Anti-Vax Influencer Turned Pro-Vax: Heather Simpson's Story Transcript

(Transcripts are generated by AI and may contain errors)

Intro and episode setup

The anti-vax movement is not just a group of weirdly anti science individuals on social media, nor are they bots. Some are maybe foreign agents looking to sow discord in the US healthcare system, but a large chunk of them are people who at one point had good faith questions about vaccines, about science, and about treatments that they saw propaganda about and are now questioning for themselves.

On this week's episode, you're going to hear firsthand one woman's account of her own path down the anti vax rabbit hole and back again. Brutally with questions she had after being exposed to pseudoscience propaganda, she sought answers in the healthcare system only for the system to basically say to her, trust me, bro.

Let's hear firsthand her thoughts on the matter and how we as doctors and nurses can do better. If you're listening to the Jaffret cast, let's rock and roll.

Welcome everyone to this episode of the Jaffercast. I am your host, Dr. Mark Papadakis. No one particularly special, just another frickin' ER doctor. This week we were talking with Heather Simpson mainly about vaccines and her role in being an anti-vax influencer now turned pro-vaccine influencer.

It's going to be an interesting conversation. If you enjoy the content, please be sure to like and subscribe. I'm on YouTube, Spotify, Apple Podcasts, all of your favorite platforms.

Find us on social media as well. I do post clips of episodes and in general spam the ever-living daylights out of my followers with medical information and medical nonsense.

As always, I encourage constructive thoughts, comments, and suggestions. You can leave them in the comments section to me. in YouTube and email them to me at jeffordcast at gmail.com.

If you're in the healthcare field and interested in being on the show to discuss topics in healthcare, or if you have a past interest in health care and just want to rant and rave like I do, please feel free to reach out as well.

As a general reminder, nothing we say in this episode should be considered directed medical advice. We mostly just talk out of our asses. So without further ado, let's bring in Heather Simpson.

All right. Hi, Heather. Welcome to the show. How you doing? Hi. I'm good. Thanks for having me. Absolutely. So, you know, this is a medical podcast, but you are decidedly non-medical.

Actually, tell us about yourself. What do you do for work? I know you're a mom, So right now, I was traveling and speaking basically on vaccine hesitation and what one can do to possibly change people's minds.

But with RFK Junior, things kind of shifted a little bit. I'm doing mostly photography and being a full-time mom. Awesome. So I am speaking on the side here and there.

It's interesting to watch. Everybody's funding kind got cut.

Heather's background and vaccine skepticism

A lot of people's funding got cut. Yeah, it was wild and it's kind of slowly coming back up. And it'll be interesting to see the next year. For those who don't know what we refer to that, the NIH recently came out and basically slashed a lot federal funding to universities and institutions for a various number of reasons.

There have been some clawbacks with that. I don' t know the exact numbers. Universities basically lost a lot of

money, so a side projects kind of got shelved.

Researchers got canned, some got hired back, and some didn't. So it's all been in flux with the academic side of medicine lately. And you were actually speaking, you told me actually before we started recording, that you spoke with Jelsey Clinton about vaccine policy and all that.

Did you speak to her about that specifically or something else? Yeah. So she, I don't know if she still records her podcast anymore. She had a podcast a couple of years ago.

And this is false advertising. This platform is giving false advertisement. That's what you're saying. Yeah, I feel like it didn't continue, but I don't know.

And they, when I first, you know, started vaccinating and I made a post of why I kind of changed my mind and moving forward with vaccinate, CNN reached out and then she got wind of it and she had me on her podcast.

That was like the start of everything I think. So how long ago was that? Cause I guess, let me start over, walk me through kind of the timeline here. I know from your social media posts, from other media you've done, you basically became a mom, your pregnant and then you started just kind cursory looking into this on your own, looking at information and he kind went down the rabbit hole.

Is that pretty much it? Yeah, so in 2016 I wasn't getting pregnant. I was married at the time and I asked my doctor, I started going to like researching wellness in general and was like, could this affect fertility?

And I ask my reproductive endocrinologist, you know, can food and your diet affect the fertility. And he was, like no, it's not gonna help, but it doesn't hurt.

That's weird. Yeah that's a weird response. It was weird. I mean, he, at the time I was like, a conspiracy, you know, He's getting paid directly, not getting pardoned.

But I went further and further down this rabbit hole and I researching inflammation and foods and it's like that's okay. That's, that, eat for your body.

Eat what makes you feel okay and got pardon within two weeks of changing my diet. But I, um, and I don't know, like this is, this was kind of a weird thing.

But when I talked about that later, after becoming pro-vaxing, people were like, you can't say that. That was probably an accident like that one. And I was like why can you say, that makes the pro vax side sound crazy.

Right. It makes them sound like they're in a cult. Like you, can, both things can be true. Yeah. I can prove that, but what that did do is make me kind hate the science world and the medical world.

And I was like, my daughter wouldn't be here. You know, I went down that path and I wasn't like how dare you. I just kind of researched and researched, and, um, stumbled upon a nine hour docu-series.

Um, the truth of that seems, like I said, nobody watches this show, so it probably doesn't matter. Don't say that because right when you say it, it blows up.

So it was a nine hour docu-series. When was it published? Do you know when was that actually produced? So I think it was like maybe 2014 or 15. Okay. So 10 years or so ago.

Interesting. That was actually pre-pandemic because I remember in, you know, like the whole plan-demic thing came out in 2020. that was a mess and a half.

so, so there's interesting that there is stuff that predates obviously 2020, but in a very organized fashion, this thing existed that not many people know about.

It's so crazy because this, I mean, this was back in the day when we paid for things, um, like movies and we, the way they marketed it was like, if you want to keep your kid healthy and alive and you watch those, then we're going to be middle ground and show both sides.

Me and my husband were like well, we need to know, you have to have a child alive. And we ended up paying like $200 I think. Wow. So we are not talking a movie ticket here.

We're talking like you know. Okay. Yeah. And there are a lot of doctors on it. You know, they promised to be in the middle, but they were pretty much anti-vax.

They were very anti vax, like they're still influencers now. Yeah, I was going to say, and here's the thing, right? Like you can still be a licensed physician and be considered a doctor or you could be at PhD and, be called a Doctor as well, you know?

But are you practicing, what's your specialty? What's all these little things that, people will, advertise their credentials, but then not really give any background on that.

And I'm actually, so I'll be speaking about functional medicine and our incoming surgeon general, potentially incoming search in general later with another physician.

We're going to talk, discuss a little bit about that, free preview for the next episode for listeners. But that's a very common tactic where they bring on doctors.

You don't really know their specialty or maybe do know the specialty, But are they practicing whatever? And then that kind of lends credence to a lot of their claims.

Mm-hmm. Yes. Yeah, I mean that they I've had a lot of people put themselves on the same level as and I wouldn't even say level but basically the Same same type of doctor as an ER doctor when they are say maybe a chiropractor and with the kind of well, let me tell you about vaccines I don't know, I felt kind of tricked and then they had RFK Jr.

on the series and at the time I was like, this guy, you know he says he vaccinated all his kids. He's not anti-vaxx, he's pro-safe vaccines and I'm like how logical is he?

He is a lawyer, like he is, a trustworthy dude, He was thinking about this clearly, and he was a Kennedy, it was the big reason why I became anti vax.

Pregnancy, fear, and early medical encounters

Interesting. And he's an environmentalist too. I mean, he was a very much liberal environmentalists, you know, worried about that kind of stuff. Right.

He doesn't come across as like a deep conspiracy theorist. It seems very rational. Yeah, after the series I was like, I don't hate children, and I hate my future children.

So of course I'm not going to vaccinate because I didn't want to kill them. Mm-hmm. And that's impressive that it left that kind of a mark on you. Oh yeah, I mean, they blame SIDS on vaccines.

I remember that was a big talking point years and years ago about the anti-vax points. Before it became more about autism and other things, it was SIDs.

I was so scared that I could be so, I don't know how to say it, but almost so lucky to be scared of autism if she could even survive to that point. But I never shall die before.

I mean, it was horrifying. And they also blamed allergies, viruses, all the odd vaccines. So, you know, they almost

promised an illness-free childhood if you don' vaccine.

Which is incredibly ironic. You know? So you walked out of the movie theater with this impress- I'm sorry. Yeah, there's some good docu-series we got on the internet.

Okay. So you walked out of that and basically you're like, you know, walked away from that. And you were like okay, we're not doing this. You know I'm terrified.

What happened next? Did you discuss this with your, like how did that all like. Yeah. I was supposed to get a tetanus shot when I pregnant. Obviously you are whooping cough and I.

asked about one of the ingredients I had heard about in the series and read about, and my OB-GYN was just kind of like, you're not one those crazy anti-vaxxers, are you?

And just kinda shut me down. I was beat red, I think I cried in my car. And that was all he said and I just never brought it up again. He didn't even know what the ingredient was.

Then I said, it was polysorbate 80. That was the first time he had ever heard of it. This is not going to go anywhere. Let me go cry. When I brought up with my pediatrician, at her two-week checkup or something, Uh, she had really severe apnea when she was born.

And so the, the PD was like, well, if you want her to live, and if she gets, you know, a cough during her apneas, then you would, If you wanted her live like do I want my child to leave?

Don't go into a conversation like that. Obviously an anti-vaxxer wants their kid to lift. They wouldn't be anti vax if they didn't, they're scared. That was the dumbest approach I've ever seen.

I don't care if she hears this, it was stupid. It just pushed me away. So far I pushed and pushed for the diagnosis for sleep apnea. She clocked in at like 144 events per hour and I think severe is like 40. And that was after fighting for a sleep study for two months, she was on oxygen.

Out of curiosity, who did you fight with, the pediatrician to do the sleep study or the insurance to pay for it? So actually it was the paediatrician.

They sent me to the ER when, okay, so I put this little sock monitor on her that was not FDA approved at the time. Yeah. Yeah, like we had the outlets now, 10 years later we have the outlets.

Yes, that's what it is. And it went off the first week at like 60 something percent oxygen and it did it several times and I was thinking it was malfunctioning.

The PD citizen thinking, well, she broke her collarbone during birth. Maybe she's like gasping for air from pain. They gave her Tylenol. It didn't get better.

they basically were like, you know what, this isn't FDA approved. Like the thing that caught it, was the problem. So you need to stop using that. The ER said that, the PD said, that they were basically like, just set your alarm, check on her every few hours to see if she's purple.

Sure. Let me just, let me set a timer to make sure my child is alive. I think I set my alarm every 20 minutes for two months. manic, crazy mom at that point.

I was, you have to send her for the sleep study. Why would we do that? She's fine. You're being a new mom. Your being an anxious new Mom. And they finally were like, they were just basically to shut you up.

We're going to sent her, sent me to the asleep study five hours away. Even the Sleep Doctor was like you're be an Anxious New Mom, this is periodic breathing.

This is, and I'm like I know what periodic Breathing is. She is doing it for five hour straight. Turn to purple. Well you shouldn't use the non FDA approved device.

At that point, I was like, if I hear the term FDA again, again I will lose my mind. They were going to send her home without a sleep study after the sleep doctor even saw her.

And I prayed like please let her fall asleep. Like right now I just need her to sleep. I need the doctor to see this. She fell asleep within five seconds they saw and they were like we kind of see what you're saying.

You're an anxious mom. Just to like calm you down. We're just to calm me down, we're going do a deep study. She freaking whiz, look at that. Go figure.

Yeah. So she was on oxygen. I finally, I had a new sleep doctor after that and I kind of, he changed my life. And I did a lot of research that week and was like, Hey, she has severe reflux.

Do you think it could be, She's not responding to the CPAP. She is responding oxygen, which is weird for apnea. You think she's, you know, maybe burning her chemo receptors and not regulating CO2 and O2.

He was, like yes, that's it. It was the first time a doctor had like taken my anti-vax googling on the toilet research, you know what I mean? And actually listened and we worked together and made a plan and she was healed.

She was having a big reaction to milk and all this stuff. And the reflux got better, the apnea got, everything started getting better because we work together.

That same appointment, we had a student doctor there. And she was like, what? I'm sorry, real quick, did you put on her foot? What was that? And I said, the outlet, sleep device that saved her life.

And with all due respect, it's not FDA approved. I was, yeah, but it saved your life and she goes, I know, If you're listening to this medical students, just sometimes it's best to just say nothing.

I'll be honest. Like, I don't know if that's, if I should say that as an educator, but sometimes especially just stand back and then at the end of the visit, speak to your attending and say, Hey, is that okay?

And then, you know. I've talked about her so many times that I hope that she has had a revelation since then, but don't say that. I mean, the FDA is not the end all be all.

So let me sidebar for a second. Uh, the last episode actually, which was over a month ago. I'm sorry, I am terrible at uploading new episodes. It's been a lot, but anyway, my cousin was on, she was a breast cancer survivor and she had a double mastectomy and the fellow she recalled, She told us this after everything else was done.

She was in the prep. in the pre-op area when the fellow to the surgeon came over and said, are you sure you're ready to go through with this? Like she's like in a gown, prepped the hat on, it's an emotional day.

And now it was like, Are you ready for this, like my cousin and her husband lost it. And for, for like, like just no, you don't do something like that.

Like that's just, You don' throw doubt into this. You, at this, At that point in the game, we're done. We're doing this respected, or committed. Oh, Like this is, this yes.

And this has two examples of how, interactions that can just completely throw a monkey wrench into an otherwise positive or stressful situation that it's like you got to engage your brain a little bit here.

yeah I can change someone's like the the course of their everything that involves the medical system I did for me based on what she said I was like well okay so we worship the FDA we worshipped the CDC and I am so done and so if you had a chance at convincing me to vaccinate or go towards western medicine it's gone forever yeah there's

no way I didn't appreciate the doctor I kind of clapped that, like in comparison to everybody else.

Yeah. I mean, that's the thing, what that negative interaction that you had just far exceeded anything that that physician that were dealing with could have done at that moment.

It lasted for clearly a while. What was the doctor's name, the one you have the positive interaction with the sleep study doctor? Do you know where her name was?

I will have to, it was actually a guy. The first one was a girl, the second one's a guys. I'll have it to look it up because I don't remember. Okay. Like I need to like reach out and be like, thank you.

Yeah. He's alive. All right, so now that, your daughter at this point is how old? Like two weeks, one month around this time? Two months. Okay. So, yeah.

You got the sleep study, kind of confirmed everything. What happened next? We just kept on keeping on.

Anti-vax influence, social media, and the measles costume

She kind slowly got better. I mean, she still had sleep apnea here and there, but it was nowhere near like severe. They thought she would die that week kind thing.

A year and a half later, So she was 18 months, her husband was working like nonstop in West Texas. and I didn't have friends or family close by. And I would kind of watch.

There was one girl that started talking about her anti-vax views on Facebook. I was part of a Bible study that all the girls were pro-vacs. So I couldn't really talk about my anti vets views.

When I saw this girl, I said, she's actually saying that out loud. That's so embarrassing. And then I kind of looked through the comments and I was like, oh my gosh, these girls are agreeing with her.

It was mostly girls and moms. And I just kind sought them for a few weeks and it was, like wow, they're really bold. I really, that would be cool to have like a support system.

But I'm also so embarrassed. Thinking that it kind of sounded middle ground, it did not sound middle-ground. I tried to tie it into the MTHR gene mutation and methylation and not being able to process certain chemicals and vaccines and certain genetic tests should be done.

And I thought I sounded so on point. Let's be hesitant, let's not be anti. Right. It's good to ask questions kind of thing. Yeah. But it was a very anti-vax, so I was looking back and it got shared several hundred times overnight and then Facebook took it down, which actually made the anti vax world rally around me.

They were like, you don't have to see it. And it's a conspiracy. They don't want you to know this then. Yes. So then it got like pushed big time that week again, and that caught the attention of like the Provox world.

And they like really blew me up because there were like a dozen hate pages like created about me. within a month, which was crazy because I would actively openly, not actively, I'd openly talk about, you know, when Charlotte would get strep, like we're going to pick up her antibiotics, gave her Tylenol, give her Motrinol.

I was never like… You're not anti-Western medicine. You were specifically, at the time, obviously… I hesitate to say, call you anti Vax at this point.

Like, yes, she didn't vaccinate her child, but it was mostly because you had a lot of questions that doesn't seem to be addressed at that point, right?

No one could answer the questions I then had in like a satisfactory way. The best they could give me was like, well,

you know, they're safe and effective.

We have studies. Like, oh my gosh, we can't answer my very specific questions. It's fine if you don't know. Just say that. They'll let me like go about my life, keeping my daughter alive because nobody can answer these questions and I'm not going to vaccinate her on safe an effective advice.

There's no way I would. I believed adamantly that the aluminum in vaccines would, um, slip through the blood brain barrier and cause inflammation. If there wasn't, I mean, if it didn't if, it couldn't do that, the polysorbate 80 would you know, encapsulate it.

So it gets slid through as like a Trojan horse kind of thing and then cause information or, or death or you. And nobody could tear that down for another year and a half.

Nobody could. I felt like I knew so many detailed questions. And a lot of my anti-bats friends still believe those things, which I know those are not true anymore because someone actually tackled those questions later and changed my life.

But at the time I was like, you tell me it's safe and effective and they've done studies, like they haven't studied the current schedule. They haven's studied this.

Yeah, they have studied my question. Yeah. And there's no reason they haven't. So I was not full blown conspiracy theorist. I mean, people like money and we follow the money.

That was as deep as I went. A lot of my followers were flat earthers. Terrain theory is becoming a new thing now as well. So terrain theory, for those who don't know, is the idea that it's based like miasma theory back in the the middle ages, where disease is not caused by germs.

It's caused, your environment is caused an imbalance of, humors was back on the day, but now it is more like the environment causes disease. So if we clean the enviroment, if you eat clean food, you don' t get disease, that's all a myth.

Antibiotics don t work. There are no such things as viruses. That's terrain. And that's a lot of what RFK believes and has pushed in other forums as well.

Wait, he believes that? Yeah, He does not believe in germs theory as the cause of disease. No, I didn't know that. I did a video on it back in the spring, actually, when we talked about this, um, in regards to like, uh, the ACIP, but, yeah, he's not a believer in.

I don't think, I, don' think he believes in terrain theory, But he is not believe in germ theory specifically. Awkward. Yeah, a little bit awkward. Holy crap.

So you were basically called a premier anti-vax influencer. When did you embrace that label? Let me ask that. How long did it take you to embrace it? In like a month, like March 2019, when I saw, I'm on the hate pages, they would take every single thing I did and post it and just blow it up on hatepages.

And then I realized like, oh, this is, it might be like I am kind of getting influential and I don't know if that's a good thing. When I would get, would wake up to a lot of messages from anti-vaxxers asking me like health questions.

I, and would have to ask, answer like hey, hey I dunno. Right. Cause I wasn't gonna toy with that. But I kind of just had fun with it because I had a background in film and TV and like I used to do acting in high school.

Like I'm just very like theatrical and big-natured anyway. So I just got fun of it. I didn't take it so seriously. Um, I have fun like with the hate pages a little bit because it's not that serious.

But then it kind became serious after I did the measles costume. Oh yeah, I want to pull that up. So this was

Halloween. This is 2019, that same year that you did it.

Hold on, let me see if this works here. In 2019 you decided to be, it says here, trying to think the least scary thing I can be for Halloween, so I became the measles.

Um, and that's you. You got, uh, dressed up, um, as the measles red spots and, you know, this and. Yeah. Um. I'm not going to lie. It's actually a pretty good job on the redspots.

Like that actually looks like it could be a good, like, smallpox costume if you really want to bring it back again. Don't. Yeah. Okay. So now you went as that.

COVID shifts and reconsidering public health

And again, that was in part and part more of like a joke, you know, but it was also like, a lot of both the anti-vax and the pro-vax committee also saw that as like almost like rallying cry in a way.

Yes. One of the girls that kind of, hated me at the time, she called me syphilis Simpson after that, so she thought it looked like sythilus and I'm in her phone is that now.

Syph-synth and we are good friends now, Syth-lis is more like like diffuse rash, not less red spots. She was like, no matter what, it's not measles. But I, yeah, I just wanted to, you know, make my friends laugh.

And I was, like you, know this looks like I'm scared of measle. So I got to think of something real stupid. That's why I said that caption, but I didn't really think it would.

I mean, was it was very much like tasteless and heartless. and that's what I really thought it, would just kind of share with my. Friends that was sitting in church and I checked.

Ironically, I checked my phone and I was like, oh, let me refresh this. And that's when I realized it was getting shared like 50 times a minute. Damn.

My brother sent me a Reddit link and this was 2019. I wasn't aware of Reddit really as a concept. That's why I discovered Reddit. He was, like are you on the front page?

You need to get off the internet, save our family name. Oh my gosh. Wow. It was over after that. Once it starts going viral, it's like a virus. Correct.

So now what happened, so of course that was 2019, 2020 we had COVID. What did anything, if anything happen during COVID? Because obviously, you know, lockdowns, masking, Operation Warp Speed was a thing.

Well, I want to go back a little bit. I didn't take the whole thing as a joke of being an influencer. I would kind of be funny. I just was glad to have a community of people that like what we I actually had mom friends.

And I mean, I'd say things like at this point, you're statistically more likely to get killed by Hillary Clinton than the measles. So just kind of, I was honoring, but after, after the measles costume, somebody sent me a picture of like a child that had died from the measles.

And it was like her hand in the hospital and the Samoa outbreak happened two weeks after my. That's right. I forgot about that. And I was like, there ain't no way.

How did I do that? Oh my gosh, I'm so stupid. And, and I just had this like this is pretty serious, you know. I am lucky to live in a world where I don't have to worry about this, but oh my Gosh.

What if Charlotte had died of the measles and somebody made a costume like that. It just kind of snowballed into being a little bit more serious. Then when COVID hit, hey, obviously, wearing a mask.

He noticed a lot of my followers were like we shouldn't And I kind of got the ick from that, as my daughter would say, the ick. I just kind was like, why would you not wear a mask to save a whole life?

That's weird. We're not injecting masks. Like, what are you doing? Why would we not? So I started kind speaking up for that because I wasn't going to just throw myself into a camp to say that I'm just in the camp.

But I am still having my own thoughts. And like I spoke up to that and I kinda got pushed away and kind started to lose my following. Interesting. I remember, I haven't really talked about this much, but one of the things besides the mask or standing up for masks around that time, this is kind of an issue of public school rights and nobody's forcing your child to go to a school and, you know, nobody's coming into your home and forcing your children to be vaccinated.

Like we do have laws for a reason and they would, they'd come back with, well, we're paying taxes. And I'm like, yeah, but you're. Paying taxes for the roads and you are not deciding roadwork and then, the layout of land and the laws of the road.

I don't know. I was starting to kind of put together like the entitlement of the mouse, the title of laws. And like, you want to have your cake and eat it too.

It's something I'm not going to do is be entitled, actively knowing I am being entitled. Of course I But, you know, it's the idea of personal freedom and the intersection between personal and public health.

And, people say that, well, we mandate vaccines for public schools and that's not right. There's legislation in Florida, for example, and I think Oklahoma too.

that's looking to remove those. And the question that I have is, okay, well, who says you need to take your child to public school? I think that is what you're trying to say too.

It's like, you know, there's no law that says that you have to taking them to the public schools. There's a law says they need be educated to some capacity, but, homeschooling exists, private schools exist.

Yes. Private schools are always expensive and public free based on our tax dollars. But then, you know, the question that becomes your personal freedom stops when you're putting my health at risk.

And I think that's a very difficult concept for people who, personal choice camp can't really reconcile too well. You know the idea that we have a service to each other, which is public health that, we need to recognize if we want to live in a society that Right.

That's just the fact of the matter. You live around people. So it's interesting to hear that it was the onset of COVID that started to make you question yourself.

Because from, from my experiences, it, was COVID, that has pushed people into a lot of the anti-vax camp and, you know, massing and things like that. But in your situation, It was, the reverse.

It, well, this is not good. We should kind of take precautions here. And then all of a sudden that community just completely turned on you. Um, it's so weird.

I hadn't really been able to figure out why COVID was the thing that kind of pushed me toward pro-vaxxers or Western medicine more so. But I think it was just seeing the entitlement and watching people die from exposure when they didn't need to be exposed.

And then just the weird, like, well, my kid's not going to see how faces develop and expressions if everybody's wearing a mask. Like, I'm sorry, what?

That is such a stretch. Like, what are you doing? Yeah, we're not telling you not to mask in your homes. You know,

clearly your child's going to watch your mouth and see your face and things like that.

This is so dramatic. And I had people reach out like, I'm a single mom now, but like at the time they would be like I can't homeschool my kid. I remember thinking that sucks, that's not really the public health problem as much as you sending your I don't know, like nothing was adding up.

Like, that sucks. I'm not getting past that. You're in a situation, but this is, I had this problem. But no, it's easy to stop there. It's like, well, And the thing is a pandemic, a global pandemic sucks.

And I think at the end of the day, you know, but it's true, right?

Answering vaccine questions and rebuilding trust

Like we have millions of people across the globe who have died from this virus that's still lingering, not nearly as fatal, clearly, But still lingering, still causing disease.

But, you know, at the outset of this, people were dying in droves, especially on the East Coast and my colleagues and what I saw in the ER and ICUs. And I think the reality is, yes, pandemics suck.

They take lives. they take freedoms. I limit what we can do with our lives and we've taken a lot of these for granted until suddenly it becomes a choice of, well, do I protect my fellow person or do i just, live my life and roll the dice?

But by doing that, You're putting somebody else at risk. And it's just, you know, I think the answer to that scenario is I'm very sorry. Pandemics suck.

You know? Like that's not great. Yeah. It's a bad situation. And if you're not going to vaccinate, wear a mask. Like, that was my thing. Nobody's forcing you to vaccinated with the COVID shot.

So wear masks. Stay out. Don't breathe in people's faces. Do the bare minimum. Come on. So now, you know, it's 2025, your daughter is getting vaccinated and she's treating it like she will, a normal child would get vaccinated.

Like, my daughter, I was like, oh, time for a shot. It's like oh boy, here we go. When did you kind of make the decision to, was there a conscious decision at one point to leave the anti-vax community or was it more that you were just completely pushed out?

So in the summer of 2020, I kind of had some anti-vax friends still, but I had kind been pushed out kind D platform myself, just kind I don't want to be in this role.

And I reached out in to a couple of doctors online that I kind of knew of in the Provox world and a cup of scientists and I was like, you know, I'm just gonna be real.

I can't change my thinking because nobody can answer my freaking questions. Can you just answer these? I would love to be wrong. the world is safe and I can trust doctors and i had two people answer and they explained one person one he's a blood brand barrier specialist he responded to my question about aluminum and he was like well um check all of the you know, the studies that anti-vouchers cite where they think that aluminum is causing XYZ, but go to the methods section, guaranteed it's talking about environmental aluminum because the type of aluminum found in vaccines is not fat soluble, is too big to fit through the blood-brain barrier.

It physically cannot do what you're saying it can do. And then I had another a scientist respond to my question about, well, you know, polysorbate 80 can actually encompass these and slip past the blood-brain barrier because of a study, a while ago showing that it could do that.

Like you could open up the brain barrier. And he took the time to be like, that fear is a little bit founded. It's a warranted, but it's wrong. Based on a studying 40, 50 years ago.

You're wrong, sorry. And I was so desperate. Obviously, you know, I'm tired. I wish I could go back to when I oblivious to anything and just trust doctors, but I know too much, and I can't undo it.

And he said, the study showed that given enough polysorbate AD ingested straight into the carotid, do you have a chance of opening it up, which is awesome for like green cancer drugs and things like that.

But he's a given, let's put it in perspective, an average newborn baby. you'd have to inject, I think he said 3,600 doses of hepatitis B straight into their neck to have a chance at opening it up.

So, you know, always say CPS would be their first. That was the first time I was like, You answered my question. And I just was kind of like Lord. I was like, what if I'm wrong?

What if all of my questions could be answered? And then I slowly started developing trust with people and they would take the time to actually, not just say, well, how their vaccines are safe and effective, we've done the studies, but they broke down the actual questions.

Because I like you don't understand. Not to be dramatic, But if you answer my specific question, I will not vaccine. The life of… My child depends on you.

You have to answer it. And you can't go past this. They answered it. That's, that's why I'm such a big advocate for medical professionals, knowing the questions that anti-visors can ask.

Like it's so annoying. They shouldn't have to know, they shouldn' have the answer. they should be able to say they're just safe and effective when we did the studies, but that is not the world we live in.

No, and you know, the internet has opened Pandora's box. I think that's the number one thing now with people having so much access to information, free, they can look at studies.

But I say to people, you can read the studies, R. F. K. knows the study, but he doesn't know how to interpret the and there's a difference there and now people who can yes do their research and you know I don't knock it to a point you have questions there are answers out there but there is also people that are going to take advantage of those questions and really push their own agenda on you and it's easy to say well yeah but the medical community has their agenda so they are gonna push the same agenda and your like Yes, but one is interested in, you know, public health and public good, the other is interest in taking your money or making you a poster child for a movement that has no scientific basis.

But I think, if we look at circumstances surrounding your evolution from good faith questioning mom to full on anti-vaxxer, Now back again to more of a Provax.

So questioning, you know, never lose that aspect of it. You know? Never lose the questioning aspect. I always have anxiety. That's me. Yeah. And you, it's fine.

Anyway, I have an anxiety too. Just hide it with caffeine and bad food. But it is the idea that you also were struggling to find a community that, that this community of people who Yeah, you're kind of like, yeah, kind crazy.

I don't know how I feel about this, but hey, I'm welcomed. Yeah. And that is I think a bigger motivator than we give a credit for. Because now maybe they sought you out.

Maybe they looked at you as like ooh, this is like a ripe one for the picking. We can really kind manipulate this one here. Or maybe it just happened naturally, you know, whatever the case is.

But now you have that sense of isolation, combine that with dissatisfaction and two extremely negative interactions, possibly more, from the medical community that you sought answers for.

And now we have a recipe for anti-vax now. We're done. Right. Yeah. Uh, they'll be ginger said, let's talk about

place over 80. I know that ingredient.

Let's bring it down. This, I might not be here talking to you. Like she totally different story. It's wild. Now the question I get often is, and the questions I wrestle with myself because I do have a social media presence.

You know, ex Twitter is accessible these days with all kinds of stuff out there. Um, there's also blue sky. There's threads, you know all these other apps.

Anti-vaxxers are everywhere on them and I wrestled between engaging with them versus trolling them, versus like, just like blocking them. And somebody said to me, they said, well, yes, the anti-vaxxer is out there to piss you off.

They're out to make you look bad, but online, I'm specifically talking about the online trolls. Yeah. Oh, yeah. Yeah, online trolls out there. They're like, you know, really going after people.

But don't not engage because there's somebody with questions that's silently watching the engagement. And it's tough because we want to say they're safe and effective.

There's been studies. But then the person who's kind of lingering in the background watching the interaction is saying, but I have the same questions, you know, and I'm curious.

It's tough. And it's somebody who, I know the clinical side of medicine, like to think I do my job well, clinically. But I'm not a vaccine scientist. I don't have the answers to these intricate details.

It took you to go to a blood brain barrier specialist to answer at least one of your questions. You know, like that's not me. But let's say, let' go back and 10 years ago, and let say if you talked to your pediatrician and said, well, what about polysorbid 80? What if he had said to you, listen, I am not vaccine specialist. I don' know exactly.

Let me find out. Let me see what I can look at. That would have been huge. I would've not felt stupid. It woulda been like, wow, they're taking me seriously.

Yes, please, like you're in this with me, that's crazy. That's amazing. Understandable if they don't know it right off the bat. Right. And I've said this time and time again to my residents and students, I'm like if you don' know something, say it.

Like the public doesn't expect you to know everything. Maybe they did a hundred years ago, 200 years, but nowadays it's okay to not know. It's OK to say, let me check in.

I don't know, that's a good question. You know from my experience, it is not this, from experience it this but let's see what I can find out. Or at least point you in the right direction.

At least be like, you know what, go here. This is a reliable source, check this out, do something like that. Yeah, it's very respectable when somebody's, they're honest and they are on your team.

That's all I feel like people really want, most people. I think we as a medical profession have to do better in general, I thing with communication. Fauci got a lot of shit. I actually gave him shit personally during 2020. Well, I did, because, you know, the answer is, well, masks don't work.

And he was doing it in a way because we want to make sure that health care workers have masks and not create a run on masks. So he's going to come out and say, You know what?

Yeah, masking. I'm not quite sure about that. Dude, just come on and just say it. Just come and out say you, know we believe that masking is likely an effective source of transmission, but we really ask that our health workers get priority on these masks to protect themselves.

Whatever. But like, don' just like come up and give like a white lie. with, you know, good intentions here because

now you've just reduced your credibility and that has for reaching consequences.

Um, that's my fucking rant. Yeah. I feel like he, and this is just my somewhat opinion, but kind of based on, I don't know. He would, he would think things and maybe this, this was an off record thing, think, things, say things.

And then say, Hey, can't say that to the public because it's too nuanced and they're not going to understand it.

Lessons for doctors, communication, and closing thoughts

Yes, and I've had that conversation with other people. I said, we have to give the public more credit. Now granted, my biggest argument lately is that the pubic doesn't want nuance.

It's all soundbites, it's also social media clips. So have we lost our capacity for nuance? I don't know, but I think we at least have the benefit of the doubt that, you know what, this is a nuanced take, let's break this down.

No, its not going to look sexy on social medias. I can't make this nuanced bit a one minute TikTok clip. Okay. But if I'm going to be a press conference, I can at least try and offer some sort of nuance and say, this is what we're looking at.

This is, what are we doing? It's a work in progress here, you know? Right. I could see that though, the sound bites now, but in general, we need to give people more credit.

The trust that's lost when you don't just say the thing is huge. And there's so many people that just greatly dislike Fauci now and think he's just an absolute not trustworthy need.

And that's huge. A lot of lives are lost because of that. Yep. I actually made the argument to one of my friends that Fauci was very old school in his thinking because that, and I've talked about, you know, the age gap, degeneration gap in medicine between the, physicians who trained in practice 50 years ago compared to the physicians coming up now and the expectations of the population.

I'm the doctor, do what I say. You know, this is what we do. And these people just do not respond to that anymore. People want to ask why, how, good questions, valid questions.

But you're running into, some people run into a generation of doctors that says, well, you know just being paranoid. Well. You're a new mom, you're an anxious mom.

You know, it's fine. And I say to people, so people come into the ER for me for chest pain, for things that I can't explain, and I tell them, listen, I've ruled out infection, a heart attack.

I don't have a good answer for your chest, pain. you know? I'm not going to diagnose you with anxiety from the E. R. That's a diagnosis of exclusion. Because people will say, well, is it stress?

Is it anxiety? Sure, maybe. I don't know. I'm not going to tell you that right now. Well, I can tell what are tested. But really maybe more testing. There may be more discussions to be had here, you know, and I think we need to, medicine needs to embrace that.

We need change the message of medicine in the wake of obviously the pandemic, but also just in age of social media and the internet. It really needs grow up.

Yeah, which I have a little thing. I was told I had anxiety. You know, you're a new mom with anxiety, but for years, and it turned out to be Addison's disease, Interesting.

Which I just really appreciate this because until I was on medication, hydrocortisone, I would, you know, almost go into an out-of-stoning crisis. And then I actually did, and I went to the ER and the nurse was like, just I've only heard of this in nursing school.

And he basically was like, he almost like googled in front of me and was working with me on it, because he hadn't really dealt with this either. It's one of those weird things.

And, and he worked with, me he got me the medication. He helped, like it was just a back and forth and not at no point did I think you're just, you are a doctor and you don't know this.

Like, it just was, oh my gosh, your listening to me. I mean, people have died because the doctor, sends them home with an autosomalian crisis. And I had so much respect for that.

I mean, that was amazing. Yeah, Google in front of me. You know what you're doing, you know how to dissect that information. Oh, listen, I will tell you a secret that this is going in the recording, so it lives forever.

Your doctor, especially your doctors or whatever proceduralist, not surgeons. Surgeons are different. We run into procedures that are not common. out of our training.

I have done procedures in my training that, you know, I come out, great, we're good. Six years later, i haven't done it again. So what do we do? You know?

We look it up on YouTube. That is our secret. We're pulling up YouTube and there's a running joke. There's one of my colleagues has a grill, a grilled apron and he on it and says, trust me.

i looked it upon YouTube, because, cause you look, do procedures. You do things we know. In our training, we know when to do them. We're trained in doing them, it's not that we haven't done it before, but, you know, if I haven' done a chest tube in three years, yeah, I'm going to refresh my memory, revisit my landmarks, look at something, before I go back into it and do it again.

Please do, please do. That makes me feel better. But we're also doing it in secret. You know we are doing a phone like, oh, okay, all right, hi, i'm the doctor now.

Like, that totally happens. Not me. I'm amazing. Well, yeah, of course not. Everybody else. Yeah, everybody else, but you know, like I asked my colleague, I had the other day, a patient with a serious ear injury and there's a, there was a nerve block that you can do where you inject anesthetic around the ear to numb the entirety of the year.

And I literally hadn't done it in years and he had just done. Like a week ago or something. Hey, can you come in and just like, let's do this together, refresh my memory here.

Cool. There's two ER doctors and a resident doing this thing and it's fine to not know something. It's find to admit you don't know. Right. You're still handling it.

you're just being honest about it and that makes the patient trust you. Obviously, if you are Googling everything, that's a problem. We've got to talk.

Heather, thank you so much for coming on. Thank you for the conversation. I hope that my colleagues, the general public, really take a lot of this to heart, especially the medical profession, medical community.

Those are the ones who need to hear this most of all. Our conversations, our interactions with patients, can really frame them for years to come. You know, people look to us as, you know leaders in the field for a reason.

And even though there's a lot of, random crap on social media about doctors, this or whatever. People still look us and trust us. Peoples still looks to nurses and trusts you.

So your opinion, what you say matters. I think it's important to also look at things like isolation and friend groups and all these things that society has that can shape somebody's opinion.

Be patient and respectful. That's I think the biggest takeaways of a lot of this. And I thank what you said about the

pandemic sucking and things just sucking.

I've had a lots of medical professionals come up to me and say, I'm just so tired. And like it's just hard, it sucks that we're in this situation and it is okay to just say this really sucks and its really hard.

I hate having to do this but keep up the good fight because I mean you can see that little things you do impact somebody possibly for life and that's worth it.

Even as a student, even if you're a medical student keep that in mind too. Absolutely, huge. All right. Well, Heather, thank you so much for coming on.

I'm sure we'll be in touch later. Heather Simpson, she is on social media, not doing the anti-vaxxing, but she does make guest appearances. And I was lucky to have her come onto my show to discuss something very important, especially in the age of RFK Jr.

So Heather thank so you much. Thank you for having me. And so ends another episode of the Jafford cast. Open communication, honest dialogue, those are things that we need to do better as a profession.

That's nothing new. We hear that oftentimes in residency, in clinical training, and just in general, even in our hospital modules, which annoying as they are, do hold some element of truth to them.

Listen to her and other testimony talking about why and how we can do a better job of communicating to our patients and maybe Just maybe. People like Heather Simpson won't actually go down the rabbit hole to begin with.

Be honest with our patients, be honest yourself, know your limitations on which you know and don't know. And as I tell everybody at the end of every episode, don' take my advice as gospel.

Do your own research, talk to your doctor, because at end the day, I'm just another freaking ER doctor. Take care everybody, make good choices, and we'll see you next time.