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In this episode, Taren Grom, Co-Founder and Editor of PharmaVOICE meets with Wendy Lund, Chief Communications Officer, Organon.

Taren: Wendy, welcome to our WoW podcast program.

Wendy: Thanks so much for having me. I'm really excited to be here with you today. It's been awhile, Taren, and I'm glad to be reconnected.

Taren: It has been awhile. The last time we spoke with each other was in 2020 for your PharmaVOICE 100 and since then you've made a major, major move. Tell me about your decision to leave your position of CEO at GCI Health to take on your current role as Chief Communications Officer at Organon. Wow lady, wow.

Wendy: Thanks, Taren. So, how did I get here? So first of all, I just want to say when I was named to the PharmaVOICE 100 I have to say it was one of the more – it was obviously very energizing, but also one of the more fun moments of 2020. I do want to give you kudos for having such a great event. My whole team really enjoyed it. So I'm sure it will be another great event this year.

And yeah, this was a really major move for me. You get to a point in your career and I was just loving my job as CEO at GCI Health. It was obviously a very interesting and very challenging year in 2020 that I don't think any of us ever imagined happening. And right about this time last year I just started to think to myself what's next, and probably had kind of passed the point of thinking about going in-house. But when I thought about it and when Organon approached me and said we've asked a few people about someone with expertise in women's health and we've come to you from different vantage points, I said myself you know what, this company is going to do something different. They're going to make a difference in women's lives, and I really want to be a part of this. So I think all my paths in life really brought me here.

Taren: That's amazing and isn't that great when everything just works out and just convenes at the right moment at the right time and the right place. You noted all of that experience you have in the PR healthcare space more than 20 years. Tell me how that leads into your responsibilities right now and how you're capitalizing on all that experience.

Wendy: So my experience actually, not to date myself, kind of goes back beyond that because I started my career on the nonprofit side and it was in a very small medical association, and then I went onto a nursing association, and then I was head marketing at Planned Parenthood of years and then I made the switch over the agency side where I really specialized in healthcare

communications. So all of that has really, again, just sort of come into this place where I can bring all that experience and that passion and that knowledge into Organon.

I think one of the things that I've really been capitalizing on is that because of my nonprofit experience, because of my agency experience, always putting patients at the center and then people at center, and now I have this amazing opportunity to kind of rally alongside 9,999 other people around putting women at the center. So it's just been great to be able to bring all of that to bear.

Taren: That's wonderful. Let's talk about your passion for women's health and what sparked that for you? Was there a particular product campaign you worked on or you mentioned Planned Parenthood and some other your nonprofit experience, but what is it about women's health particularly that drives your passion?

Wendy: It really started very, very early in my career. My education, I have a background in women studies. I have a Masters in women's history. So I was always kind of circling around women's issues and really, really emphatic about the issues that women face and overcoming them and being a proponent of banding together and kind of fighting forward for our rights. And so the women's health thing came out very naturally because I started working for a nursing organization for seven years where healthcare obviously and women's health was obviously a big part of that and then landing at Planned Parenthood where I would have been happy to kind of answered phones and I was lucky enough to be the VP of marketing there. So that was it; that was my turning point.

So when I went over to the agency side, I went over there working in the area of contraception and through my 20+ years was able to work on virtually every aspect of a woman's life, every aspect of her health and so it just became an enormous passion for me. I was basically, you know, whenever anything will come into the agency and you would ask all my colleagues, I would be like 'I want to work on that. I want to work on that.' Even when I was CEO I was still very deep into women's healthcare and supporting women, even forwarding efforts out of the agency where we could advocate for women and their health before COVID and then during COVID.

Taren: Fantastic. You threw out a number just a little bit ago, 9,999. What does that mean?

Wendy: We have 10,000 founders, so if you take me out, we have 9,999 other people who we're all working together focusing on her everyday and her health.

Taren: Fantastic. Tell me a little bit more about Organon's story and what the company stands for and why in the world do we need another women's healthcare company. And I'm saying we do – it's rhetorical.

Wendy: Well, I'll start by saying that Organon is a very different kind of women's health company. We're the only company of our size. We're the only company that's really focusing on the things we're focusing on. I really do think of us as a unicorn in this space, and we're the

only real global health company – we have offices around the world; we’re located in 140 spots around the world, and we have this vision to make a better and healthier everyday for every woman. Our tagline is completely focused on her, here for her health. We did a lot of research building up to that.

So I do really think of us as quite different. We’re really, for our size, the only company that puts women at the center of everything we do. And as you probably saw, and we’ll talk about this a little more, we were launched with this commitment to listen to women to really hear and understand her unmet needs and help identify solutions.

Taren: Right. And that’s that Wall of Voices, correct?

Wendy: Well, the Wall of Voices was only a part of it, but it was a big part of what we did.

Taren: Okay. So tell me a little bit more about the Wall of Voices and that’s that spinoff from Merck, correct?

Wendy: Right. So this decision was made well before I joined to spin Organon off as a women’s health company. And I get really passionate about this, so if I say too much, cut me off.

But Organon as you probably might know was a company that existed and it did have tremendous number of women’s health products. Eventually brought under Merck, it was integrated into Merck and then when Organon was spun off, Organon was brought back from Merck and the different brands they had worked with and spun off as a women’s health company after they did a lot of research looking at what are the big holes, what are the big needs, where is there an opportunity for us to support patients but also find that opportunity.

When we launched as a company, as you know this is normally a financial transaction and we made a decision to yes, launch our company, but also launch this commitment and launch this commitment to women and to listen to her and learn from her and to take and understand those unmet needs and then act on those. So that’s really been our focus.

You asked about the wall. The wall, I have to give credit where credit is due. Our colleague Kate Vossen, who is head of corporate communications, this was her brainchild. One of the reasons this brainchild came about was because of COVID. We weren’t able – we’re this company that launched in the middle of COVID and we’re working to make sure that we have the vision and the values and our mission all worked among our staff and our founders, and so in doing this, Kate envisioned and our team created this Wall of Voices from all over the world.

It was this multimedia exhibit that sat outside at the New York Stock Exchange. And we were able to use that to bring together influencers and everyday women from around the world to share their voices. Then our team also created within two weeks’ time, which I think is pretty unheard of in the pharmaceutical space, a micro-site called hereforherhealth.com where people could go on and comment. So all the stuff that was mounted on this wall, and we had hundreds of comments and it was all audio so you could hear everything; we then took that and put that

on hereforherhealth and continue to ask this question – what are the greatest unmet needs out there. And we got thousands of women who came and commented, not just to hereforherhealth.com, but also on our social channels. We partnered with the female lead on their social channels. And it was just a really stupendous, as you said splash, but we take this really seriously. And we’ve become somewhat of a research house because so many women spoke to us, we’ve learned so much about women in the process and their needs.

Taren: Excellent. Very exciting stuff. What is the biggest thing you learned from listening to the women? What surprised you the most?

Wendy: I think what has been sort of an eye opener for me having worked in reproductive and women’s health my entire career is that right before COVID we did a survey – this is when I was at my former, GCI, and we found that women were struggling seriously with depression and stress and anxiety, which I think I may have talked to you about before. It was really troubling to just see the number of women that were dealing with this across the United States.

So coming over to Organon obviously with COVID hitting, we assumed it would be as bad, if not worse, and it was. But one of the interesting insights that came through with all the women speaking to us is that a lot of these mental health issues that women are of course dealing as an output of COVID also related to her reproductive health, related to menstruation, related to menopause, related to endometriosis, related to obviously postpartum depression. This was like a big aha for us in that women are – there’s a lot of stigma around a lot of the issues women deal with, and then making sure that we can kind of rip the veil off and talk about these issues and really begin to look at what are the mental health issues that are related to reproductive health and the issues that she faces everyday that we can help with and support.

Taren: Excellent. So, you mentioned a couple of those gaps, but what are some of the other gaps you see existing in women’s health today and what is Organon doing to help bridge those gaps?

Wendy: So there are some pretty significant gaps. I think one of the things that’s been most surprising to us is that many of the gaps that exist today existed 20 years ago. So there’s really need for us to do something about this as collectively.

Menopause, great example. When WHI came about over 15 years ago and a lot of the way people were treating menopause and a lot of the education that went away, women were left with very little to understand why is my hair this way, why am I gaining weight, why am I sleeping this way, why do I feel sweaty, why do I feel cold – all these things around menopause where women have really gone underground and they really don’t have anyone to talk to. So this is one of the biggest unmet needs that are out there.

One of the things I thought about is how like when you start to menstruate you have a circle around you that talks to you about pads and menstruation and what it means. And when you go into menopause you don’t have that circle around you. You kind of go silent and dark. We

need to change all that. That's kind of one of the big areas where there's tens of millions of women are suffering from that.

Another area is that despite the fact that here in the US we have the ACCA come in, offer access to birth control and yet we still see this really high level of unintended pregnancy happening, 40 to 45%, which is still very significant and very high, and this is due to making sure women are aware of all the options that are available to them, making sure that they have the education, the information and that we're supporting women in those family planning choices.

Another area is postpartum hemorrhage. We just acquired a new company that's focusing in this area. Again, the number of women, especially in the US, that have faced and have dealt with postpartum hemorrhage is way, way more than what we should be experiencing in a country like the US. We hear about this from people like Serena Williams and others. These are areas where we can all do something about this.

Taren: Excellent. I'm so excited about the work you're doing and bringing so much awareness to these issues to the fore. I saw on LinkedIn you launched something else that was pretty unique and it was #TakethemicTuesday. What is the significance of the mic and what are you looking to do? Is this an extension of the wall? Is this a different kind of outreach?

Wendy: It's really tying back to the wall because if we go back to our original strategy, it's all around listening. This is again an extension of making sure we hear from people. And in this particular case we're looking to hear from our senior leaders because our senior leaders have a very diverse viewpoint. We want to create a very inclusive culture and environment. We want people to feel that they all belong.

So normally in our world in communications it's one person who gets to speak on behalf of the organization; it's usually the CEO. We made a very deliberate decision early on that we wanted to have multiple voices to be out there being heard. At Spin we had our head of research and development. We had our head of commercial. We had our CEO. We had our head of finance. We had a number of different people out there speaking. And then recently we widened it to a broader group, sort of likening it to our C-suite and our She-suite, people that can talk on behalf of women and so Takethemic really ties to that. We're going out and we're asking our senior leaders to come in and talk about diverse topics that people want to hear about, that they want to talk about, to provide some interesting and deeper content.

Taren: Excellent. You talked before about Oganon launching in the middle of a pandemic. How did that impact your strategy from a communication standpoint in reaching key stakeholders?

Wendy: I think it had two impacts. Our folks internally, our company, our 10,000 people who launched this company, we see such an incredible opportunity for us to come together to focus on our vision, to be focused on our mission and to embrace our values. So 85% of our staff came over from Merck; so clearly a whole new culture that we're creating, new values we're embracing and that was just such an important thing to do during this pandemic to bring everyone together. So we've definitely been overindexing in a really positive way on how we

communicate with our internal teams and how communications has really become in many ways a centerpiece of that.

The other piece goes back to what we talked about – the New York Stock Exchange. We knew that we could not launch that by running around to television stations and going all over New York City to kind of tell our story, so we centered everything in and around the New York Stock Exchange. We launched there with all our assets. We did a huge forum for all of our employees that I co-hosted with the chief correspondence of the New York Stock Exchange, a great guy. He was incredibly excited and passionate and really jazzed us up.

So I think to your question, a lot of how we've come together is the excitement around our vision and everyone really focusing on one singular vision. While we have a number of different product areas, not everything is women's health; we've been really focused on our vision on how we can bring each other together and then our values. Our values are so critical and so important to be successful. Everyone has really rallied around this and we've put a lot of effort into communicating around it.

Taren: Fantastic. We've talked about because of the pandemic you had to employ some different kinds of strategies. Let's talk about where we go from here. Do you see the need to continue to innovate, especially as the pandemic continues to not abate in any way significantly? I mean what is that going to do for healthcare PR, for communications. What do you need to think about doing differently?

Wendy: I definitely think we need to embrace all forms of innovation around communications and uncovering and looking at ways different companies are doing things; it doesn't just have to be in the healthcare space. It could be in any space, which we're definitely looking at and bringing in through experts and through discussions and through just general kind of oversight into the industry. We also just need to continue to make sure that we're operating in the eyes of women and our stakeholders, whoever they might be, customers, women, media, etc., and work according to what they need, versus the way we want to actually want them to need. So that's really important.

I think the third thing is that one of the things I was so excited about during and if there are any tiny little things to get excited about during 2020 was the rise of the reputation of the pharmaceutical industry and the way competitors kind of like dropped that down and said, you know what, we're going to come together, the industry is going to come together on behalf of all people to try to solve this horrible pandemic. So that, to me, was so inspirational, and I think we have an obligation as an industry to continue to forge a path to continue to do that. We cannot fall back on our old ways of doing things.

Taren: I agree. We spoke a year ago when you were a PharmaVOICE 100 and we talked about the need for continued collaboration across the board, and I couldn't agree with you more that we have seen how a rising tide lifts so many boats and together we can be more. Let's go back to your PharmaVOICE 100 as being recognized as one of the most inspirational leaders in the industry. Who inspires you though? And tell me what motivates you.

Wendy: I have a few different answers for that because I feel like my entire career has been driven by inspiring people and points in life that have kind of driven my passion. I will say that I'm very inspired by my children. I am so proud to call myself a single working mom and to worry all those years about what if, what's going to happen and to see these kids in their 20s and what they have become – they are, by far, better versions of myself and I am just so proud every single day for them to be my kids and to be my family. I'm just so inspired by them and the fact they have no fear and they've embraced so many things that probably in my day I never would have done. So I just say the generation just needs to keep going.

Lately, what has been inspiring me and motivating me is all these women, and the fact and I would encourage anyone listening to this, Taren, I would love to hear more from you as an influencer, please talk to us, come on our channels, show us what's needed. We really want to understand and learn and gain knowledge from all of the women and men out there who can help inspire us to do what we need to do.

And then I'm going to give you a little thing that I hope that will be relatable is that this weekend I watched *Nomadland* which I have been avoiding, to be honest with you, because it seemed like it was going to be so depressing and who needs another depressing movie in their life when we were living in this pandemic. But I was so inspired by Frances McDormand as an actor, the fact that she – I've always loved her, but she was so raw, she was so real. She told a story that was so important. I just love to see women who are just so authentic and don't care about things in terms of the way that they're viewed and looked at and sort of show up, but really because of the content and what they deliver and the authenticity, and I will say like she's on my list this week for the woman who is inspiring me most.

Taren: I love that. Yes. We wipe away some of that superficial and we get down to the substance. Let's face it, with women who are in control are really the medical CEOs of their families. We make more medical decisions than men, and we need to have more voice in how our healthcare is shaped. So kudos to your company for taking on that mantle of responsibility. It's an awesome responsibility, and I feel we're in pretty good hands there, so congratulations to you. You touched on something a minute ago and it was yes we need the women, but we also need the men. We need men to understand that they need to be allies in this movement. How do we start to change their minds, those who maybe think it's just a woman's issue, what do we need to say them?

Wendy: Taren, I have been so inspired – going back to inspired by the men of our company. When we had International Women's Day way back when, earlier this year we were still a company in a company with Merck so we couldn't be external. So we did an internal activation, and I was so blown away by the inspirational points – I'm sorry, I keep using that word, but the inspirational points men wrote about in terms of how they want to contribute to women and their health, how they want to support their families in that, and I have to say I went to our CEO who's a man and I said, you're not going to believe the kinds of points that men are coming across with; we have to embrace men more as allies. We have to bring them into our world.

Fifty percent of the population may have to help us change the language of how we talk about things. They need to be a part of that.

Our CEO has done an amazing job going out there and talking on behalf of our company, but really believing in what we can do and really wanting to support the needs of women. So I would say just based on what I've seen in my microcosm of my world, I believe men are there and they want to fight for us and they want to be there with us, and I believe there's just there's more to be said there in terms of that collaboration and partnership as we go forward.

Taren: Excellent. And Wendy, because this is our Woman of the Week, our WoW podcast program, tell me about an accomplishment or a wow moment that either shaped your career or changed the trajectory of your career.

Wendy: So based on the fact that – and I appreciate you're asking the question – I think the epiphany I had a year ago was probably that wow moment. I think I had settled into a life where I was thinking I'm going to be working in the agency world, which I loved, working with clients who I absolutely loved for the rest of my career. And so that wakeup call that I basically brought to myself in August to say you know what, I can go in-house at this point in my career because you know usually people would go in earlier in their career, I can make a difference in-house. I can drive this purpose. I can be a part of this. I can embrace all the colleagues I have and hearing from them in terms of all the things we want to do, that to me definitely was that kind of wow moment that shaped my career.

Having gone from nonprofit to agency, now in-house, it just makes perfect sense, but it really was an awakening for me to see that there was so much more in my career. I think a lot of people think about themselves – and I'm in my 50s – people think about okay, this is it for the rest of my career. And my big wakeup call was that no, careers can take many forms and have many functions and there's still a lot of career to go for many people who are at this point in their careers and I'm excited about what the future is going to bring, and I think there are going to be more wow moments in my career as I go forward.

Taren: There's no doubt in mind that you're not done wowing us.

Wendy: Including myself really.

Taren: Congratulations to you. It takes a certain amount of internal fortitude to make that kind of leap. Kudos to you for taking stock and seizing the opportunity when it presented itself. So congratulations. It's been so great to catch up with you, and I can't wait to see what the future holds for you and for Organon and for women. So thank you for being part of our wow podcast program.

Wendy: Thank you, Taren, and for you, too. You've been doing such wonderful work, so I look forward to seeing what you come forward with, and thank you for taking the time with me.



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