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*In this episode Taren meets with Terri Phillips, M.D., Vice President and Head of Global Medical Affairs, Merz North America.*

**Taren:** I'd like to welcome Dr. Terri Phillips to the PharmaVOICE WoW podcast program. Thanks for joining us.

**Terri:** It's nice to be here with you, Taren.

**Taren:** Terri, your résumé is fascinating. I've reviewed it and I would love if you could walk us briefly through your career journey starting with your 14 years of service in the US Army as a major in the medical corps, and let me also thank you for your service.

**Terri:** Thank you. I actually attended medical school on a scholarship from the United States Army Medical Corps. That's really what my connection was with the military, and my father had previously served. So that was the means by which I was able to finance my education and then subsequently went on and did a pediatrics residency and then a fellowship in neonatal perinatal medicine. As part of my military service, I ended up being assigned to Fort Campbell, Kentucky, that's the home of the 101st Airborne Division and spent time there, then went into private practice and then subsequently into the pharmaceutical industry.

**Taren:** That is a whirlwind. So I want to ask you, during your service, you said neonatal?

**Terri:** Yes.

**Taren:** And what drew you to that specialty?

**Terri:** After my pediatrics residency I knew that I wanted to subspecialize in pediatrics and the intensive care nursery was a place that I loved. I also loved the emergency room, and so I think I self-identified as part of my residency training as someone who liked urgency in medical care. I enjoyed the environment of the critical care units and kind of like the thrill of not knowing what

was going to walk through the door; it was not the same thing over and over again that sometimes you see in the primary care setting.

As an example in pediatrics during cold and flu season it's not uncommon to see a full day worth of patients on your docket, all of whom have the same signs and symptoms and for me, that was not as motivating and not as fulfilling as the urgency of some of the critical care specialties. So that's what drew me to the NICU, I think.

**Taren:** Excellent. Well, it is an important line of work too because those babies are in desperate need; they need good doctors obviously.

**Terri:** Absolutely.

**Taren:** How did all of that translate, if at all, into the area that you eventually moved into, which is medical affairs?

**Terri:** My journey to medical affairs was a little bit serendipitous. At the time I was looking for a way to balance work with my family. I was raising four children and was married to another physician and our household as you can imagine was getting increasingly chaotic and the demand to really give time to the kids that they needed to have had just started to weigh on me a little bit because in my specialty – and I was also the medical director – we worked nights, weekends, holidays, the intensive care nursery never closes. And so I was just really looking for a way to balance that and serendipitously found out that one of the larger companies was looking for a field-based medical person, and really what I heard first and foremost was home-based office and I thought that will be something that helps me manage my life. So that's how I ended up coming into medical affairs, and it's been the place where I've spent my entire career in industry, and I've been part of medical affairs as it's grown in this industry. The importance of medical affairs within the pharmaceutical industry continues to be of increasing importance and it's been really fun to watch that trajectory and be part of it.

**Taren:** That's excellent. I think you're right, that medical affairs has evolved considerably over the past even 10-15 years. What do you think one of the biggest changes is that you've seen in medical affairs?

**Terri:** Yeah, it's an interesting question. What I really believe is that medical affairs has now become recognized as one of the strategic pillars of a successful commercial strategy for any company. We have great colleagues in R&D who help us to bring products and devices into the market, but someone has to do the work of taking very complex datasets and translating that into a marketplace that increasingly demands transparency and a clear understanding of the

product position and the value, both to the clinician as well as to the patient, and that's what the role of medical affairs is. So I think there's increasing recognition that in a time where there's tons of data being generated on a minute-by-minute basis, the demands of transparency from the payer sector, from patients, and the way that people access that data digitally immediately, that's the role that medical plays. We take the complex and make it palatable to the multiple stakeholders that need to use that information to ultimately incorporate our product or device into their practice or into their treatment plans.

**Taren:** Terri, well said. We've seen that as well the evolution of the – I like to say it's the art and the science of medical affairs because it's a little bit of both. Now in your role as VP of Global Medical Affairs at Merz, you are responsible for physician education and outreach, what are some of your near-term and then longer term goals for the company?

**Terri:** I've been here now for about 18 months and my number one goal is to build a best in class global medical affairs function, and that begins with hiring the right people. We are in a very rapidly one of the fastest growing aesthetics and neuroscience markets in the world. For us, it's important that we forge very strong credible relationships with the healthcare providers so that they understand that we are a company that is interested in generating very strong robust credible science that they can trust. And then we also want our customers to understand that we have a portfolio of offerings that are relevant and to keep it relevant, we have to understand how those products and devices are being used; once we get them approved and into the market, how are the clinicians actually using those products in their practice and what can we learn from the real world use of those products and then take that data and sometimes develop new programs, but certainly continue to educate and improve the product offerings in so that we can make sure that the patients and the clinicians continue to have that trust and the safety and efficacy of our portfolio.

**Taren:** So just a little remit, right, not too busy there.

**Terri:** Yeah.

**Taren:** I also understand that you led the team to develop and launch a virtual reality simulator for HCPs. Talk to me about that initiative.

**Terri:** That was an initiative that had begun before I arrived, actually. We have a very smart leader of our scientific communications function here who saw the direction that this was going in terms of medical education that today's learners are very different than yesterday's learners. The way that people learn medicine now is very different than the way that I learned it, for example, and it's changing very, very quickly.

So this virtual reality tool – we call it Leo – is really something that I'd say younger clinicians are quite familiar with. It's based on gaming technology and it's a simulation that helps to demonstrate some of the clinical patterns in the diseases that we're treating – cervical dystonia and spasticity – and these can be very complex. These patients show up with very complex patterns of muscle overactivity. Each patient is different. And so to identify which muscles are the major players in the dysfunction of the patient can sometimes be complex. And before you administer therapeutics, like neurotoxins, you want to have a very strong understanding of what muscle is the target for your injection. This tool in particular allows the resident or fellow who's learning about these complex diseases to play around a little bit and in a very, very low risk environment understand what the complexity of the disease is, refine their ability to identify the appropriate muscles and even understand what doses that they should be giving to that particular patient with that particular pattern of muscle dysfunction. It's been a great tool because it's allowed us to interact with tomorrow's learners. We know that one of the targets of medical affairs is to continue to understand this virtual reality and virtual engagement and virtual patients, really, which is an evolving part of the medical curriculum in a lot of the academic medical centers and really is the preferred way that some of the younger generation of healthcare providers want to learn.

**Taren:** That's fascinating. Do you see other applications within Merz's portfolio where you can be using augmented or virtual reality?

**Terri:** We definitely do. So right now, we're just using it on the neurosciences part of our business. But as you know, we have a very active and focused business that is dedicated to medical aesthetics and there is increasing understanding in the aesthetics arena of the need to understand the anatomy of all of the aesthetic areas that are being addressed by clinicians. So without a very, very strong understanding of the complexity of the anatomy, whether it's the face or other parts of the body that are being addressed with aesthetic applications, a very, very strong foundation in anatomy is necessary. So we do believe that there are applications on the aesthetic side and we're looking into that.

**Taren:** If we've got this great stuff happening on your end, how does this translate over to the healthcare provider? Are they open to receiving these kinds of new technologies and understanding new ways of looking at data?

**Terri:** I think so. As I said, when I think back to when I was a medical student and then a resident and fellow, we didn't have cell phones. We pulled books off shelves and we went to live meetings and major congresses to get updates. Then you fast forward to today where people are getting information much more quickly; if you have a question, a clinical question, if

you want to access data, you don't have to go to the librarian and get the microfiche to get the journal; you can actually just pull up your cell phone and it's right there.

So I definitely know that today's learners are very, very different. I have a grandson, as an example, who can push the YouTube buttons and push the skip ad button and he's two years old but he knows already how to do that.

**Taren:** That's so funny.

**Terri:** Yeah. I think it's incumbent upon us to adjust, right, because this is the way that people are getting information and this is the way they prefer to learn.

**Taren:** Do we dare have to explain what microfiche is for the millennials who may not even understand what that term means.

**Terri:** *{laughing}* I raised my family in the DC metro area and I'm a little bit of wonk; I love to go to libraries and look up old things. So anybody who's ever had to do massive research should know what a microfiche is.

**Taren:** Understood. You know I think this is really a fascinating way in which the world is changing and hopefully, as you say, it will allow for improved efficiencies and maybe even improved diagnoses and faster treatment leading to better and healthier lives. So obviously you are taking a really progressive look at elevating the role of medical affairs at Merz. What else is on your horizon?

**Terri:** We continue to work on establishing ourselves, as I said, as a credible scientific partner. We really want to be in a position as an organization – as a medical affairs organization, we want to be in a position where we are actually the preferred partner for clinicians and for patients when they are looking for new therapeutic or aesthetic options. And the way we do that is to continue to make our science relevant, right, and bring it front and center to the patients in consumable formats that might be social media, and then certainly to engage with our investigators and clinicians who really are the people who move the science forward the most quickly. Once you get a product or a device into the market, the clinician is really the one who finds the novel ways of utilizing that in practice, whether it's combining it with other options or developing even new ways of applying the therapeutic or aesthetic tool. So again, we want to identify Merz as the partner who is responsive and who is interested and who is willing to support that type of innovation in the aesthetic and the therapeutic arenas.

**Taren:** It sounds like things are really progressing at Merz and you have a leadership team that's really behind a lot of these new technologies and new ways of thinking. It's got to be exciting.

**Terri:** It's very exciting. I've been in and out of the aesthetics arena for probably 16 years now, and I really don't think there's a more exciting time than now.

**Taren:** That's wonderful. It's a great way to get out of bed in the morning thinking this is going to be a great day.

**Terri:** Yep.

**Taren:** As an African-American woman in science, I know you know how rare it is to come across other female leaders, especially women of color, in your day-to-day professional life. Talk to me about what some of the challenges are that you face and what can be done to remove some of those barriers impeding career progression.

**Terri:** Thanks for that question. There are challenges and just unique situations that as a woman and as a woman of color that I have found myself in and find myself in, and a lot of that revolves around the simple fact that I just don't see people like me in certain parts of the organization, whether it's at the executive level or even senior management. When I was coming up through my training as a neonatal fellow, I was frequently the only person in the room who looked like myself, and I remember one time in particular I felt kind of isolated. It's difficult when you don't see people like you who are either dealing with some of the same issues that you have in your life.

As an example, I was also raising a family and so finding a woman who was a leader who was also raising a family, they were very, very few people – rare really – that I could count on, that I could go to and say how do you deal with this challenge or how did you get through this particular part of your career progression, how did you balance it all. So finding people like that for me was rare. To be honest, I counted on my mother quite a bit to keep me motivated and she's the one who pushed me and kept me going.

So I think that what we need to continue to do is to mitigate that for future generations is just to show up and to be visible at the senior leadership ranks and to be accessible and to actually demonstrate in a very visible way that you actually can combine a professional woman who achieves professional goals with also having a family. Until some time in the future, women will always be the people who have the babies; I don't see that changing ever, and so we as a society are going to have to make it easier for women to combine both their professional and personal lives and to make it okay to step off and then come back in to the workplace.

There are other countries I think that do that much better than the United States, but I think we're getting better and better. I could tell you here at Merz we're really proud of the fact that we have 50% of our management team are female. So we are a family-owned company and our DNA is really to support women and men and create a culture that empowers our employees to succeed, whether you're a woman or a man.

**Taren:** That's awesome. You said you relied on your mother quite a bit, but she's one person and you were really often in positions where you were an n of 1. How do you make your way through some of those challenging times?

**Terri:** Yes, my mother was a main – she was the person I counted on, but I actually had a lot of men, just by virtue of the fact of I guess the time in which I was training and the scarcity of females at certain positions, whether it was in medicine or in industry, the men who mentored me were pivotal in my career as well. The guy who hired me in my first industry role was a significant part of my success story, and he was somebody who I could trust and who I could go to and ask questions and at times when I did not feel as strong or as confident, he was the person who pushed my career forward and gave me that confidence. To this day I can call him on the phone and count on him.

So I can tell you that I have been fortunate to have people and it has, in my case, been a couple of men that I can name who have taken an interest in me personally and who have taken an interest in my career and who I developed enough of a trust relationship with that I could actually go to them in challenging times and get really, really good advice to continue to feel like I could push forward.

**Taren:** Excellent. Well, you sound like you're the perfect person to be chairing the women's leadership network at the company, that idea of mentoring, and it's beyond mentoring for you, it was really sponsorship, somebody who really took an interest in you, put their name on the line to bring you forward. So let's talk about what you're doing with that network at the company.

**Terri:** We're really proud of the work of the women's leadership network at Merz and we think we have an opportunity to move beyond the concept of just supporting women, to be a champion, to be a voice for the women in our organization. That means that we have to do more than just kind of behind the scenes push them forward; we actually have to actively promote their ideas. That needs to happen in meetings where we affirm their comments, that we stop and pause and check in with them and make sure that they have a seat at the table and that they are being heard. And then we have to of course recruit them to our teams and propel

them, look out for them, propel them forward, so that when those opportunities for career progression become available that they're thought of. I think it's crucial of course that we mentor women, keep them moving forward in their professional development path, and that's really what our women's leadership network provides. It's important for us to network and we also do this through both formal and informal meetings and relationships within the company. And it's really been a very, very I'd say successful forum for women to find other women to find both that inspiration and that motivation.

**Taren:** Do you have any pieces of advice that you consistently provide to that next generation of leaders?

**Terri:** I have three daughters and I'm one of five girls and one boy, one of six children, and what I say to them is probably consistent with what I say to other women, and that is to not limit yourself. If you believe it, then you can achieve it. That may sound a little naïve, but I think it's true; it's been true for me. It starts with believing that you actually can accomplish something.

So you have to set your goal, you should not limit yourself by not seeing someone who looks like you; if you want to achieve a certain destination, then it really is up to you to set the path and go forward and execute and to expect that you'll have some places where you may stumble, where you may be challenged, where you may need the support of other people, but to rely on the people around you and to push through the challenges and just go for your dreams really. Do not let anyone take you off the path that you've set for yourself, even if there is not another person that looks like you ahead of you.

**Taren:** That's a powerful piece of advice. So you obviously believed in it and you have achieved it and you've gotten to really a very senior management role within Merz. Talk to me about some of the ways you navigated your way into that C-suite. So believing in it and achieving it, but you had to set some goals. Talk to me about that process.

**Terri:** I think if you probably ask my family, friends, siblings, spouse, I'm a driven person. That's just who I am. I don't think I've ever been anything but that. All my life, I have loved to learn. I am somebody who likes to learn something new every single day and if I haven't, then I don't feel like I've been successful, and I think I'm also somebody who believes you can learn from every single person around you. So that's kind of been my way of navigating this.

I didn't necessarily set out to be a leader in medical affairs. I don't think that I even knew what the possibilities were because at that time, medical affairs was still very much in its infancy in the industry. We were still very much a service function to the marketing and now of course we are really, as I said, a very strategic pillar of a successful commercialization strategy.

So I grew up with it, I watched it, I helped build medical affairs at now at least four companies, and I think that it's just been my good fortune to be here at this time. Because I've watched the regulatory landscape evolve and because I understand both from the side of the clinician being a physician myself, as well as from the side of industry and the people who develop the drugs and devices that we use as clinicians, I think I recognized pretty early the opportunity that medical affairs would have in the future. So that's why I chose to stay in medical affairs. I am the kind of person that when I see that something needs to be done, I don't wait for someone else to do it; I do it. I think that's been the thing that has gotten me to success. You can be a leader without a title, so I've never let the title limit my contribution. I go about my daily role and my daily activity in my professional career to deliver what I'm supposed to deliver but also to identify what I think needs to happen now and in the future. And if I see that there is a certain challenge that needs to be resolved, I don't wait for someone else to do it; I take it on myself to do it and I think that's probably what propelled my career faster than anything because once you start doing that, it's recognized in the organization and those opportunities then are provided to you.

**Taren:** That's excellent. You know I talk to a lot of leaders and one of the most consistent themes is that desire to be a lifelong learner and to be curious. Those are the two things that most leaders have in common. I have to ask, is there something you know now that you wish you knew then?

**Terri:** It's easy for me now to look back and tell my daughters or tell other women to believe in themselves, but I think I would tell my younger self to have more self-confidence and actually believe it. As a young person, I was a very good student. People told me that I had certain talents and certain strengths. I don't think that I necessarily believed it, but somehow I always found myself in leadership positions whether it was in private practice; I ended up being the director of our medical group. We had multiple sites and I ended up being the person who led that team and then when I moved into industry, I started as an individual contributor and ended up in a leadership role.

So I think I somehow have this – I don't know – natural talent to bring teams together and to make things happen with larger groups of talented people. I think part of that is because I'm number four in a family of six, so that's been my natural position to kind of be the broker. I still am the broker in that family. So I think it's kind of like a natural thing for me and I think that I would have told my younger self to just go with it and just let that be your talent and develop it.

**Taren:** Yeah, it's funny because you had all those natural abilities; it's just being at that age, so it's the circumstances of youth perhaps. But I do think that that's an important lesson to share with younger women that don't wait 20 years until you figure out that you have those strengths,

understand that you have them now and use them to your benefit. One of the questions I often ask is what's the one word that describes you best, and I think you told me that, it's driven.

**Terri:** That's probably right. I am driven, that is for sure.

**Taren:** What else about your leadership style? How do you motivate and inspire your teams?

**Terri:** I try to show them the path. I think that everyone wants to be successful. I don't know any individual who doesn't want to have success in whatever their chosen career path is.

The way I try to motivate my team is to, number one, show them where we're going, set a very clear path towards what we're trying to achieve. And then my job is also to recognize what the unique strengths and talents are within the team because a team is only as good as the sum of its parts, but we all have different strengths and we all have different weaknesses. So building a team means you know where people strengths are and you play to them, you set people up for success, and then where you identify weaknesses, you have others fill those. None of us have everything, not one person possesses all of the talent to get the job done, but as a team, we are able to do it. So I also say that out loud to the team that it's okay not to know something or to know how to do something, but by connecting with your teammates, you should know who has that strength and the ability to fill it for you and to actually teach you and mentor you through it. So we're constantly learning from one another at all levels of the organization. So it's really setting the vision and then getting to know one another and leveraging the strength of the team.

**Taren:** Excellent. And finally, tell me about an accomplishment or as we like to say a wow moment that shaped your career.

**Terri:** My biggest accomplishment is not my career, it's my family, it's my children. I have now four adult children and I can tell you and you probably surmised from some of what I've said already that it wasn't always easy to balance that, having four children and managing a professional career. But I can tell you on the back side what witnessing these four very, very successful adults who are actually giving back to their communities, I can tell you, for me, that's kind of the wow moment that I'm looking back and interacting with these adult people and knowing that I had a role to play in who they are and who they're becoming and being extremely proud. Because sometimes when they were growing up and I wasn't necessarily there or I wasn't there as much as I felt I should be because I was managing a professional life, my children now give me feedback to tell me that everything I did for them was exactly right and they feel so proud and special that I was their mom and that I'm the person who brought them through it.

I've learned that guilt is a useless emotion and I think that women need to get rid of that emotion, men too, because you are actually teaching your children something when you're showing them that you can actually be true to yourself, whether that's you're being true to yourself is the work inside of your home or outside of your home, that it's okay to choose that and that for me now that they're successful people, I definitely feel like that's my biggest accomplishment for sure.

**Taren:** Well I'm wowed by that. That is fantastic. Congratulations.

**Terri:** Thank you. Thank you.

**Taren:** It's not easy getting them through those teenage years when you want to knock their heads together, etc.

**Terri:** I've had my moments, trust me.

**Taren:** I can't tell you how much I've enjoyed speaking with you, Terri, and thank you so much for being part of our WoW podcast program and sharing your insights with our audience.

**Terri:** Well, thank you very much for having me on your program and spending this time with me today.

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