, I didn't even know that a technical field could be an option for me until my high school science teacher convinced me that it could, and she took me to Georgia Tech where I ended up going to school. But I didn't even realize that that was an option for me. So I think it's just the awareness for young women to even know that these kinds of fields are available to them.

And then I think later on once they're in the field, out of college and in their careers, I think helping them with mentorship is so important because STEM has largely been dominated by men and I think women just need support so that they can navigate the types of things that women face like 'hey, I was brought in potentially to this company in one role, but I'd love to be able to eventually switch and move up and develop my career,' and they don't know how to go about doing that. They don't know how to make the ask. And so helping them develop their careers and identify that they can move up, that they can ask. I was talking to someone just recently, she did not ask for a raise for 10 years.

**Taren:** Oh my!

**Jody:** She's in a healthcare role. Not at Elligo, don't worry, we're not even that old. But she's someone that I'm an acquaintance with, and I was just shocked and I said 10 years, and then when she finally did she was turned down, and so she left. And when she left her company, everyone was floored that she would possibly leave. She literally doubled her salary going elsewhere.

Women are so bad at that though. She could have stayed in that role every year and just made a case for herself. I shouldn't generalize and say we're always bad at it, but we are paid less than men on average. So I think it's just really important to mentor women around all aspects of their career within STEM, and a lot of times that means negotiation as well.

**Taren:** Absolutely. I think that's a skill that women aren't necessarily taught in the same way that men develop that skill.

**Jody:** Absolutely.

**Taren:** So I do think that's a gap. Agree with you. I'm glad she landed someplace where she is not only appreciated, but she's being paid for what she's worth. So that's great.

**Jody:** I agree Taren, yes.

**Taren:** Let's move on to your stepping outside of healthcare and your foray into politics. I understand you worked for the Beto O'Rourke senate campaign. Tell me what that was like because I'm fascinated.

**Jody:** Yes, absolutely. I live in El Paso, Texas where Beto is from, and I had always been a volunteer for him in my free time. He one day called and asked if I would come run his senate campaign and I said, "You're absolutely crazy. No way." And then about a week later, I called him back and said, "We'll do it." And it was a tough decision to me, for me to make I think simply because we knew it would have such a – it would really affect my family. My kids were I think 5 and 7 at the time, so being a mom of young kids there was really almost no one out there who had run a major US senate race who was a mom of small kids. And so there weren't a lot – for me, there weren't any mentors. There wasn't a path that I could see necessarily. And so it was a really hard decision to make, but it was the right one and I did it, and luckily I have a ton of support from my spouse and my kids were great through it. It was the best decision I ever made and the hardest job I will ever do. It was so, so difficult.

I loved it because we started out being a 20-point underdog, no one knew who Beto was when I came on to his senate campaign. We couldn't even sometimes get people to show up at his events, and we went from that and fast forward a year later to being within two points of Ted Cruz who is one of the most notorious senators probably in the country. We were the largest raising senate race in the history of the United States. We raised over \$80 million. My initial goal was just to get to \$15 million and I thought we would just be in such a good spot if we did, and we were able to do \$80 million. And that was because Beto is who he is in that he had this approach that I'm going to go to all 254 counties in Texas, I'm going to meet with everyone, Democrat, Republican, non-voter. That was really his approach. Like, how do I listen to the people all across Texas, and so many of them had not been heard and had not seen a statewide representative in many, many years. They had been forgotten. And so his approach really made him this Texas-wide sensation and then that caught on nationally as well. It was really an incredible experience. I just wish we would have won.

**Taren:** Aside from I don't have a bias with politics, but I think what a fascinating journey for you. Talk about having the intestinal fortitude to make a leap, right, and to make such a courageous choice at that time. Kudos to you and who knows what's next for Beto. So we'll keep an eye on it.

**Jody:** Yes, fingers crossed. I'm doing a phone bank with him tonight in calling voters all across Texas. He's still very, very engaged, which is great.

**Taren:** Excellent. So obviously you've had a very varied career and a lot of success. Is there anything you know now that you wish you had known as you were moving up the ranks?

**Jody:** That's a great question. I don't know. I've always been really balanced about my career goals with my family goals. I think both are just really important. I think when I was younger I didn't quite realize that yet and I was just very, very focused on career goals. But once I had kids – I read Sheryl Sandberg's book *Lean In* and it actually had a big impact on me because one of the things that I'll never forget her saying in there is like it's not necessarily a corporate ladder when you're a working mom, it's a Jungle Jim, and it's okay if you kind of go over to the side and hang out when your kids are little. You can always crawl back up the middle ladder or the side ladder of the Jungle Jim along the way.

I have that vision in my mind all the time when I'm balancing family demands with career opportunities. And so I've always just had a balanced approach definitely in the last 10 years when I've had children, but before that I was definitely really career motivated and I felt like nothing would ever stop me. And I wish I could go back and tell myself hey, look at life as a balance because you don't live to work, you work to live. And so I have more of that perspective now.

**Taren:** I love that. And then finally, tell me about an accomplishment or a wow moment that helped shaped your career.

**Jody:** Gosh, that is hard. I should be a little more prepared. There was something that happened to me actually in college, and I think about it often. I received a scholarship to go to Georgia Tech, the Hope Scholarship, it was state funding in Georgia and I didn't have any other money to go to college. That was it. So I worked every other quarter full time and then would go to school full time. And my parents helped as they could and then some family members tried to help, but it was pretty much self-funded and I didn't want to take out any loans. So it was challenging, but it was totally worth it.

During that time I really wanted to be able to study abroad, and there was a program at Oxford College in England that I wanted to go to, and there was just like no financial way for me to go. But what I did was I research a bunch of scholarships and there was one through Georgia Tech Alumni Association and maybe there were 500, 600 people who applied for that, 10 got it. I applied for it and got it. And that, to me, was a very pivotal moment that kind of set me up for a great trajectory because it really gave me a lot of confidence and belief in myself. For me, it's not necessarily an accomplishment, but it really kind of set that trajectory.

**Taren:** That is totally a wow moment. And again, to have that understanding of the importance of it at the time was very mature for somebody who was still in college and to respect what it took to get there, that's tremendous. So congratulations.

**Jody:** Thank you. I really appreciate that. I think there's one other quick one that I would just mention in my career because you did ask me career-wise, was I did get the opportunity to

present to Jeff Immelt and the board of directors at GE or his staff, his direct staff – I shouldn't say board of directors; it was his executive staff. It was a really awesome opportunity that my boss at the time declined so that I could have the chance. And I think about that wow moment often because I want to make sure that I do that for other people as well, that now when I present to a board I'm not as nervous because I had this great opportunity to present to the CEO of GE and his direct staff. And I just want to make sure that I pay that forward to people who work for me and give them those kind of opportunities.

**Taren:** I think that's another excellent wow moment. Absolutely. Again, giving you that confidence to – I mean because that's no easy thing to do and it's so important, and so kudos to your boss for paving the way for you as well.

**Jody:** I agree. It was awesome.

**Taren:** Fantastic. Jody, thank you so much for being part of our WoW podcast program. I truly appreciate your insights into where we need to think about clinical trials, your courage to take some big leaps and some insights that we can all take some notice from. So thank you so much. It's been great talking to you.

**Jody:** You're welcome, Taren. Thank you so much for the opportunity. I really enjoyed it.

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