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In this episode, Taren Grom, Editor-in-Chief of PharmaVOICE magazine meets with Dr. Margaret Yu, VP Disease Area Leader Prostate Cancer, Janssen Research and Development.

Taren: Dr. Margaret Yu, welcome to the PharmaVOICE WoW podcast program.

Dr. Yu: Thank you Taren. I'm really happy to be here. Thank you for inviting me.

Taren: It's our pleasure. I've done a bit of research into your background and your professional journey which has been really fascinating. Can you discuss your path from physician to oncology researcher?

Dr. Yu: Sure, Taren. I spent the two years during my hematology and oncology fellowship and when I was an instructor as a clinician, I was in medicinal chemist lab. That is where I first understood the importance of basic science and a strong team of people with diverse expertise to medicine. Now early in my career I worked as a physician within the VA where I spent the first two years of practice caring directly for men who had metastatic prostate cancer. That, in part, really sparked my interest in developing more options and better treatment options for patients.

At that time, men with prostate cancer had fewer treatment options than they do today and certainly the understanding the biology of prostate cancer was at a much earlier stage. That was true not just in prostate cancer; it was true for the entire oncology field, and I knew that at the time to really have an impact on as many patients as possible and to continue to provide hope to patients, I needed to be doing research. That really led me to R&D and ultimately I joined Janssen as a clinical researcher and am now the Vice President in Disease Area Leader for Prostate Cancer here at Janssen R&D. My primary responsibility now is in choosing which of the science we discover at the bench should go into clinical development for prostate cancer.

Taren: It's a lot to unpack there. So if you don't mind, can we start with getting into the field of prostate cancer, what drew you to that specific field of oncology?

Dr. Yu: Prostate cancer is a fascinating disease. It is the second most common cancer in men, and it remains a disease of unmet need. The reason why it's fascinating from a scientific

perspective is that the male hormone plays a big role and the prostate tissue has been under its exposure for the entire life of the man.

It's a complicated disease. And while we've made lots of advances in treating it, we're still trying to figure out how to best translate the differences in tumor biology from one patient to the next patient and personalized care for each patient based on that understanding.

Taren: Talk to me a little bit too about how your experience working with the VA impacted your view of patient care, you were working with a really particular patient population.

Dr. Yu: My experience at the VA really helped me understand how much access to medicines influences how much we as physicians can do for our patients. We were really able to offer whatever medicines were on the formulary for patients, but the benefit of being a part of the VA for a patient was that you did have access to all those medicines, but physicians can only prescribe the medications if they're approved and are accessible. And so as researchers we have to identify and develop the best possible medications, get them approved, that's how we really can improve patient care.

Taren: And how are you bringing those learnings to your role at Janssen now?

Dr. Yu: I think those learnings helped me understand that it's not just about generating the best data and getting an approval by the health authority, it was also important to have the expectations of the payers met so that the medicines can get into the hands of the patient.

Taren: Excellent. I also want to go back to what you said earlier about this being an unmet need and it is the second leading cancer for men. So when you are evaluating drug candidates to bring into the clinic, what types of things are you looking for?

Dr. Yu: I think it's really not enough to find a medicine that could extend progression-free survival. That medicine really has to be well tolerated, maintain quality of life and it really needs to be convenient for patient.

Taren: What do you think some of the biggest barriers are into bringing a more effective prostate cancer treatment to market right now?

Dr. Yu: Well, some of it is technical. I think prostate cancer, like I said, it's different biology for every patient. At times it takes quite a long time for the disease to actually develop metastatic disease if you count from when patients are first diagnosed with very localized prostate cancer. So it takes a very long time to show that effect. Some of the barriers in getting a drug approved is how long some of these clinical trials take.

Taren: Sure. And so as we are living amidst the Covid-19 pandemic we're seeing quite a bit of movement in terms of rethinking that clinical trial process. Is this on your radar in thinking about how to maybe re-imagine how clinical trials are done?

Dr. Yu: Yes, absolutely, Taren. I think we were already thinking about how to incorporate telemedicine and to incorporate remote study monitoring into clinical trial conduct, but I think the pandemic has really made us execute on some of those realities.

Taren: If I wouldn't be so bold to say the future is now. Technology has pushed us ahead of the curve to speak and that we have to really think more immediately about solutions. Fair statement?

Dr. Yu: Yes. Yes, agree. I mean in the past, patients had to come into the clinic to receive their study medicines, and now we're talking about direct drug to patients so that they can receive these study drugs at home.

Taren: Excellent. It'll be interesting to see where we are in a year and to see if telemedicine has really taken hold in a substantive way more so than the theoretical talk over the past couple of years and is it telehealth, is it telemedicine; I think it's going to be interesting to see that evolution.

Dr. Yu: Right. Absolutely.

Taren: When you were just speaking before about the disease being particular to the biology of a person, that's also a trend we noticed in oncology overall in the past five or six years, that it's not just the field of oncology, but we're talking about really personal medicine – not personalized medicine, but personal medicine based on somebody's biological makeup in terms of oncology. So how are you managing that aspect of the personalization of a treatment?

Dr. Yu: That's a good question. I think we're still trying to figure out how to best apply the understanding of the tumor biology from one patient to the next to the entire field. I think we're starting to do some of that with understanding exactly how DNA repair defects might impact presentation of prostate cancer. Patients who have some predisposition to repairing DNA tend to present with prostate cancer at an earlier age. It's also an Achilles heel because it's a way that you can attack the prostate cancer with different medicines.

Taren: So if you were to look to the future in terms of the treatment of this specific cancer, what is your hope?

Dr. Yu: My hope for the future of prostate cancer is that we'll be able to develop very specific therapies to treat each type of cancer. Just like in breast cancer where there are different kinds

based on the hormone receptor status, in prostate cancer we have very similar segments; we're just at an earlier stage of understanding.

Currently, we tend to treat prostate cancer all the same way because we don't really know how to apply in a general setting right now in prostate. The more we learn about prostate cancer as we continue to advance therapy in understanding how prostate cancer is segmented, the better we'll be able to figure out what specific therapies we could use to treat each type.

Taren: I wish you well and much luck in your future endeavors. It's obviously an unmet need and you're really doing some really transformative research. So thank you so much. Let's switch tacks a little bit here, if you don't mind. I also know that you're an advocate for women researchers. What do you think can be done to encourage more women to join the field of R&D?

Dr. Yu: We really need to do this when girls are young. Girls should be encouraged by parents, by teachers, by their family, by even the media to explore science, to be really curious about science. Instead of getting a doll, maybe a girl should be getting STEM-like kits. There are science kits that you can do at home. So why not?

I still hear teachers telling young girls to focus on art. I've had some personal experience. Because maybe there's this perception that that's what girls are good at and not at STEM subjects. It starts early. We need to talk about it so that the culture changes over time. Girls should be encouraged to ask questions about germs and their body's biology, anything and anything without being judged.

It's important that we work on getting more women into R&D as an organization instead of just talking about diversity and inclusion. At Janssen, we're working to implement this into a broader goal. It's a goal and objective that we build into our individual goals and our organizational goals. One of the things that we're doing is making sure that we're all trained with our training curriculum and as part of the training we – the training kind of helps you understand how diversity and inclusion really has an impact on performance of teams, on innovation, and our business.

Taren: I know that Janssen is part of one of the J&J family of companies is very progressive in its diversity and inclusion initiatives. Again, kudos to you and your organization for making this a cause that is front and center. I'd love to know about what drives you everyday and then your leadership style. What are the things that get you revved up about what you're doing?

Dr. Yu: I'm amazed everyday by how talented some of the team members are, the women of all ages – we're a global company and so we have men and women come from different parts around the world, different cultures and how important that is to team decisions.

Taren: Yup. And then how would you describe yourself as a leader?

Dr. Yu: Everyday I think about how I can support the team and how I can help them, and I try to empower the people around me by really hearing each of them and sometimes you have draw them out, there's all kinds of personalities and everybody has a different way of working. But in my career I've had really a lot of strong people, some women and some men who have provided me with resources and support and ideas, and I try to take what they taught me and I try encourage women to keep that same kind of connection, even if it's informal because it helps you build better teams.

Taren: Absolutely. And that connection also helps you increase your network, which then helps you in your career. Have you had a sponsor in your career, somebody who has really championed you?

Dr. Yu: I did. I did. Multiple sponsors. It's interesting, usually it happens – maybe better when it happens naturally instead of you seeking someone out. Some of them happen to be your direct supervisors. Others tend to maybe connect with you during projects that you work on. But I've had many who have helped me in my career.

Taren: That's great. Is there anything over the course of your career you wish you had done differently?

Dr. Yu: I thought about this and when I looked back, I can't really think of any big decisions that I've made during my career where I wish I had made a different decision. But in retrospect, had I known what I know today, I would have liked to have been more thoughtful about what work-life balance really meant to me and to really reflect and be thoughtful about what I wanted for my career. It was really something I didn't realize until much later in my life. But it's hard to do because you don't always know what you don't know.

I'm very happy with where I am today and I think all the experience I've had, I've learned a tremendous amount but I wouldn't trade anything for the path that I've had.

Taren: That's awesome. And finally, since this is our WoW podcast, can you name a wow moment in your career that has either left a lasting impression on you or that might have changed your trajectory of your career?

Dr. Yu: That's a good question. I think it was probably the moment when I realized that I really wanted to do R&D. I was still in academia and I was early junior faculty when I was seeing that some of the things that we were using to treat patients were just not enough. I even had conversations with my department chair and my division chair about how I wanted to be able to make more of an impact with patients, and I felt that I wasn't able to do it fast enough in

academia. So I think that really – I think that was the fork in the road when I took the road down R&D full time.

Taren: Well, I am pretty darn sure there are going to be a lot of men who are very happy you took that fork in the road as you continue your meaningful research in tackling what I didn't know until today was a really complicated disease. So thank you for sharing your stories and thank you for explaining the biology of prostate cancer. Again, I wish you all the best of luck in your pursuit of trying to find a cure for this devastating disease.

Dr. Yu: Thanks again for having me, Taren. I really appreciate it.

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