

December 30, 2020

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In this episode, Taren Grom, Editor-in-Chief of PharmaVOICE magazine meets with Jessica Bosc, Director of Business Development, Selexis.

Taren: Jessica, welcome to the WoW podcast program.

Jessica: Thank you so much, Taren, for the opportunity to be here. I'm really looking forward to our conversation today.

Taren: It's our pleasure. I, too, am looking forward to digging in. In reviewing your résumé and your extensive experience, you obviously have a love of the biotech industry. What drew you to the sector?

Jessica: Taren, I think like many of us, I was originally drawn into the biotech industry by a desire to help people and patients gain access to new medicines, and that was really coupled with a strong scientific curiosity. When I entered the field back in 2000s, we were just beginning to unlock the possibilities of what our industry could do, and I feel so fortunate to have seen the growth of the industry over the past few decades. I love having a small part to play in developing new and innovative ways to support drug developers and get products to patients.

Taren: Before we dive into your role as 2020 President of Women in Bio, which is fantastic and congratulations, tell me a little about your role at Selexis, which is really doing some remarkable things in terms of cell line technology.

Jessica: I'm on the business development team at Selexis, and my work is focused on connecting with partners who need our technology. Often those partners are right on the cusp of transitioning a molecular lead from development and really starting to move that drug towards patients for the first time. It's an exciting time to get involved in the process, and I love being able to see all of the new and interesting protein-based therapeutics that scientists are working on in our industry.

In other cases, we have potential partners that will come to us with a more difficult to express protein where perhaps some of their standard techniques for expression have failed, and through our technology, coupled with our team's experience and expertise, we have made it possible to get these products into the clinic and ultimately to patients in need.

What I really like about working at Selexis is our combination of a strong established technology platform and the continued focus on innovation within our space. We have helped our partners

advance over 130 molecules into clinical development and even advanced into commercial products. Our industry keeps innovating to combat disease with pipelines that contain all kinds of non-natural scaffolds, like fusion proteins and bi- and multi-specific antibodies, and these are proteins that have real promise as treatments. So Selexis continues to develop our platform to enable our partners with solutions to express these proteins.

Taren: It's fascinating science what you all are doing and so necessary as we continue to move that innovation ball forward. Let's talk a little bit more about your role in business development. Obviously, a lot of business development is done face to face. How has the pandemic impacted you in how you operate?

Jessica: That's a great question. I've always covered a fairly large part of the US. I'm based outside of the Boston-Cambridge area and so I've taken advantage of some of the virtual tools and balanced those with in-person meetings. Often the headquarters that we work at is not in the Boston-Cambridge area. In our case, we're working with people in Switzerland, so there's always been some aspect of virtual meetings. I think like many of us though, my last in-person meeting was in early March. So there was a bit of an adjustment as so many of our partners also had to make the switch to remote work, and that included some of the adjustments to be being able to raise fundings in the virtual environment.

Overall, I'd say that the development engine seems to be driving forward, but I think that every partner that we have is impacted in slightly different ways. Some maybe with funding, some with supply chain, some with their clinical development timing. But I've really been blown away by how quickly the focus of so much of our efforts as an industry has become COVID therapeutics and vaccines, and I think that's really great to see.

For our part at Selexis, once the pandemic really started to rage, the operations team which is led by our chief operating officer showed some serious dedication keeping partner programs on track while prioritizing the safety of the team. I was really impressed with how well the team executed these changes and then communicated them out both internally within the company, as well as out to our partners.

Taren: That's fantastic. Obviously, you took advantage of some of the tools, but are there any specific tips you can share for creating and then maintaining some of those virtual relationships and connections because it's not easy. Everybody seems to be a little bit Zoomed out even though we know we have to do it.

Jessica: I think it's interesting. I mean as far as relationships go, I think that people respond generally to the same things, whether it's in person or virtual. What they want to know from me as a business development person is how my technology can enable theirs. And so we're able to connect through the strength of the science, whether it's across the table or across an ocean; if I can convey to you how I can help you and speak in terms of solutions and data to back that up, I think that's when people really want to talk with you.

And on a personal level, I think we can all relate because every one of us has had our lives turned upside down by 2020. We're all still trying to bring products to patients despite the pandemic and we're really in it together. So I don't know if that's specific enough tips, but that's how I've been handling things.

Taren: I think that's a great tip, that you're bringing a solution to somebody who needs a solution so therefore, that connection is naturally there. You mentioned just a minute ago about how the industry responded to the pandemic; where do you after the pandemic is corralled – if we can call it that – to a manageable state, where do you see the next area of growth or opportunity for you in terms of your technology?

Jessica: Oh, that's a great question. I mean I think very broadly we still are expressing a large number of I would say sort of standard antibodies, but I really see a lot of growth opportunity and a lot of potential in some of those alternative scaffolds bi-specifics, multi-specifics. I mean I think that as we're trying to really dial in, especially the immuno-oncology space and the autoimmune space, there's a lot of opportunity with these new molecules and it's important to have a strong expression technology that you bring to bear when you're working with these, what I sometimes call, Franken-molecules.

Taren: I love that – Franken-molecules. Tell me a little bit more about a Franken-molecule.

Jessica: They're molecules that don't exist in nature, so they have been engineered by very intelligent scientists, and we really do our best I think during the discovery process to hopefully create something that can be expressed by a standard technology like a platform. However, I think there's only so much that you can do when you're doing your protein design, and the rubber really hits the road when you start to look at expressing those different types of molecules within cells.

Taren: I think the area in which you're working is so fascinating because it's really into that deep science, and so I'm always so thrilled to talk to people who can explain it so nicely as you have and make it so understandable, so thank you for that.

Now on to your exciting role as 2020 President of Women in Bio. Why don't you share with our audience what the mission of the organization is and then talk to me about what some of the main areas of focus are for you in your leadership term.

Jessica: Sure. I'm happy to do that. Women in Bio (or WIB for short) is an organization of professionals that are committed to supporting career and leadership development along with entrepreneurship of women in the life sciences. We promote increasing inclusion across the life sciences for all women throughout their career trajectory, and we do that through our 13 chapters across North America. We currently have over 3,000 active members. Our organization is fueled by volunteers across all sectors of the life sciences. We're very broad. So we have R&D scientists, regulatory affairs professionals, business and legal professionals, along with C-suite executives.

We work with women at every stage of their career, starting in the classroom with young women in bio with a focus on programming that will help ignite interest in STEM. This year we actually launched our first group of what we call YWIB ambassadors. This wonderful group of girls is tasked with engaging other high school students and they're really STEM leaders within their communities. It's been really inspiring to see how engaged and focused these young women are already, and we also provide national and chapter programming for women in all career levels with focuses on things like leadership skills and industry-specific discussions and, of course, networking.

We also have a strong focus on executives and entrepreneurs. We want to be part of the solution for closing the funding gap for female entrepreneurs by providing opportunities like pitch competitions and ways for these entrepreneurs to connect with each other through our founders forums. We provide programs and networking specifically targeted for executives within our chapters and those include things like panel discussions and roundtables, and we find that many executives really value the opportunity to connect with women at their same career level. These opportunities to stop and connect I think are few and far between, especially during their workdays where they're stretched in all different directions, and so they're really important.

At the national level, the pinnacle of our program is our boardroom ready program and that focus is very simply to get more women on boards in the life sciences throughout the whole career cycle. We also provide mentorship groups as another effective way to provide support for career development in connection amongst our members.

Taren: And in particular, is there a specific focus that you're looking at for your slate of objectives for the year?

Jessica: Well, our slate has changed a little bit because of the pandemic, but very broadly – I mean launching the YWIB ambassadors was a big piece of what we were trying to do, as well as focus on entrepreneurship. We were fortunate to have Melinda Richter from JLABS as part of our slate of bio speakers, and she was featured during our plenary and she really gave some great tips on what women entrepreneurs need and that was right at sort of the high point, I think, of when we were realizing what the pandemic was doing to our industry. So I thought that was actually really helpful to be able to give us some focus on the entrepreneurship piece.

And then of course, we've recognized the need for diversity, equity and inclusion, and we had some plans to incorporate some more programming around that that we really accelerated based on what was happening in the US and the protests that were there and the need for that type of programming.

Taren: Excellent. You mentioned just a few minutes ago about the board readiness program and that is so crucial. Tell me a little bit more about that program and how are you measuring your success? What kind of metrics are you using or looking at to determine the impact that you're having on moving women into the boardroom?

Jessica: Well, our first metric is generally the number of overall board placements that we have of our graduates. So at this point, the way that the program works is our graduate – our cohorts get together through a very competitive selection process. They go through that early in the year and the cohort is announced usually around June, and in the fall is when we have the actual program taking place. And that program focuses on giving women both the network and really comfort with the skill set around being a board director. So that's really what the focus of the program is overall.

We are up to our fifth cohort at this point in 2020, and we've achieved 65 work placements so far. So I think that overall from our perspective that's quite successful. The women in the program are highly qualified candidates and they bring exceptional professionalism to their work. The feedback from the cohort is that they value the program itself, but they also really value that strong network that they're able to develop. So part of what we do is to reinforce that by hosting an annual retreat every year.

This year, we were fortunate to have among other speakers Bio CEO Dr. Michelle McMurry-Heath and she was great to have – it was great to have her there really inspired by her leadership and for the opportunity to connect with her and for the graduates to connect with one another. I think from the recruitment side, what we're seeing is that we are seeing an increasing amount of inquiries to the program itself, to our board, and anybody that's related to women in bio is seeing outreach from people who are recruiting for board positions and want to have a female director on the board. And I feel like we're really starting to move the needle in the right direction so that we can have women gaining additional impact in the industry.

Taren: That's awesome. Congratulations to you all. It's such important work that you're doing. In terms of the pandemic and we're seeing report after report come out that women are tending to step out. We're seeing it in greater numbers than their male counterparts because of the pressure on themselves being home, having to home school, having to manage elderly parents and a career. Are you all tackling those issues at all in terms of your programming and how you're addressing this need?

Jessica: We are. That's a really great question. I mean at times it can seem a bit overwhelming I think just everything that's being demanded of us, but part of what we're doing is trying to really balance the work that we do and help our members find balance. So we've had a number of programs – and even before the pandemic we have had some programming focused on things like self-care. I think our Seattle chapter actually had a yoga event one month and so we've really been trying to keep the focus there, but also make sure that we're focused on bringing attention to that as an issue to people being squeezed in so many different directions in trying to find solutions to that. So there's a lot of conversation in our panels around that leadership overall. So I think those are really starting to get at the heart of what it is that we're dealing with here.

Taren: Fantastic and continue, again, great work that you all are doing. Being a leader of a nonprofit organization is challenging enough during the best of times, but now you are faced

with the presidency during a pandemic. What are some of the challenges and how are you managing some of those challenges right now?

Jessica: Well, I think as a nonprofit who relies heavily on sponsorship funding to support our activities, we're always looking for new sponsors. That's really important for us. For the most part, we've really been able to keep that on track, and there are some areas where it's been a little bit more challenging than others, but overall I think we've been very fortunate in that way. But the biggest challenge that I see us facing is exactly I think what you're alluding to, what other organizations are facing which is this general fatigue when it comes to the new normal. Our volunteer leaders are dedicating their energy to so many different places, their careers, their communities, often their families, and I think that takes a toll that needs to be really acknowledged and supported. And if you had a chance to look at the recent McKenzie report on women in the workplace, I think that's concerning for a lot of people. And as an industry we had a telling gap before COVID.

So most leaders would probably tell you that recruiting was one of their biggest challenges, and we just want to be able to create opportunities to provide that open dialogue to be able to support the needs of women in our industry so we can recruit and retain them.

Taren: Absolutely. And when we talk about looking to create better gender parity, greater diversity, equity and inclusion, women can't do it alone. We have to be mindful of men as allies. Are you also finding that true in your organization when you look to engage with your male counterparts?

Jessica: Absolutely, yeah. I think it's really an ongoing discussion within the organization the best way to engage with men as allies and to be better allies ourselves. So one of the things that we did as an organization in early June is we actually did a callout for a diversity and inclusion resource group. It's a little different within the organization compared with the way that we structure some of our other groups, but we really felt like it was important to look internally to be able to develop best practices within our organization. So we've really tasked this diversity and inclusion resource group with helping to give us a way to provide best practices to the rest of the organization.

It's a really broad mission within our greater mission and we want to address all aspects of what we do when it comes to communication and programming, membership, mentorship, young women and executive women and we needed to be very broad and so this group is really working at the national level and we have some groups that are within the chapters. They're helping us to create these broader opportunities for inclusion and that includes being able to incorporate male allies more effectively and be able to recognize that we're not really having this conversation in a vacuum. We really do have to make sure we're addressing all parts of the industry as we're having it.

Taren: Awesome. Jessica, tell me when were you named president? Was it at the beginning of the year or do you work on a different kind of fiscal? I'm sorry, I don't know that.

Jessica: Yeah. January 1st is the year that I start – the date that I took over for 2020, so January 1st 2020 to December 31st and then we will have an incoming president elect on January 1st of 2021.

Taren: So as you wind down your year, what has been the best part of this experience for you?

Jessica: Well, it's been an interesting year to be in a leadership role like this – as I'm sure you could guess. But I've also found a lot of inspiration being in this role on a daily basis, and a lot of that has come from the dedication of both our staff and our volunteer leaders in the early days of the pandemic when we didn't really understand what the impact was going to be. The organization had to come together and pivot very quickly in order to be able to work together to keep moving our mission forward. And so it's been inspiring to be part of leading that process.

We also have some really wonderful speakers throughout the course of the year. We had Dr. Sandra Horning speak at JPMorgan. We had as I mentioned earlier Melinda Richter at Bio. We really our list of speakers through the course of 2020 goes on and on. But I think for me the most rewarding is really the one-on-one interactions that I've been able to have with our incredible staff and volunteer leaders. I am so excited for the incoming president Kayla Valdes to lead us in 2021 and the theme for 2021 for Women in Bio is inclusion and innovation achieves the impossible. I think it really sets the tone for what we as an industry and Women in Bio as an organization are hoping to accomplish.

Taren: Fantastic. And I want to commend you on a great job during a tumultuous to say the least year and we do wish your incoming president all the best of luck as well. Jessica finally, tell me about an accomplishment or a wow moment that either shaped your career or changed the trajectory of your career.

Jessica: That's a great question and I've been giving it a lot of thought. I think for me so far – and I'm still in the middle of my career, so I'm sure I may have others – so far I think my career has reached a turning point when I decided to move away from the bench and into a position that was more focused on providing technology to help other developers do what they do better. I've had a number of roles that had given me the chance to introducing new technology to sciences in the lab or be able to provide a platform that enables faster advancement to the clinic and through those roles I've had the opportunity to gain a wider view of the development space and to make a broader impact within the industry.

Taren: Fantastic, and I am absolutely assured you are going to have many more wow moments in your career. I can't thank you enough for spending some time with us and sharing your insights on the cell line technology that you're involved with and especially all the work that you're doing with Women in Bio, great stuff. Thank you so much.

Jessica: Thank you, Taren. I really appreciate the opportunity to speak to you about our work and I'm very excited to see what happens next.

Taren: Here's to 2021.



Jessica: Yes, absolutely.

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