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In this episode, Taren Grom, Editor-in-Chief of PharmaVOICE magazine meets with Natalie Douglas, Co-founder, RareiTi.

Taren: Natalie, welcome to the WoW podcast program.

Natalie: Taren, thank you for inviting me. It's a pleasure to talk to you.

Taren: It's so great for me to connect with you and congratulations again on being named a 2020 PharmaVOICE 100. We were so thrilled for you this year to be recognized with such a well-deserved honor. So we're thrilled to get you here for our WoW podcast program.

Natalie: Well, thank you very much. I'm also deeply honored to be one of PharmaVOICE 100 this year. Thank you for that.

Taren: It's our pleasure. Natalie, you and I know each other a little bit, and I also know that you're embarking on a brand new venture once again curving out a new space. Can you tell me about the vision behind RareiTi and why did you decide to start a new business now?

Natalie: Starting a new business in the middle of a pandemic is a crazy decision to make, but of course we didn't know about the pandemic as we were building RareiTi.

RareiTi is a brainchild of me and my co-founder Wendy White, who I know you know extremely well. The idea was conceived, of course, over a bottle of wine sometime ago. Wendy and I have known each other a long time, and we have both been engaged in the rare disease community for a long time. I mean of course Wendy is a veteran in the rare disease space, but of course based on my previous experience in building IDIS, which became the global market leader in managed access, Wendy and I were talking about the state of healthcare, particularly in rare.

We've both got a major affinity with rare disease. We were both at the time board members at Global Genes and were longstanding members of the board at Global Genes. We were having a conversation. In general, we were on some sort of Global Genes business when we conceived the idea of RareiTi, and we were really talking about the ongoing challenges that patients with rare disease face the global issues as well as associated with medicines access, particularly again for patients with rare disease. And we could really see through the work that we did our previous experiences as entrepreneurs in healthcare and where things needed to go that there was a new model that needed to emerge. In fact, it was really during that conversation that we built the business model for RareiTi, which is a new and different model for managed access.

We describe ourselves as a different kind of managed access company, and I believe that that is really true.

And so our vision for RareiTi is to really inspire and change the way that healthcare is delivered, particularly for patients with rare disease wherever they are, to provide equitable access to new therapies and supportive healthcare for rare patients. And I think fundamental to this model is our desire to work collaboratively with the pharmaceutical company to – our job really is to help them navigate these complexities of access for patients with rare disease to their new therapies.

We just feel that there's so much change that is going happen. I think we can see how some of the change is happening as a result of COVID this year, but when we conceived the RareiTi model we weren't in the middle of a pandemic. We could already see that there was a real need actually in the market for a different kind of model and hence, RareiTi was born. That's how it all came about.

Taren: That's awesome. It's such an inspiring endeavor that you are partaking in and it's such an important space. Tell me you – the venture is global, correct? You are looking at managed access around the world?

Natalie: Yeah. Again, because rare patients are everywhere and in many cases we're talking about quite small populations and going back to my background at building IDIS actually, we were always managing medicines access to patients in multiple countries at any one time on the basis that there was an unmet need. We're really talking about providing a solution for patients with an unmet need and of course, they're not all in the same place. They're not in the same country. So for us, you know I've built an international healthcare service business before. I've done it before. So to me, it was not a big leap of faith. It wasn't as if we hadn't been down that road before. And so it's a global solution which means that we can provide access to multiple patients in multiple countries as and when required.

Taren: Excellent. Now, since your time at IDIS, and we'll jump there, you were the CEO and you developed the company to become a global market leader. Since that time, have you seen anything change in terms of how managed access is being managed, to be quite honest, and what's new in this space?

Natalie: It's a great question. I suppose I am recognized as the pioneer in the managed access market, and that was the desire to build that proposition so many years ago was born out of personal experiences I had gained working in industry and seeing that there was just no suitable way that some of these patients could access therapy. So it was personally driven to build and create the model. Obviously, I went on and did other things when I left IDIS and when IDIS was sold to another company. So I took some time out in some respects from what I would call the managed access market. I went and did a big turnaround of a major clinical home care company. And again, that was sort of very focused on providing solutions in the home for people with unmet needs. So it was somewhat related.

But if we get back to the real point of your question, what's changed in the managed access world over the years; I do see a couple of key things. One is I see greater acceptance by the pharmaceutical industry and a recognized need to make a level of provision available to patients post-trial and pre-approval. So that's one thing, so definitely more recognition and more acceptance of that today than there was 20 years ago when the whole IDIS model was building around managed access. So it was a real hard when I started talking to pharma for the first time, it was a really hard because I was bringing a concept to the table that was really unfamiliar and a bit scary actually I have to say for a lot of them. So I definitely see there's been a huge shift towards greater acceptance.

But what I also see at the same time is that most of the examples that we see today are in the therapy area of cancer. You see it primarily in cancer and not so much in rare. So, it was obvious in starting RareTi that there was a real need to focus in rare and enable more access to rare patients and of course, there's complexity, but greater acceptance. I definitely see more competition in the market in terms of third party providers offering their services to the industry, and I think that's an indicator that this is a legitimate marketplace, if you like. So I definitely see that. I was the pioneer and through IDIS it was pioneer and I was really banging a drum that I was the lone voice at the time, and I think today it's a different model in the sense that I think it's more acceptable practice as some great examples of how companies today are using it quite legitimately to help patients when they need medicine most. So I suppose those are the key things I see.

Taren: Wonderful. Thank you so much for that. Let's go back a little bit about your entrepreneurial journey because this is not the first company you have started. What excites you about a startup? What inspires you? What drives you?

Natalie: Oh my God, if you'd asked me that earlier on this week, I had been like God knows, I have no idea what inspired to do it all over again because it's really hard work. I think that – and actually I'm sort of joking here, but it's true because it's not an easy – taking the step sometimes is really hard, but taking the step knowing how hard the journey is and when you've done it before, and of course Wendy has done it before as well, you really do have to think twice about starting again and being in a – and actually starting from scratch is I think is terrifying to be honest. But what inspired us to do – what inspired me to do it is because I can see there's a real unmet need.

I'm driven by the determination to make a difference, a passion for this space and knowing that it's something I understand this journey – not to say that every part of the journey or that the road will be completely the same. But it's knowing that I can do something meaningful with my time and knowing that as I've been down this road before, I kind of know what to expect and I'm okay with that. I'm always energized by solving complex problems that sort of difficult stuff has always been something that really if it grips me, I can't not do something about it, you know what I mean? So there's a whole combination of things. Passion believing I can make a difference and wanting to do something meaningful, want to have a positive impact on other people and I've spent my life in healthcare. It's all been centered around helping people.

So it's a combination of all of those things I think that has sort of encourages me and certainly drives me. I can't say that the excitement is there everyday. I mean we have some really fun days, but – and actually it's been, I've got to say it's been super hard in the pandemic. Launching a brand new company, Wendy and I know a lot of people thankfully, but people don't have brand recognition unless it starts to create some noise around it, trying to build the brand and meet new people when at the time when everybody is at home is almost impossible. So we have had to be super creative (and thankfully we are) and as I say we can draw from many years of experience being in business and knowing that you got to roll your sleeves up and get on with it.

So you've got to be a pretty energetic and positive person I think to enjoy the entrepreneurial role and we've had some real fun along the way I have to say. I think the exciting moments are when we really connect with the client and when we feel that our model has really – they've understood what's different about RareTi compared to everybody else.

Taren: That's excellent. It's not easy to start up a company and it takes a certain amount of resilience and energy and creativity. Aside from that though, I talked to a lot of women and they're not sure what their next step should be. They may have hit the ceiling of their job and then looking maybe to venture out, what advice do you have to women who might be looking to start their own gig? Any little correlates that you've learned?

Natalie: Oh yeah. And by the way, I'm a big fan of supporting women because I don't think women are – and I'm generalizing here, some of your business might not respond well to what I say, but I think a lot of them will. Women aren't great at self-promotion. We're not always great at recognizing our skills. We are not always great at feeling like we are going to be taken seriously if we go down a route that other people haven't already been down... or for some women I think there is a – I don't know if it's a lack of confidence or a lack of belief or – I don't know what it is, it's different for many people.

But in general, I find that women are a bit timid sometimes about taking that big leap forward and I'm not surprised because unlike a lot of men I think we're just not wired to pat ourselves on the back and talk ourselves up to be amazing everything. I just don't think that's a natural female trait in general and your point about resilience is a really good one. Women are incredibly resilient, but they tend to do it quietly and sometimes when you embark on doing something completely different you're literally walking into the unknown. I think that can be very intimidating for a lot of women. And so some advice I would give and the things that I also reminded myself about, if you're going to take a big leap forward and do something, venturing out on your own, you've got a great idea, there's a few things you need to check off I think.

You've got to ask yourself and double check the reason why you're doing, why are you doing this, why is this a good idea, why does it matter to you because you got to be able to answer that question a number of levels. So ask yourself why just to check in with why you're doing it and why it's important and most of the time what will happen then is you'll check all those boxes because you'd be like I know it's a great idea. There's a gap in the market, but what you'll also be saying is I can do this. I can do it. And that's a good place to be. Then when you've kind

of pumped yourself up to and convinced yourself that you really are on the right track, you then have to ask yourself the question, they you need to think about your worst day ever at the office. So just think of like the shittiest day you've ever had – sorry about that, am I allowed to–

Taren: Yes, go ahead. 😊

Natalie: Anyway, think about the shittiest day you've ever had, like the worst day and I'm sure there will be more than one. I mean I've had multiple days like that. But think about the worst day and it invokes all those emotions again in you, but the reason for doing that is because then you start to build your – this is where the resilience piece comes in – because then you start to map out what you did. You start to remind yourself how you handled that situation, how you bounced back from that situation and what occurred after you went through that experience because any entrepreneurial journey, these days it often sounds like, we read the news everyday and somebody is making billions of dollars and let's say they really are the exceptions rather than the rule. But it's made to sound really easy and what you have to know as an entrepreneur is this is not an easy solution.

Getting another job in big pharma is probably a much easier solution than taking that leap forward and starting a new venture, starting a new business, creating a new market, whatever it is that is not the easiest route to take. So you've got know when you remind yourself of those horrible days, just remind yourself of how you deal with adversity because that's going to be important. And then when you've got belief in yourself, you just focus. So to me it's build your resilience, you add your passion to the resilience and then you focus because it's very easy as well with entrepreneurial ventures to get distracted or to take an opportunity because it's an opportunity. You sometimes have to check back and think umm, was this really part of my strategy to take this kind of client or do this kind of work. It's very easy to do that and sometimes you have to do that because you just need, you need to generate the revenue, but so to me it's three things: Build the resilience, add your passion to it because your passion is your golden ticket really and focus your energy. And I think those three things are my tips for women who are thinking of venturing out in their own.

Taren: Those are awesome tips. Thank you so much. I couldn't agree with you more. Passion, resiliency and I love that, yeah. Think about what your worst day is because when you're building the company, you have to be all things. You have to know how to put the toner into the printer. Be your own IT department. You have to be your own HR department. You have to do everything from scratch. And so you have to be able to figure it out and know what those hacks are and where you go to for assistance and who you can ask for guidance.

Natalie: Oh my God, you're so right. I mean honestly, actually one of my most exciting days recently was figuring out how to use the scanner because I've never done it before. It was either – in my previous role I had – I've always had a P.A. For 20 years, I've had somebody – my right hand wasn't doing everything and then Mr. Douglas, he's my other P.A. right now because we all have to be at home, but I'd be like oh my God, where is he? I need to scan a document. I don't know, he's gone to Home Depot or something and so I had to figure out and it was honestly, it was the most frustrating situation and that is really the worst day at the office, but

your point is really good, one stuff you – yeah, it's you're going to do stuff you don't really want to do, but you've got to do it.

Taren: Exactly. To me in speaking with you, you have it sounds like a very egalitarian leadership style, but I don't want to put words into your mouth. How would you describe yourself as a leader?

Natalie: Oh my God. The first thing I did when I thought about this question is I asked the RareitI CEO Alex Evans because she – obviously, I engaged with her quite significantly and she's sort of in the driving seat in the business, but she's dealing with two co-founders and we speak a lot. We worked together before, Alex and I, so we know each other pretty well. But I asked her that question, how would you describe my leadership style? So I'll tell you what she said and then I'll answer the question the way you asked it.

These are her words – supportive and helpful, but clear and direct, which is a good thing, is what she said. Now, I don't know if she's looking for a raise and she was being particularly polite, but I think it's always helpful because it's a horrible question to have to answer. How do you describe your leadership style, and I think but having said that it's a difficult question to answer. I will answer it. I would say I am very often and transparent. I do have a very supportive nature. I've been in business a long time and I know where you have to lead by example, lead from the front, but also where you have to give space to those around you and so I've learned to know over the years, but I would some very open and transparent. I am definitely direct. I mean I'm an open book and it also depends on what you're doing.

I had this example, I had to do a lot of driving from the front. I was extremely passionate. I could see so clearly how, where we were going and describing that to people was so easy for me and a lot of people if they could get the description they could see the vision. That was really important for me, so explaining, talking to people about the vision, painting the picture and a lot – people come along with you in that scenario or they don't. Some people struggle in those situations. I think when I did a big turnaround with a huge organization, almost a \$2 billion company, Healthcare at Home, I walked into that, didn't know the business. I had been asked to go in to lead the turnaround by the investors who knew me and I walked into a business that was in really bad shape and I had to walk in and take control.

And so I did that by explaining very clearly who I was, what was I doing here and what we needed to achieve together and it was a really good – actually, it was a great experience, but I think it would be a good way of me sort of evaluating what my leadership style is like because it was a situation where I kind of had to wake the organization I bet was in complete panic. They didn't know me, so I had to build trust, build confidence and I had to calm everybody down. And so I think that Alex's words around me being supportive and helpful would definitely ring out in the scenario and what I think a lot of people who've worked very closely with me would see that side of me, but they would all agree that I'm very direct.

I'm very decisive and actually when you're in a turnaround situation or if it's a business that you really care about and you believe you know how to deliver a solution for example to a client

then that's what you're going to get a very – this absolute clarity about how we're going to do something and I need to be the one that can help these people get to the place I need them to get to quite quickly. So I suppose that sums it up really. I don't know. I don't know. What do you think?

Taren: I think that is a spot on description. So at the same time, a lot of leaders they look for others on their team when they're building their teams for those competencies or the skill sets that maybe they don't have as much of. So what do you look for in others when you're building out an executive team?

Natalie: There's some fundamentals like they got to have the right skills for the role and for their culture at the organization. They got to have something different about them, a bit of a spark to them. They definitely got to be bright, smart people. There's two other things that are really important to me, authenticity. People who are authentic, they don't need to be everything. I think it's people that really are genuine, honest, good people and that sounds a bit crazy because you kind of think that that is in everybody, but I can tell you in my experience over the years is while you can hire people that are – who are real snakes and I have.

I won't name anybody, but people aren't always what they – people aren't always genuine. They're not always authentic and you can – and I've definitely been on the receiving end. There's been pretty bad behavior by people I've worked with and actually have hired as well in the past. So I really look today for authenticity and if your instinct is sort of telling you that this isn't the right fit then I definitely listen to that these days, but in general the attributes, the things I've talked about, smart people, real skills with additional spark.

RareiTl is a service business. I've often been running and building service businesses. You've got to hire people who really care about delivering the best possible solution for the clients. So that's also important. People can roll their sleeves up and people that genuinely will go the extra mile and I'm sure that these are all things that most people look for, but these are the things that are important to me and people who I work with, those are the things I look for. The other thing that's really important is people who can think and move fast as well because I mean you know Wendy, she thinks and moves fast, and I'm the same.

We're slightly different actually which is super helpful. We are slightly different and super helpful, but we need to work with people that can move at speed. And so we need to hire people with those abilities.

Taren: When you're small and you're a startup you have to be nimble and you have to be agile and you have to be able pivot and look at the chess board as a whole and figure out what your next moves are and have that vision and staying true to that vision.

Natalie: Absolutely.

Taren: Good point. And thank you for not naming names. We don't want to out anybody on...

Natalie: I'm not going to do that. Very few and far between I have to tell you, very few and far between.

Taren: That's good. That's credit to your instincts. We've noted at the top of the program that you were named to the PharmaVOICE 100 this year and that really recognizes the most inspiring individuals in the industry. Having been recognized for those qualities, I'm curious who do you look to for inspiration?

Natalie: There's lots of people who in the public eye that I'm interested in listening to, but in the main I have to say it's rare people, rare patients, rare families. There's no question that these people are unbelievably inspiring. The journeys they go through, the challenges they face are just unbelievably difficult. So rare people just inspire me everyday of the week.

I think as well when I started in the industry at Johnson & Johnson and it's really how I got into managed access is because I was working in London all the large teaching hospitals during the HIV and AIDS epidemic, and actually it's the one thing I was so inspired by everyday because I was in the clinic and so many of the patients were there. I always feel very grateful that I was given that kind of opportunity working within the pharmaceutical industry that I got to talk to patients. And those patients with HIV and AIDS were patients who knew everything about every drug coming to market, every drug in clinical trials and what they were facing was at that time was death because this was way before triple therapy. We were really treating symptomatic infection at that point in time. So there was no real long term solution for these patients and they were so – those patients were amazing, and it really taught me a lot about what my job was about.

So it's really rare people, very ill people which is why I guess I'm still in healthcare and actually finally, just a very personal story was my own sister who died five years ago from a rare cancer. And actually, it's one of the reasons as well of starting RareiTi is because I wanted to get back into this field where I needed to find a solution for people like her and unfortunately she died within 12 months of her diagnosis, but the inspiration bit about her is that she was a social worker.

She always looked out for everybody else and she had the most terrible journey towards the end and she still inspired everybody despite what she was going through and I think that I'm not as – I'm just not sure I'm as resilient as she was or any of these people. That's what inspires me the most, people that really, really struggle and despite adversity just still want to give to others. Those are the people that inspire me the most.

Taren: Natalie, thank you so much for sharing that very personal story with us and you know losing a sibling, it's so different than losing a parent because it's the natural course of aging, but losing a sibling is that'll be devastating. So thank you so much for sharing that and being vulnerable with us in that storytelling.

Onto our final question – tell me about an accomplishment or a wow moment, since this is our WoW podcast that either shaped or changed the trajectory of your career.

Natalie: I think it has to be getting my first job in the industry at Johnson & Johnson. It was such a – I mean I honestly had no idea what I was in for. This was my first job in the industry, starting out carrying the bag and I have no idea to this day how I managed to get the job at all. I really don't. But that was really the starting point for me in the industry. And I know I've just talked about it, but the moment when I realized what I was actually doing. You break it down, selling drugs to doctors – I wasn't just selling drugs to doctors; I was selling hope for patients, real people with real – with just incredible challenges with their health. So that was the aha moment for me in that role in London with those patients with HIV and AIDS. And that's what went on to inspire me to build IDIS I have to say.

So that journey in itself that started at J&J and culminated in building the global market leader in managed access, that is a package right there that combined is my wow moment I think. And of course I'm inspired today by being involved in the rare disease community, doing other things in my career as well. I'm so grateful for the whole journey I've been on up until point in time, but I guess it already started at J&J.

Taren: I love that sentiment – you're selling hope for patients. It isn't just about the physical product that you're really giving those who are as you said so desperately ill who have no then such unmet medical needs, giving them something, an opportunity to have a better care and a better standard of living and everything. You talked about the HIV and AIDS patients and when we look back at that time, they were really the true first patient advocates for themselves.

Natalie: Absolutely.

Taren: They created a whole movement.

Natalie: They absolutely did create a whole movement and I think it was that that actually, that movement really drove the expanded access methodology and regulation I guess that kicked it off what is now the expanded access route that was established around that time back in the 80s so and my journey is completely linked to all of that. I wouldn't be here today without that experience with those patients in those hospitals.

Taren: Well, I can't thank you enough for sharing your journey with us and providing such lights of inspiration and such great insights in terms of managed access and what it takes to be a leader in today's healthcare world. So delightful to speak with you Natalie. Thank you so much.

Natalie: Taren, thank you for the opportunity. As always, it's such a pleasure to talk to you and I really appreciate the opportunity.

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