

May 19, 2021

Welcome to WoW, the Woman of the Week podcast from PharmaVOICE. This episode was made possible by a generous sponsorship from eClinical Solutions. For more information, visit eclinicalsol.com.

In this episode, Taren Grom, Editor of PharmaVOICE meets with Nancy Di Dia, Chief Diversity & Inclusion Officer and Executive Director, Boehringer Ingelheim USA.

Taren: Nancy, welcome to our WoW podcast program.

Nancy: Thank you, Taren. I'm really thrilled to be here today. It's exciting for us to reconnect. It's been a while and it's great to reconnect with you.

Taren: Likewise, I'm so excited to dig into your story. I'm a fan girl. So I'm going to fan out a little bit. Just saying for the record here. Nancy, let's face it, you are the original OG in the D&I space. As the longest standing Diversity & Inclusion Officer in the pharmaceutical industry more than years, how is it for you to see so much focus on DE&I today?

Nancy: First of all, I didn't realize that I am the most tenured person in our industry – in the pharmaceutical industry in general – because what we are seeing is really a trend of chief diversity officers jumping around quite a bit. And I think what is really fascinating now more than ever, and I've been doing this work long before I came to BI many years ago, is the amount of focus and attention and realization that business has taken to this topic. And that it's more than a topic, it's much more of a business imperative and very much being treated like a business priority. And that's different than what we've seen years past.

Taren: Absolutely. And that's one of the areas that you really target is on aligning DE&I efforts – or D&I efforts – to overall business performance. In fact, you have the ear of your CEO. So talk to me about how you put that whole puzzle together.

Nancy: There are lots of puzzle pieces, right? You can do those 25-piece puzzles, and given the amount of years that I've been doing this, it's more like putting together 1000-piece puzzle every day. And what I mean by that is, through my tenure, I've worked through four CEOs, and working with them has been not only a delight, but also an incredible learning experience for me to understand what I would say their negotiating tolerance was, if you will, like how far I could push something, and knowing when it was time to back off, but also knowing that I wouldn't forget and that I would come back to them over time.

I think the key for me, to my success has never been to push an agenda, but rather to present the what ifs, we don't do this, what can go wrong from a competitive edge, from a competitive angle, from a talent attraction angle. If we don't follow this pursuit, if we don't create a culture or climate where people can be their authentic selves, if we don't look at diversity in our

studies, in our trials, if we're not part of the health equity strategy in our industry, how is that going to look, not only to our customers and patients, but to our employees and colleagues as well?

So being able to remind them that diversity, equity, and inclusion is a way of life, it's the way in which we roll with our employees, but more importantly, it's not a thing, it's not an HR thing. It's an important part of their business and the way in which they engage with the customers, with our patients, and with our employees. We have this hashtag at Boehringer Ingelheim, one of my favorites, in fact, I have a face mask with this hashtag, it's a hashtag for each other. And what I have learned through the years in working with the CEOs has really been their concern for the wellness and wellbeing for employees and ensuring that they have a culture where those employees can thrive rather than survive.

So I have really been incredibly fortunate to have a seat at their table. And I do think that they continue to give me a seat because I'm not a shamer or a blamer, I never have been. And I really seek to educate in a way that's not intimidating, but to help them see the side, the other side of things where they may not be inclined to focus in that way. So I'm really designed to be that wide lens, that wide-angle lens, that's my role. And my role is also to be a little bit of an agitator or one who challenges the status quo.

And so, the good news is that I am highly respected, regarded. I can't say that through my tenure here that everything has always been easy, but I have stayed because everything has always been listened to, valued, respected. So I've always had a sense of belonging since I've been at BI, regardless of the CEOs and even going back 10, 15 years ago, for them to have, meaning the company to have the wherewithal to know that this world was important 15 years ago speaks volumes to the company's commitment to moving this forward. Does that give you a good sense, Taren?

Taren: Absolutely. What a wonderful legacy you have created and what a difference you've made on behalf of employees, patients, and the other stakeholders you named. And I love that hashtag for each other. It shows empathy and compassion, but also collaboration and togetherness, all the things that a company needs to move forward. You identify that it is a business imperative. And with all business imperatives, we need to be able to measure what those results are. How do you measure the impact that you're having through the different programs or BRGs that you are charged for overseeing?

Nancy: Yeah, that's always the number one question, right – return on investment, and I call it diversity, equity return on investment. There isn't one metric – there isn't one particular metric. There are a variety of metrics that we look at. And the three key ones have to do with hiring, promotion, and turnover, and looking at the rates, and right now specifically, we focus on areas such as race and gender, in the context of the external population, representation of a talent for those positions in general. We also look at things qualitatively in terms of focus groups and how people feel. And with our business resource groups, we have 12 business resource groups right now, with more than 25 percent of our total population involved in a business resource group. So that's almost 2700 employees involved.

When I started 15 years ago (even longer) we had 60 and at that time, we call them employee network groups. And as we evolved as a company, and I have to admit this past year, we added 30 percent more membership to our BRGs because people wanted to get engaged, wanted to get involved. So we don't do things like, obviously, we can't do food celebrations, especially in the COVID world, but each of our BRGs submits a business plan every year that ladders up to the four strategic pillars that we focus on. We call it our DICE framework – Diversity, Inclusion, Culture, and Equity. And in that framework, the four pillars include talent and learning and organizational development, that's one pillar. The second pillar is culture and engagement. The third pillar is workforce representation. And the fourth is company reputation.

So if they're able, meaning the business resource groups (or affectionately known as the BRGs), if they're able to come up with a proposal on putting together an event for the company, they are approved and we give them a nominal budget to do this work. But given that we've been mostly virtual, the costs have been zero to none, because you don't have to provide refreshments or things of that sort. And we're talking about attendance of 400 to 500 people on a virtual call. Just to give you a sampling of what these groups are doing, the Women's Leadership Initiative, we call it, did a whole segment on women and heart health. And how that is such an underreported condition and misdiagnosed condition for women, and that also, of course, is a therapeutic area, in our companies. So we engage people on the clinical side, on the marketing side, on the scientific side to tell those stories and present the data.

We also look at things from a disparity perspective, and the impact of culture on medicines. And understanding, if you look at certain groups that their culture might be much more meat heavy, and starch and carb heavy, how do you get, for example, a Latin culture or a South Asian culture to recognize that their diabetes could be better controlled if they move to more of a plant-based vegetarian-type diet, when their culture has always been around eating a certain type of food, that's part of their culture, pork and beans and rice and other starchy high-carb, high-fat types of foods do not contribute to a healthy lifestyle?

So these groups actually bring in the cultural aspects as well as the clinical and medical components. Our nurse group brought together the whole mental health strategy on what people are dealing with, with COVID. So it just goes on, and I just sit back, Taren, and I relax. And I am like, oh, my goodness, they have truly arrived. They are doing everything that I had wished for when I first started here, that to see this blossom and to see the group understand the importance of this and take it to where they've taken it is phenomenal.

Taren: That is phenomenal. Those are some great examples. And it goes to show that it's just more than the surface area of what we need to address when we start to look at health inequities and health equity across the country. And we really do need to get into an understanding some of those unconscious biases and those belief systems, and really identifying what are those trigger points and what are the levers that we can use to elevate some of these populations that are in desperate need of the assistance to get to that lifestyle. And I know that you've spent a lot of time on uncovering those unconscious biases and those belief systems. What are some words of advice you have to some of your peers and colleagues in the industry?

Nancy: You know, unconscious bias is such a broad topic. If you think about the levels of bias or the number, the different types of bias that exist, there are at least 35, right? You have affinity bias, confirmation bias, all these different biases that are out there. I think the most important part to remember about bias is that many practitioners, I would say, diversity, equity, and inclusion practitioners think that the way forward is to educate about unconscious bias. And so they'll put forth this massive training program to educate everybody or to, I should say, train everyone on being less biased.

And the important thing to note is all of us have bias, good, bad, or indifferent. It's a natural part of who we are. And that bias pretty much starts at a very young age. Bias is learned and taught. And you can argue and say, well, bias could be unlearned and untaught, but that's not a flip of the switch. And I think what's important is not so much to teach about bias but to strip the systems of bias. In other words, examine where bias can creep up in a particular hiring practice, in a particular performance management practice. Where are the terms that you hear?

And I'll use you for an example, Taren. Let's just say you're the topic of a talent discussion. And we might say, Taren's been with the company for a long time, but I understand she is taking care of her elderly parents, so she probably doesn't want to go on an overseas assignment. Okay, great. All right, let's move on to the next person. Wait a minute, timeout, we've made an assessment that you might have eldercare or something going on without even checking in with you. So there is a bias because you might be taking care of a parent that you're not really accessible or ready for a move. And so we explain, when we talk about bias, we really talk about in this is not this is how you should be, but more about what bias limits rather than providing those broader views and opportunities.

So I think the important thing is never assume, even if you told me yesterday that you were not available for an extended business trip or relocating, but to ask you today, because your circumstances may be different. So not to bias you because of one thing that occurred or a history perhaps when you were in a different role, that might not have been a good history that stuck with you, but that's the past, and looking at where you are now. So not really having like, I call it the history bias of something that you might not have done so well five years ago, we should not bias you into where you are today. People do change.

So I think looking at bias as an evolution, everyone's experience, it's not to change people's beliefs, but to open their eyes wider, to see another side of things. And we talk about that a lot through courageous conversations. And we've hosted more than 26 courageous conversations since the George Floyd murder last year. And we've had over 3000 employees join these conversations, and we held space and grace for our employees to express and they were raw discussions, they were not structured in any way. We asked one question. And the one question was, what are you feeling right now? And it just went for 90 minutes. And people queued up to speak like a radio show, to talk about what was on their mind. And of course, there were people on the call that felt differently than the majority, and they were courageous and spoke up.

What was remarkable was to see, even if somebody had a different viewpoint than the majority and felt that things were not really the way that the majority of the people shared it, we saw an extension and an outpouring of employees that were in the majority to those that had a different point of view to better understand their rationale, and not to agree with them, but they wanted to learn. And when you have a culture like that, and you give people the space to express, and you have people from all levels, and I co-hosted them with senior leaders throughout the organization. So it was me and a senior leader and I had a producer who handled the logistics and the queuing and the Q&A and the chat. We would sell out almost every session, we would book up to 300 participants a session.

So I think when you talk about, and they would bring bias up on these calls, we have a very different view about unconscious bias, but just to close the loop here on health inequities, I think we could do a whole different discussion on that one, Taren, because health inequities in the medical field are really multipronged. It happens with the practitioner, the medical practitioner, if you think about the amount of time, if we're lucky, if we get 15 minutes, to speak to our physician, if we're not pushed off to a physician's assistant, right?

For years, you may have gone to the primary care, but his or her practice has grown, they don't have time for you to talk. And then, either it's a gender situation or a racial situation, they may not understand the resistance to why you may not want to change your diet. They may not understand why you might not want to go into a clinical study, given the history. So I think there's so much that we can do in the industry to educate and turn the lens around for others to see how their actions, and the impact on those actions are having on patients and customers can really make a difference in our world and in our society.

Taren: Absolutely fascinating. And I love hearing those anecdotes and the stories and how you're making a difference to your employees. And I think for our listeners, you really opened up the lens for us to consider different ways of looking at this topic of bias. You brought up about the industry and what it's doing, what grade would you give the industry and its approach to DE&I, at this point right now? Currently, to use your nomenclature right now, how would you grade the industry?

Nancy: Which scale do you want me to use, a scale of 1 to 10, A, B, C, D, E, and F? Which one?

Taren: Use 1 to 10, and 1 being the lowest, 10 being the highest.

Nancy: I would say, as an industry, we're about a 7.

Taren: That's encouraging.

Nancy: Yeah. I mean, others might disagree with me. We're certainly not a 10. When you're a 10, that means you've hit the pinnacle of where you can be. We have so much opportunity for growth. What I can say is that our trade association, which drives a lot of what we do, pharma, the organization has done an inordinate amount of work on the equity side, as well. And I'm

proud to say that our company has a seat on the boards there, as well as the work that we're doing with the racial equity initiatives.

So industry has really taken much more of a keen focus on the importance and relevance of this, not only from the business side with respect to patients and access to affordable medicines and care, but also looking at this in terms of what are the barriers that we can help facilitate removing and augmenting better access to health care. So there's been much more of an open dialogue about this. And it's unfortunate to say that it took COVID for many to realize the disproportionate impact the pandemic had on BIPOC patients in general. And many of us that have been doing this work for a long time know that BIPOC patients or people have been significantly disproportionately impacted in areas of cardiovascular, metabolic, oncology, obesity, all of these areas and not getting the proper attention and care that they need.

So I think at the end of the day, we have seen a dramatic awareness and commitment on the part of industry, and all of our pure companies or competitors, as well, I can comfortably say that we are all committed to doing more and to acknowledging our room for growth and opportunities that we have. I don't think any organization in the world right now, even outside of pharma, would say that their a 10. And if they did, I think they have a blind spot. Ten, 15 years ago, I would say we were a 4 or a 5 and these are giant steps. So moving from a 4 to 7 is almost doubling your grade, right? And I think pharma deserves credit and acknowledgement for their commitment, their CEOs stepping up and really speaking out and recognizing the importance of this.

Taren: Absolutely. I'm encouraged by that. We look for the silver linings out of all that has happened with COVID, and I do agree with you, I think that's one of the silver linings, that there has been this veil that has been lifted and we're really seeing where some of these trouble areas are and starting to address them. So I'm encouraged by that. That is great. So I'll take the 7.

Nancy: Good. I'm glad.

Taren: Personally, you, because of the work that you've done, you and your team have culminated in a lot of national awards, and I can't even name them all, but including the HRC Corporate Equality Index for the best places to work for LGBTQ+ employees, Disability Equality Index, the National Association of Female Executives Top 60 Companies for Executive Women, Working Mother's Top 100 Companies, and it goes on. What do these recognitions mean to you?

Nancy: Thank you, Taren. It takes a team of people who are not just willing, but committed to change. And recognizing that change matters and that equality and equity for all is not only crucial, but a competitive differentiator. And what it means to me and I can really comfortably say this, is that we earned those awards. There are many awards that are out there that are paid to play. And we have never subscribed to giving an organization X amount of dollars so we can get a placement on their list. We see these opportunities for recognition as great benchmarking data to uncover where our opportunities lie, and we've learned from them.

And when we start out the first time on some of those awards that we applied for, we didn't get a perfect score. And we knew what we had to do. At the same time, we know that industries that offer these awards keep raising the bar, which means that if you win at once, you have to sustain that performance. And I think it demonstrates to me that BI (Boehringer Ingelheim) as a company has not only been committed to sustainable performance, but also committed to ongoing improvement, continuous improvement.

For me, personally, it's a sense of pride, it's a sense of encouragement, and it demonstrates to me that when you have a group of highly committed, talented individuals across all of our departments, like communications, total rewards, talent management, that all want to see BI on this list, they'll end, even our site services group, you talked about disability in. We actually converted our auditorium, amphitheater in our US headquarters to be much more accessible for wheelchair users. So we put an elevator in, we have a ramp onto our stage, we have seats at the top of the theater, we have seating at the front of the house so that a wheelchair user and their aid or assistant can accompany them to be a speaker on the stage.

So when we looked at a lot of these enhancements that we had to make to our sites, we looked at this in the context of patients as well. And many of the conditions that we provide medicines for many of our patients have disabilities, have difficulty walking upstairs. And so it was important for us as we learn from our patients to ensure that we were practicing what we should be practicing, which is better accessibility to our patients. So I'm really proud of that. And it ties to my personal commitment of doing more for the underserved, those that need.

My work is very purposeful. I mean, you've known me for a long time, Taren. When people say to me, you've been at BI for so long. Why are you doing this work for so long? So many of your contemporaries are moving around, why aren't you moving around? And I don't see this as a job, I see this as my life's work. And working for a company that has let me be me and not ask me to be somebody else or to fit in has really given me the opportunity to take that long-term view, which very much aligns with the company's strategy, and have them stand with me on the journey together, knowing that there were, oh gosh, bumps in the road and twists and bends and fits and starts.

And I'm not saying it was always a walk in the park. I mean, this is hard work. And it is frustrating at times, but for every day of frustration, you get one email or a text from one employee that says, this culture has made a difference in my life. Thank you. Thank you for having such a great culture where I can come out and be my authentic self. We've created so much space for people to be who you are rather than conforming to what we want you to be. So we're all about integration and less about assimilation.

Taren: That's awesome. Nancy, you talked about this being a lifelong journey for you. And it really started with you at an early age. I know you were born in Brooklyn. I know that helped shape who you are today, as well as several other parts of your life's journey. Would you mind sharing some of that with us? And what's really culminated in who you are today? Because certainly what you do and how you do it is not a fad, you just didn't dump on the DE&I wagon yesterday, lady. So how important is that to you?

Nancy: You're so funny, Taren. Well, thank you for the opportunity. Yes, I'm a native New Yorker, born and raised. I grew up in Brooklyn, New York (Sheepshead Bay), and I grew up at a time in New York City when things were very unsettled in the early 70s, late 60s. I know, I'm dating myself, but I also grew up in a household of a very conservative family, Italian American, my father was very much a strict person, had very conservative views. And my mother, on the other hand, was very much open minded. And pretty much I would say, mirrored some of those conservative views, but not in a way that was limiting. So I saw that. And it frustrated me, and much of my battles with my father was on his views about society and what was happening in society, specifically around the Martin Luther King era.

And so as a kid, growing up, I was fortunate enough to be talented academically and I did well in school, but my parents didn't have the money for me to get any type of good education, other than the city university education, which, quite frankly, is a very good education. I was always the kind of kid that noticed the other kids that were isolated. So if I was the captain of the volleyball team, I would always pick first the last kid that would always get chosen on the side for a team. So I would pick the least popular kid first, because I knew that that individual had potential and if given the opportunity of not being intimidated, they would shine. Or I would pull myself out and go sit with that individual instead of them being isolated to just hang out with them.

So I was very much aware of these differences growing up in Brooklyn. And I didn't want to do the classic things that many of my friends did, like work in Burger King or McDonald's, I just wasn't interested in that. I really had an intense interest for business. And so I became a bank teller in Kings Plaza, which is a big shopping mall out there. And I remember – now I'm really dating myself – my first hourly rate was \$2.75 an hour, and I was in high school, I was in my junior year of high school, and I was working in the mall as a bank teller. And that led me to my career ultimately at what was then Chemical Bank for mergers later to JPMorgan Chase, leaving the industry in 2004.

Being a vice president, they're running a variety of businesses, but also at the time, dealing with the care of my elder parents, 9/11, my own cancer diagnosis when I was 40 years old, having breast cancer, getting divorced from a heterosexual marriage, and coming out as a gay woman as a lesbian in the workplace where you couldn't say that word, you whispered about it in the hallways, where women had to wear, in banking, dresses and you couldn't wear open-toed sandals. And for somebody like me and you know me, Taren, I'm more of a tailored kind of dresser. So to be in a dress is so uncomfortable for me. And the first thing I would do when I would come home would get into jeans and a sweatshirt because I felt so confined.

And so when I think about the experiences that I've had, those have shaped my views on how I look at this work, knowing that I came from very little, I didn't have much privilege growing up at all, other than my skin color like privilege, but that was really the extent of it, and not having any money or having to save the money that I made to buy a pair of sneakers for the sports that I played, because my parents didn't have a lot of money to do that. So to see that and to see where I've come today, to make it to a C suite, and furthermore, not ever being able to finish my

college education because my parents got ill and I had to take care of them and I also had to support them. I didn't have the money to finish my education, nor did I want to get too deep in debt. And I had pretty demanding jobs.

So to think that I got where I got without an undergraduate degree. And I don't believe that I'm an imposter at all, we talk about this imposter syndrome, I truly believe that I have learned along the way and I'm a better person for it. And the people that have touched my lives have made me better because of who they are and how they've influenced me to follow my passion. And this work is my passion. So I hope that gave you a good story.

Taren: Nancy, it's a tremendous story. And all of that rolled up is why you are such a role model to so many women, whether they're working in the DE&I space or not, you have such an authenticity to yourself and to your views and how you approach the world. It's quite admirable. I am in awe. Thank you so much for sharing that piece of you with our audience and with me, tremendous, you have worked your way up. And you have gotten into the C suite despite tremendous number of obstacles that you have overcome and flourished. You didn't languish. What is some advice you can give to other women who might be facing some of those similar obstacles or different obstacles? Like, how did you overcome? Like, in your toughest day, what's the one thing you relied on?

Nancy: You know, Taren, I still have tough days after all these years, but I think the most important thing is never give up, and I've learned that from having cancer. And it was the first time that at 40 years old, I was scared. There was a chance I could die, there was a chance that this could have gone metastatic. And I didn't know that until after the surgery, but there's always that fear that something might come back. So I kept believing that if I can get through cancer, I can get through anything, or I never give up, I always look at the positive. And I don't want to sound cliché, but I focus on what I can control.

And what I can control is the way in which I present my pitch, my approach to a solution, my way of including others. And so I get energized by making others feel better. And so for me, it's less about me, but more about giving that keeps me pumped up. And like for example, speaking with you today is not only energizing because it's a reunion for us, but knowing that this podcast will be listened to by so many in our field and that if there's one ounce of something that a dear colleague or listener can take away and we've made a difference in their day, that propels me to continue this work. It brings me joy.

Taren: Brava. Yes, you're amazing. We're done pondering now, but I do need to ask you about, because this is our WoW podcast program, can you name an accomplishment or a wow moment that shaped your career or changed the trajectory of your career? And I'm going to challenge you to think of one.

Nancy: There have been many milestones in my career, but there are two recent things that happened in the past year that I think were crucial. One was the ability for me to get in front of the board of managing directors and present a course that we created during the pandemic called navigating through uncertainty and ambiguity. And I attended the board meeting with

the CHRO, the Chief Human Resources Officer, and just put together four or five slides and walk them through the overview of navigating through uncertainty and ambiguity.

And on the spot, the chairman of the board said to me, take us through an exercise, we want to experience what this is like. And I had to pivot really quickly because I wasn't prepared to do that, but I just couldn't imagine that this was going to happen. So I did it. And it was probably the most memorable and powerful marks in my career to be able to take such a current situation during the pandemic and get the board to talk about how they were feeling and what they were experiencing in a very candid, emotional way. So that was one, being in front of the board.

And of course, the other was the George Floyd event, and having an audience with over 6000 employees that I hosted with the CEO and we dedicated a 90-minute segment to listen to stories of our own employees on how they felt about the George Floyd murder. That was the pinnacle of my career.

Taren: Wow. Well, two awesome examples. And thank you again for sharing them. And thank you so much for being part of our WoW podcast program. I could talk to you for another hour. Thank you, thank you, Nancy, for being part of the program. And I look forward to touching base with you again soon.

Nancy: Taren, thank you. Thank you for such a generous opportunity to sit down with you and for all of your kind words and for just sticking with me through the years. It's always been a delight and it's been my distinct pleasure to be your guest today. So thank you very much.

Thank you for listening to this episode of WoW, the Woman of the Week podcast. And thanks to eClinical Solutions for making this episode possible. For more information, visit eclinicalsol.com. And don't forget to check out our other WoW episodes at pharmavoices.com/wow.