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*In this episode, Taren Grom, Editor-in-Chief of PharmaVOICE magazine meets with Georgia Mitsi, Ph.D., Sr. Director, Search and Evaluation, Digital Healthcare Sunovion Pharmaceuticals.*

**Taren:** Georgia, welcome to the PharmaVOICE WoW Podcast program.

**Georgia:** Thank you Taren. This is so exciting. I mean creating this series and enabling women to join the conversation and share their perspectives with fellow colleagues and especially gathering women in the industry is just an incredible idea. I love it being here today. So, I am very excited to talk about my career path with the lessons that I learned, the mistakes that I've made, about the patients who drive me everyday, but also about what makes me hopeful for the future.

**Taren:** Excellent. I can't wait to get into it.

**Georgia:** Okay.

**Taren:** Georgia, I know you. You are passionate about the impact of digital mobile can have on patients especially those suffering with chronic mental conditions. You also have an MBA, a Ph.D. and Masters in Applied Medical Science and a Bachelors degree in Biology. That's a heady mix of science, biology and business. How did this all coalesce for you in becoming one of the leading experts in digital healthcare?

**Georgia:** Yeah. So, thank you for giving me the opportunity to tell you a little bit my story. So for as long as I remember myself, I wanted to show patients this was and still is my driving force and the sole motivation for what I'm doing. Do I have to accumulate all these degrees to show them? I'm sure that there was a better and maybe faster way, but it wasn't my way. How I became one of the leading experts on digital healthcare, I think the answer here is pretty simple. I was just another frustrated healthcare consumer and I couldn't accept the status quo or what it was offered as a standard of care.

So, the little voice inside my head was telling me that the technology can transform the way that we deliver care and even improve its quality. So this in combination with the fact that I love learning new things and taking on challenging pathways were more than enough motivation to dive into the digital healthcare. At the end of the day, the digital world opens up endless possibilities and brings a sense of hope and optimism.

**Taren:** So let's talk about what areas that digital health can bring to patients and where do you see that hope emanating from? Where do you believe digital has the biggest opportunity to change healthcare?

**Georgia:** Healthcare right now, there are so many inefficiencies in the system. We're dealing with fragmented, poorly coordinated care, problematic access to specialist, a chronic care model that lacks data just to name of these inefficiencies. And I strongly believe that all this can be very easily fixable with digital shelf offerings and the biggest opportunity in my mind for digital to change healthcare is the ability to improve access and give back care, the right care to the patient at the right time.

**Taren:** What is your vision for the future of healthcare? Is it what you just said, making sure the patients have the right healthcare at the right time or is there more?

**Georgia:** I am a dreamer so I dream of a better world than I am generally very optimistic about the future. So, I do not believe that technology is a panacea and I do not see technology as a substitute for the expertise of doctors, but I do believe that technology has the unique ability to restore the trust and give the opportunity for more empathetic and in-depth interactions between patients and doctors. So technology in other words, it will just allow doctors to do what they can do best, provide care and the same I also envision for pharma companies, that technologies especially advanced analytics and data science will allow us to go beyond the traditional regulatory pathway and bring the right treatments to the patients faster to the market. That's my dream.

**Taren:** That's fantastic and I love your optimistic outlook.

**Georgia:** I have to be.

**Taren:** I know that you're working on a lot of different projects. Talk to me about some of the most exciting things that you're working on right now.

**Georgia:** Yes. Actually, I'm very excited and that's the reason why I told you that it's very important in my role to remain optimistic about the future. Trying to inspire innovation within an organization, it's a challenging task. Trying to find the right partners and the best technologies to help with the therapies that we offer in neurology and COPD and in psychiatry also takes lots of effort and lots of hard work, but I'm just getting so excited because finally we are at the point where we have established the partnerships with some super smart people that they are offering great solutions either with sensors or mobile applications and internally we have a core team of people who are nurturing innovation and they are working with me next to me inspiring me to move forward and continue these projects.

So, one of the projects that we currently have ongoing is that we are using Empatica. Empatica is a wearable device for epilepsy in our phase 4 trial with Aptiom. We are also through this particular technology we are collecting objective but also subjective data from patients and this technology allow us for continuous monitoring, so this was a unique opportunity for us. We are involved with some other projects. Unfortunately, I

cannot name the partners, but we are doing lots of exciting things with wearables and with mobile applications in the COPD area as well.

**Taren:** That's exciting and I wish you continued great success.

**Georgia:** Thank you.

**Taren:** You were primarily responsible for turning around Sunovion's culture in terms of thinking about itself being a digital culture. Tell me about that process a little bit.

**Georgia:** Yes. I think that this is a – I couldn't have a better role in my mind. It suits me perfectly what I'm doing because it requires technical expertise. So you have to be a subject matter expert to what you're doing but then you also have to be determined, patient and inspirational. So it is a long process. It requires lots of discussion not only to create the same background of information when it comes to specific expertise that people need to have around digital, but it also overcoming the fear of failure of trying something new for the very first time. So the only thing that I could say about my role is definitely something that it's not a boring job and I could never have that boring job.

**Taren:** That's excellent. I can see you could never do a boring job because you're not a boring person. You also are the driving force behind Sunovion's partnership with Health MassChallenge and that was launched I guess as a component of the Mass Digital Health Initiative, which was designed to accelerate competitiveness of Massachusetts' digital healthcare industry. Tell me more about this initiative.

**Georgia:** Today, on behalf of Sunovion I have to say that we are extremely proud to partner with the HealthTech MassChallenge for the third year in a row. The way that we see this our way of giving back to community and of course fostering the whole innovation, the culture as well. It is a great contribution for us to be able to offer our expertise to companies, to startup companies that we have selected. We enjoy that a lot and we learn a lot because it's one thing to being in a position to support startup companies and continue nurturing the dreams, but we learn so much from them as far as they bring their new fresh perspective and new ideas. It works. It's a very nice partnership and it works very well and I wouldn't be able to do what I'm doing for the third year if I didn't have again, a core team of my colleagues who are also supporters of innovation and they work with me and the companies very, very closely and they offer their expertise whenever they can.

**Taren:** I know that you're also the founder and CEO of Apptomics. Talk to us about this venture.

**Georgia:** Yeah. So, I started Apptomics in 2012 and I consider it to be my third child. It's a true labor of love and determination and basically Apptomics made me what I am today. It gave me all the technical expertise that I can now apply in my current role, but

most importantly it helped me grow as a person. I learned a lot by diving into the whole entrepreneurial world in trying to start something in digital shelf when digital shelf a term accepted by a lot of people.

So a few of the things that I learned is I learned that patience is a virtue. I also learned the importance of perseverance and I also learned that it's okay not to win every battle as long as you have a clear vision and you keep moving forward. And this is something that I'd like to share with other women that they may think or they're already working on their own companies or even women who are in corporate world and they are trying to climb the corporate ladder is never give up. It's not an easy world. It's a fight, but never give up.

**Taren:** Very true. And because you are busy enough balancing all these jobs and roles and responsibilities, you are also part of the CNS Summit Leadership team and Movement Disorders Digital Health Task Force. How are you hoping to guide these organizations?

**Georgia:** I told you I don't like a boring life and so being part of the CNS Summit Leadership team is an honor for me. I have the privilege to hear and learn from other people with different views. Some of them they have been involved for the past 10 years and now I am working with them and we're collaborating to help shape the vision. And the most important thing about the CNS Summit is that it's not only the conference that brings amazing speakers and it has high quality of information shared, but what we have managed to do is that we created this beautiful community and it's amazing to see how many things people are willing to do for their tribe. It's a work, but we do it with a smile.

And it's also a great opportunity for me to participate on the Movement Disorders Digital Health Task Force because I have been able to work with experts in the movement disorders and technology from all over the world and it was an amazing learning experience. So I'm very proud of being part of that group and the good news is that in both cases multiple stakeholders are focusing on advancing innovation and patient care and this is in perfect alignment with what I'm doing at Sunovion as well.

**Taren:** That's fantastic. At last year's CNS Summit you and I had the opportunity to sit on an inaugural panel to address gender parity in the life sciences. It's a topic that you have a passion for. It's a topic I have a passion for. Let's talk about why gender parity is so important.

**Georgia:** We rocked it in that panel. This is a matter that is very close to my heart and it is very well documented that gender parity improves the bottom line. However, we still live in an era where there is so much more work to be done in order to achieve the gender parity in the life science field. And as a mother, immigrant and a woman I have at times experienced many forms of inequality and I have to tell you that at the beginning of my

career I was getting very frustrated and very sad, but now I realized that I need to change my tune.

So first of all, I decided to embrace my individuality and my accent. I am from Greece and I moved to US when I was 30 years old so that accent will die with me and I am more focusing on finding the right people that I can fight the good fight with. So like what we are doing last year at the CNS Summit I would like to think that the dream of a world of a gender parity is attainable and that we can change the world with a little bit of coordinated health from both men and women who are supportive of its future.

**Taren:** I couldn't agree with you more. I do think that there are certain things that can be done to change the paradigm and some of it is just as easy as changing the language we use in our everyday workplace and some of it's bigger and it's going to need systemic change throughout organizations, but there is a movement ongoing, so I'm very happy to be part of this movement with you.

**Georgia:** Me too.

**Taren:** So what lessons have you learned along the way speaking of women aspiring to get to the top that you have learned that might benefit other women?

**Georgia:** First of all, I love learning so I see myself as a lifelong learner. But I will tell you what I have learned so far. First of all, being amazing at what you do and work countless hours are only a couple of success factors. While you're devoting time and effort to your place of work, it is important to invest time and effort to continuously work on your own professional development either by reading books or attending networking events or being part of women's professional associations. All these things they offer a great opportunity to learn and be mentored by other successful women and I understand because I may sound extrovert, but I am an introvert and I have tried very, very hard for that. I understand that it can be very nerve-wracking to push through your safety zone all the time. But what I have learned is that being comfortable with the uncomfortable is just a great life skill and sometimes 50% of the success is just showing up.

**Taren:** That's right. Very good. You know your passion and innovation comes through every time I speak with you. Please describe what drives you everyday. I have a feeling I know the answer.

**Georgia:** I think it's obvious, but okay let me tell you what drives me everyday. The fact that there are so many people out there who suffer from chronic conditions and they're struggling to find the right resources or therapies is what keeps me going and I feel that it is a fight worth fighting and as a person I am always driven by higher purpose and that's my purpose in life.

**Taren:** That's wonderful. Finally, what's the one piece of advice you would give to your younger self if you could go back 20 years?

**Georgia:** Yeah. Actually, I have thought a lot about that lately. Two things: Trust yourself and smile more and I will tell you what I mean by that. I think many women just like me we all suffer a little bit of that syndrome of beating up ourselves and striving to be perfect, doubting ourselves as we go and if I had the chance to go back in time and talk to myself 20 years ago I would say you're good enough, just trust yourself and move on.

The other thing is I believe that because this is a long, long way, it's a marathon, it's not a sprint, we always need to remind ourselves we need to find ways to bring smile and laugh in our life and I think that I have taken my life and myself sometimes too seriously and I think that smile is a good thing and it brings people closer to you.

**Taren:** I think that's great advice and so I hope that you make everybody smile listening on the podcast.

**Georgia:** I hope so.

**Taren:** So thank you for being so open and transparent with us and thank you for sharing your stories with us on our WoW Podcast program.

**Georgia:** Of course, any time.

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